



• A survivor of the helicopter crash at the DSC Clinic, Steel Town Extension, Ovwian, Aladja, Delta state.

• Debris of the crashed helicopter

Two die, two wounded as helicopter crashes in Delta

TWO people have been confirmed dead in the OAS helicopter crash that occurred in the early hours of yesterday at Aladja in Ovwian, Udu local council area of Delta State. One of them Kingsley Kabuelu died immediately after the crash occurred while the other, a Filipino, Javier Manoba died hours later while receiving medical attention.

Yesterday air accident occurred barely two weeks after an ADC flight 053 plane crashed in Gwagwalada, near the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, killing 109 persons.

Reports said the six-sitter helicopter belonging to Odengene Aviation Shuttle (OAS) crashed after hitting a high tension electricity tower; it was flying at a very low altitude, obviously because of the hazy weather.

The Chief Executive Officer, Capt. Everest Nnaji, was among four persons aboard the chopper (reg. no. 5N-BHU), when it struck the ground at about 0845 hours.

The rotor blade and other parts of the helicopter were strewn all over the place when our correspondent got to the scene shortly after.

The occupants of the Port Harcourt bound chopper included two Filipinos - Javier Manoba and Captain Abo Wilfredo - who were receiving treatment at the DSC and Shell Clinic at the Steel Town and Warri, respectively, before Manoba later died.

Our correspondent who was at the DSC Clinic saw Nnaji and one of the Filipinos; they were responding to treatment and in stable medical condition.

The medical doctor on duty at the time of the event, Dr. Innocent Ejike, said their "situation was stable and they are not in danger at the moment".

Nnaji was awake and conscious when our correspondent stepped into the ward, but he appealed for quiet and privacy.

He said, "We don't need disturbance now, we need to rest, you cannot come in here and take pictures".

The dead member of the team was said to hit the ground shortly after the helicopter smashed into the power tower; it could not be confirmed if he was elec-

Shola O'NEIL, Warri,
Kelvin OSA-OKUNBOR, Lagos and
Vincent IKUOMOLA, Abuja

trocuted or if he died when the chopper crashed on him.

An eyewitness at the scene and one of the first persons there, Joseph Iyenagbe, a mechanic, informed *The Nation* that the chopper was flying at low altitude, adding that visibility was poor because of the harmattan haze.

Iyenagbe further stated: "I saw one man that was thrown out of the helicopter, he fell down and the tower bent down and the wires fell on him and he died immediately. We rushed to the helicopter and brought out one white man. One black man came out of the crash himself but fell down again and became unconscious."

He said one was already dead and he took two of the victims to Etedia Clinic with blood gushing out from the mouth of one of the expatriates.

It could not be confirmed if the helicopter landed in Warri or any of the neighbouring communities in the area during the ill-fated trip.

A document recovered from the scene however indicated that there was a eight-hour contract worth N1,687,500:00 for a Lagos-Nember-Yenegoa-Calabar-Lagos trip.

It was not certain if the accident occurred on that contract. But the Commander, Joint Task Force, Operation Restore Hope, Brig. Gen. Alfred Ilogho, who arrived the crash scene at about 1059 hours told news men that Nnaji was on his way to Port Harcourt from Lagos.

Ilogho was accompanied by the Commanding Officer, NNS Delta, Capt. Mufutau Ajibade and high ranking military personnel from the area.

However, it was gathered that the cause of the crash could be unraveled as early as a few hours as it was gathered that the in-flight data recorder (black box) was intact.

Ilogho said only technical experts could retrieve it.

The helicopter departed Lagos at about 07.11 and made contact first at 0754 at Patani and later at about 09.30

at Port Harcourt.

According to Chief Femi Fani-Kayode, the Aviation minister, the crash happened at about 09.30 local time.

Fani-Kayode, who briefed journalists in Abuja on the crash said the helicopter made an attempt to land at the Port Harcourt airport but due to bad weather, it could not land.

The bad weather forced the helicopter to move towards Osubi airstrip in Delta State where the pilot made contacts with the tower at about 500 feet altitude.

Osubi Airstrip Tower lost contact with the plane after three previous contacts with the plane.

The tower also confirmed making contacts with the helicopter before the reported crash.

The minister noted that it was some people at the crash site that informed the authorities of the crash after several attempt to make contact with the ill-fated helicopter.

He also said, "rescue and fire-fighting units from Osubi Airstrip and Shell base at Ogunu rushed to the scene.

He said officials of the Accident Investigation and Prevention Bureau (AIPB) and the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) have been dispatched to the scene.

He also noted that the Ministry would do everything within its power to ensure that the N19 billion approved for the ministry by the president is secured so as to make Nigerian sky safe for flying.

Roland Iyare, Director General, Nigeria Aviation Management Authority (NAMA) noted that the country has put in place a machinery that would remove all obstructions along the Nigerian airspace.

The helicopter

The helicopter which crashed at the Ovwian-Aladja Expressway, near Warri, Delta State yesterday was an AS350B2, manufactured by Eruo. It was manufactured on 28th October 1998. It has single engine AS 350 Ecureuil, it is reputed to a be high-performing, safe and low operating costs chopper. It has a single engine powered with a Turbomeca Arriel 1D1 engine.

The helicopter has the capacity to take 1 pilot and 5 or 6 passengers; has a maximum take-off power of 546 KW / 732 shp, fast cruise speed of 246 km/h - 133 kt (at max. weight) and a maximum range of 666 km / 360 nm (take-off at max. weight). Its overall length with blade in front is 42,45ft.

The helicopter is owned by Ikeja, Lagos based AOS Helicopter Services, a subsidiary of Odengene Air Shuttle Services Ltd. The company with registration number 186858 is licenced to provide helicopter leasing and charter services. These services are rendered to a wide range of customers, mostly corporate bodies in the oil and gas as well as banking sectors. The company operates from two main centres: OAS Heliport located at Bank Anthony Way, Maryland, Lagos and from the OAS Concord Hanger at the Local Airport, Ikeja.

The Managing Director and CEO of the company is Capt. Everest Nnaji. He hails from Enugu State. Nnaji is an FAA (USA) Licensed Commercial Helicopter Pilot, as well as a holder of a Nigerian (NCAA) Commercial Helicopter Pilot's License. He has flown F-28, R-22, R-44, Bell 206, and AS-350 along with other fixed wing aircrafts. He is a member of Aircraft Owner and Pilots Association (AOPA) and Flight Academy of USA.

He contested the 2003 Enugu East Senatorial seat under the UNPP, and was defeated by Senate President, Chief Ken Nnamani. He was reportedly being flown to Port Harcourt by the crew when the accident occurred.

Controversy last year dogged the citing of OAS helipad in the Maryland area of Lagos, a development that forced the company to abide by all prescribed safety standards.

Also last year, a pan African helicopter on its way to Port Harcourt crashed into the Atlantic Ocean, killing all on board.

Yesterday's crash raises fresh doubts over the dampening lack of safety in the Nigerian air space, where air crashes have become a recurring decimal.

Only this week, new aviation minister, Chief Femi Fani-Kayode read the riot act to airline operators, insisting that they must comply with prescribed safety and airworthiness standards.

Failure to comply, the minister said will amount to criminal negligence, which he said will attract jail sentence.

The aviation sector has been grappling with a spate of air crashes between 2002 till date with a record of unprecedented mishaps. The last being an ADC aircraft with 106 passengers on board, including the former Sultan of Sokoto crashed shortly after take-off from the Abuja Airport on Sunday, October 29, 2006.