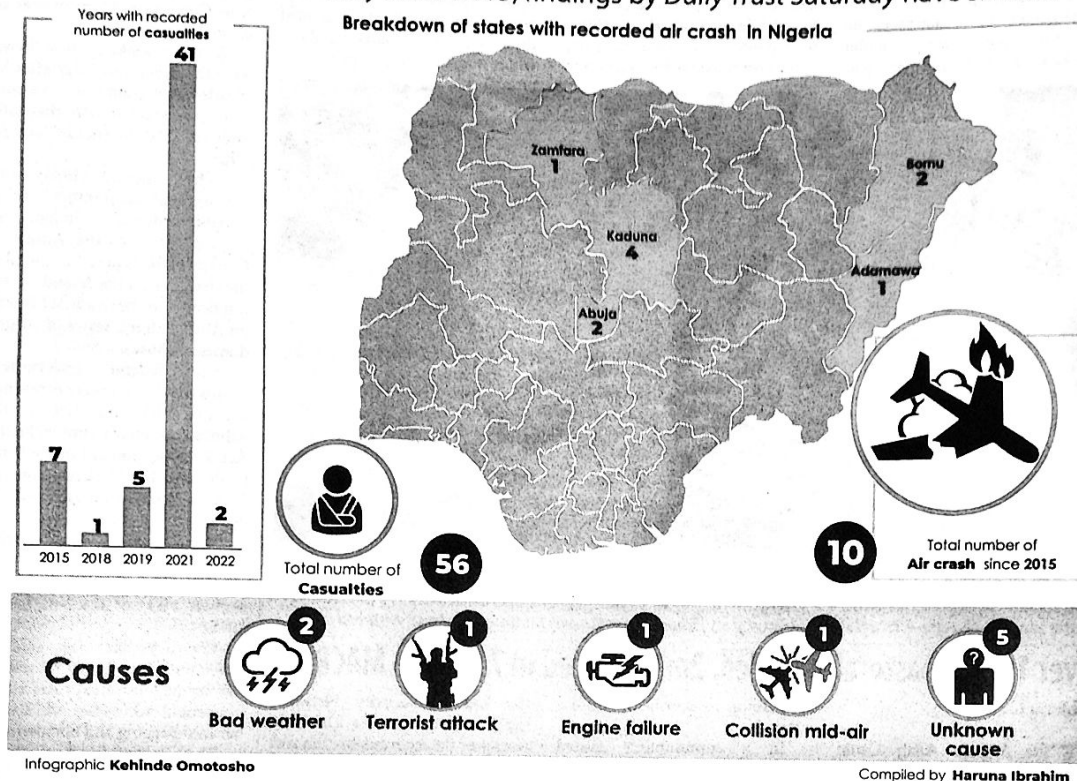


## FEATURE

## How Air Force jets crashed, claimed 37 lives in 8 years

No fewer than 37 persons lost their lives in 9 reported accidents involving Air Force planes in different parts of the country since 2015, findings by *Daily Trust Saturday* have shown.



the NAF has trained 23 instructor pilots in the last two years while seven are currently undergoing training abroad with three in US and four in Jordan," he further disclosed.

#### Why air force records frequent crashes - Retired officer

A retired air force personnel, John Ojikutu, attributed frequent air force jet crashes to three main factors - human, technical and environmental errors.

Ojikutu, a retired Group Captain, bemoaned the declining nature of training among personnel working in the aviation sector both in the military and civil authority.

He also noted that intelligence gathering within the military had been declining drastically, calling on the government to step up its game in tackling frequent air crashes.

"Well, it (air crashes) depends on the frequency. There are human and technical errors, both in the civil and the military. If the frequency is like every month, then it is bad.

"If it is every year, you will look at the number of flying hours. So it depends on the number of hours being spent in the air because they can be in the air 1,000 times, and if you record just one crash, that's not bad at all. But if you are in the air for about 10 times, and out of the 10 times you record crashes for about 2 to 3 times, that's very bad. That's about like 20 to 30 per cent.

"The military cannot say they are in peacetime. If we are not in peacetime, the frequency of crashes will increase, but if we are in peacetime and we have frequent crashes, then something is wrong because they won't fly many times to go to the war areas," Ojikutu said.

He added that if there are threats as we have all over the country now, there will be casualties, especially if the accident happens in what we call the "torn-edge" of the battle area. If it happens where all these things are happening, there is very little you can do. All we need to do is to strengthen our intelligence.

"Like I always say, what is the national intelligence estimate of all these areas where there are threats of Boko Haram, bandits, and others? If we have an intelligence estimate and deploy it properly, we won't have crashes.

"But if we do not have, it is like you want to enter your house and you don't know who is in the house, and suddenly just enter the house and somebody was already waiting for you, but if you had intelligence you would prepare for it, but if you don't have intelligence and preparation for it, anything can happen anytime," he added.

He maintained that the aviation college in Zaria was still the best in Africa, saying the only thing Nigeria needs is the personnel.

He called on the federal government to ensure that trainees are not taken abroad again because it is costly but to bring in qualified personnel to train the pilots using the facilities in Zaria.

Fidelis Mac-Leva & Idowu Isamotu

Out of the incidents, four were recorded last year (2021), three in 2015, while one each was recorded in 2018, 2019 and 2022 respectively. Similarly, four of the incidents occurred in Kaduna State (North-West), two each in Abuja and Borno, while one occurred in Hong, Adamawa State.

While one of the incidents was attributed to 'bandits shooting', others were blamed on bad weather and engine failure.

Not a few Nigerians were outraged by these tragic crashes, some of which claimed the lives of senior officers and raised concerns about the safety of military aircraft, as well as what needs to be done to check the ugly trend.

#### Endless crashes

One of the most tragic of such crashes was that which occurred on May 21, 2021 when a Beechcraft KingAir 350i NAF 203 crashed near the Kaduna International Airport.

Eleven military officers, including the former Chief of Army Staff, Lt Gen Ibrahim Attahiru, lost their lives in that mishap.

With Attahiru in that ill-fated aircraft was Brigadier-General Abdulkadir Kuliya, then acting Chief of Military Intelligence; acting Provost Marshall of the Army, Brigadier-General Olatunji Olayinka; Chief of Staff to the COAS, Brigadier-General Mohammed Abdulkadir; Aide-De-Camp to the COAS, Major

Lawal Aliyu Hayat; Major Nura Hamza and the pilots.

One of the victims, Flt Lt Taiwo Olufemi Asaniyi, was looking forward to his wedding, while his colleague, Flt Lt A.A. Olufade got married only two months earlier. Other victims; sergeants O.I. Adesina, Umar Saidu, and ACM Olamide Oyedepo, who had a bright future ahead of them died with their dreams.

In another incident that occurred near the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport on February 21 last year, a Beechcraft KingAir B350i plane belonging to the NAF developed engine failure on its way to Minna.

Although it was asked to return to the airport in Abuja, from where it commenced its journey, it crashed on its way back, killing all seven personnel on board.

On March 31, 2021, a NAF Alpha Jet 475 on a reconnaissance mission was declared missing with two crew members. One year later, its wreckage was found in Bama, Borno State, where the body of one of the pilots, Flt Lt Chapele Ebiakpo, was recovered. The other pilot, Flt Lt John Abolarinwa, could not be found.

On July 18, 2021, crashes involving NAF planes took a dramatic turn when bandits shot down a fighter jet in northern Nigeria on the border between Zamfara and Katsina states.

On September 28, 2018, a NAF pilot died after two aircraft crashed around Katampe hill in Abuja while rehearsing for the

country's 58th Independence Day celebrations.

In another incident recorded on August 29, 2015, a light military plane, Dornier 2k crashed in Kaduna and all seven onboard were killed. The plane, which had taken off from Dana Airport, operated by the NAF in Kaduna, came down some minutes after at the Kantoma Army Barracks, otherwise known as the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) barracks.

#### Flashback

Way back on September 26, 1992, a Nigerian Air Force Hercules C-130 crashed just a few minutes after taking off from Lagos airport, leading to the death of all 158 persons on board.

Again, on September 12, 1997, a Dornier 228-212 belonging to the NAF also crashed with 10 persons on board. Nobody survived. Nine years later, precisely on September 17, 2006, a Dornier 228 military plane crashed at Vandeikya, Benue State, killing 14 military officers, including 10 generals.

#### Huge investments in pilots

The Nigerian Air Force had said it had successfully produced 72 pilots between July 2015 and 2018.

*Daily Trust Saturday* reports that the then Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Sadique Abubakar, who disclosed this at the winging ceremony of pilots trained in Westline Aviation, South Africa, held at the Nigerian Air Force headquarters, Abuja in January 2018, also disclosed that it had trained 23 instructor pilots, while seven others were undergoing

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training abroad with three in the United States and four in Jordan respectively.

While disclosing that additional 74 pilots were undergoing training to qualify for awards of NAF wings, the air force chief was quoted as saying, "We are expecting additional 19 pilots from the International Aviation College in Ilorin and four pilots from South Africa to complete their training in February 2018.

"By the end of February, therefore, the NAF would have successfully winged 72 pilots. In the area of instructor pilot training,