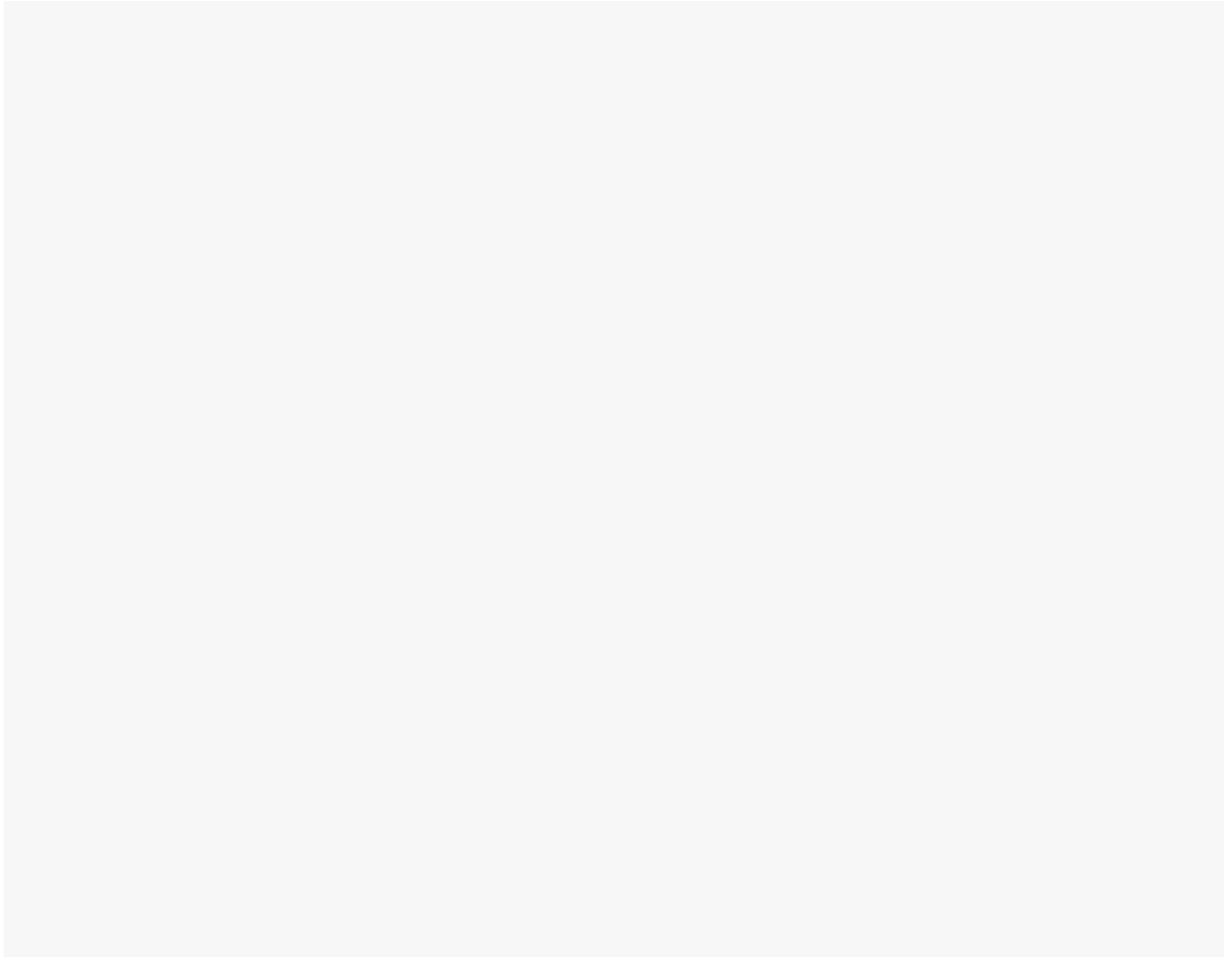


Crashed helicopter: Nigerians hail 'hero' pilot for saving lives

August 30, 2020



The late pilot Chika



Precious Igbonwelundu; Kelvin Osa Okunbor and Oziegbe Okoeki

- *Identities of dead crew members revealed*
- *NCAA, firm deny chopper wasn't airworthy*
- *AIB examines engine parameters, maintenance record, crew flight history*
- *Sanwo-Olu visits crash site, promises to rebuild damaged structure*

Nigerians in their thousands on Saturday took to the social media to salute the pilot of the Bell helicopter 206B3 which crashed at Opebi, Ikeja, Lagos on Friday, for his courage and selflessness.

For many of them, Captain Ernest Chika, was a hero for emptying the helicopter's fuel tank when he sensed trouble and avoiding crashing the aircraft into houses.

His action is believed to have saved many innocent souls and minimised damage at the scene of the accident.

An unconfirmed report said he dedicated his child only a week before he met his death.

His employers and operators of the helicopter, Quorum Aviation, dismissed reports that the chopper was not airworthy, while the Accident Investigation Bureau (AIB) continued its probe of the accident.

Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State visited the scene of the accident yesterday to personally assess the situation.

He pledged to repair the buildings damaged by the chopper.

In one of the tributes to Chika, Rita Umeh said the late pilot deserves Nigeria's highest honour for taking actions to minimise casualties.

She wrote: "What a tragedy! This pilot, Captain Chika Ernest, deserves Nigeria's highest honour. He flew the Quorum Aviation helicopter which crashed in the middle class Opebi, Lagos neighbourhood, Friday 28th August 2020.

"Captain Chika, knowing a crash was imminent, emptied the chopper's fuel tank to avoid explosion on impact. He then crashed on a fence, deliberately avoiding the roof and houses to minimise casualties. He himself died after being rushed to the hospital."

Imoh Umoren said Chika was a brave man who, even in the face of death, decided to minimise casualties by emptying the fuel tanks of the helicopter.

One Ifechidera wrote: "I want to celebrate this Captain Chika! He averted what would have been a bigger tragedy, emptying his fuel tank, and crashing into a wall. How many think of humanity even in their last minutes? Rest in Peace, Chika! You served well."

Jonathan Nnamdi said: "My heart bleeds for this loss. He considered others and did all that was within his control to save other lives (within few seconds quick decision moment)..."

Ozzy Etomi hoped that the pilot's heroic efforts to minimise the loss of lives are remembered and commemorated.

John Peter said: "What you did before that crash is heroic. You saved a lot of lives while losing yours. That's what heroes do, and you are one. Rest in peace, Captain Chika."

To Deolu Adefisan, the pilot's act was legendary, brave, kind hearted. He added that Chika deserved more.

Josephine Francis wrote: “Rest in peace Captain Chika. Heard you considered others first before yourself. My condolences to your loved ones.”

An industry expert said: “The pilot was a man of honour. Eyewitnesses said he manoeuvred the copter from crashing into a school.

“He must have thought about the SS3 students writing WASSCE. Eyewitnesses also said he further manoeuvred the copter from crashing on residential buildings till the craft dropped and crashed into the fence in between two buildings.

“When the news broke yesterday (Friday), my mind ran wild about ground casualties but later learnt not a cockroach died on ground.

“This is so astounding when one thinks about other craft that crashed in residential areas. It’s also unbelievable that there was no explosion from the crash.

“How the pilot did that remains a mystery known to him alone. My sincere condolences go to his family and the families of the two other deceased persons. ”

A childhood friend of Chika, Gloria Ugolee, said of him: “Always looking out for others. My brother and friend since primary school said he was in Port Harcourt just this week, and now he is gone...I miss you is an understatement.

“John 11:23-25 my only consolation.”

Ugolee had claimed that the hospital where Chika was rushed to after he was extricated from the wreckage of the crashed helicopter delayed his treatment because it wanted to see police report first.

The claim sparked an outrage from many quarters.

She appeared to have modified the post later on Instagram to read: “Chika is gone. No, I cannot confirm if it was the police report or something else. I wasn’t there.

“When I asked last night about his condition, that is what I was told.

“He is gone. We are all sad that he survived the crash but didn’t make it through.

“It truly will be unfair to blame anyone out of grief. Please, let us allow the family to grieve.”

The Director General (DG) Lagos State Emergency Agency (LASEMA), Dr. Femi Oke-Osanyintolu, and the police denied the claim that Chika was denied treatment because of non-presentation of police report.

Oke-Osanyintolu said: “Does it even make sense? I was at the scene, the police and our collaborators were there.

“We work with medical workers, nurses and paramedics who operate the ambulances. So, tell me, is it possible that emergency workers will rush victims to the hospital and they will deny them treatment for police report?”

“We recovered the pilot and mechanic dead. The engineer was unconscious and rushed to LASUTH where he later died. People should be mindful of the things they say in situations such as this.”

Lagos Police Command spokesman Bala Elkana said: “That is a careless and baseless lie. It is like saying the government took an injured person to the hospital and the hospital told the government to get police report. We will investigate and unravel the person behind that post.

“Our people must stop saying things that are capable of causing trouble, especially when they know such tales are false.”

The crash also claimed the lives of Flight Engineer Clement Ndiok and the aircraft technician, Macaulay Brownson.

Brownson was initially rescued alive but critically injured.

He was rushed to the hospital for treatment but died soon afterwards.

The helicopter was on its way from Port Harcourt and crashed a couple of minutes before its scheduled touch down at the domestic wing of the Murtala Muhammed Airport, Ikeja.

Ill-fated chopper was air worthy – sources

Sources close to the operators of the helicopter, Quorum Aviation and the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) on Saturday dismissed claims that the chopper was declared non- airworthy in 2017 by the regulatory authority.

Sources also said information suggesting that the aircraft was used in the past by different airline operators to dupe the regulator into issuing it an Air Operators’ Certificate was not only laughable and misleading but false.

According to regulatory requirements, the AOC, which authorises an operator to carry out specific commercial air transport operations, is issued once the NCAA is satisfied that the operator has the required personnel, assets, and systems to ensure the safety of its employees and general public.

According to the regulator, an operator applying for AOC is required to have an air transport licence from the NCAA, which permits it to operate scheduled passenger or cargo air services in the country.

Crash probe in progress

Investigation of the crash of the helicopter by the Accident Investigation Bureau (AIB) continued yesterday.

Its spokesman, Mr Tunji Oketumbi, said on the phone that besides examining the aircraft wreckage, the agency had also begun investigation into the maintenance history of the chopper as well as the flight history of the crew to ascertain what could have gone wrong.

Oketumbi said the AIB team of investigators was also looking into the books of Quorum Aviation to ascertain its aircraft maintenance history, crew record and other vital parameters at the regulatory body – Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) – to establish what could have gone wrong.

AIB will advance further to look into the last conversation between the ill-fated crew and the control tower to obtain useful information key for its investigation.

Although Bell 260 helicopters by weight criteria does not fall into the category of aircraft mandated to be fitted with Flight Data Recorder and Cockpit Voice Recorders according to requirements prescribed by International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), a huge row broke out in the industry yesterday over allegations of their recovery.

While personnel of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) claimed they had recovered the black box, AIB dismissed the claim.

An aviation expert said: “The Bell 206 is certified at approximately 3,350lbs, which is 1519kg, and therefore does not require a flight data recorder.”

Commenting on the accident, the Chairman, House of Representatives Committee on Aviation, Hon. Nnolim Nnaji, said: “We must be thankful to God that we didn’t record any ground casualty. It was a great miracle that such a crash could occur within a residential area in a city so populated like Lagos without any ground casualties.”

Nnaji, however, urged the officials of the Air Accidents Investigation Bureau (AIB) and other agencies collaborating with them in investigation to do their best to unravel the cause of the accident.

He said it was regrettable that the unfortunate incident occurred just a few minutes to the final destination, which was Murtala Mohammed Airport, after flying several nautical miles all the way from Port Harcourt.

We'll repair structure damaged by crashed chopper, says Sanwo-Olu at accident scene

Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State on Saturday visited the scene of the accident at Salvation Road, Opebi, Ikeja.



•Lagos State governor, Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu (left), sympathising with Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Oluwole, whose

residents were affected by the helicopter crash, during his visit to
the accident scene at Opebi, Ikeja on Saturday.

The governor spoke with the residents and thanked God for saving their lives

Sanwo-Olu said he was out of town when the accident occurred on Friday otherwise he would have been there immediately.

He spoke with nonagenarian Comfort Adeniyi-Johnson who was all alone at home reading her Bible when the helicopter plunged into her fence.

The governor said: "The people affected are senior citizens of this state and we have come to see them.

"We will start working on the fence and the government agencies are here to support them.

"I want to commend all our frontline workers. I have received calls from my colleagues, and I thank those who sent me messages personally."

The residents thanked the governor for the visit and God for saving their lives when the helicopter crashed.



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