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Search

Hunters found missing plane – C’River

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Hunters found the wreckage of the Beachcraft 1900D plane in Busi, Obalinku Local Government Area, the Cross River State Government has said.



Cross River State Governor, Liyel Imoke

Photo file

The finding, exclusively reported by THE PUNCH on Tuesday, puts to rest the controversy over the fate of the light aircraft which disappeared from the nation’s airspace on March 15, 2008.

A statement by Mr. Patrick Ugbe, the Chief Press Secretary/Special Assistant on Media to Governor Liyel Imoke, said the hunters recovered the international passport of the pilot, Captain Augustine Egbedi among other items from the aircraft.

The statement was however silent on whether or not the remains of Egbedi and the two other crew members — Mr. Mohammed Tongo and Miss Fubarata Jack — were seen at the scene.

The statement reads, “The Beachcraft 1900D belonging to Wings Aviation which went missing on March 15 has been found. The ill-fated aircraft was found by hunters in the thick forest of Busi in Obalinku Local Government Area on Saturday, August 30, 2008.

“Some of the items recovered from the aircraft include the international passport of the pilot, Captain Egbedi; upon confirmation of this, the state government notified the relevant agencies after which it was overflown by National Emergency Management Agency helicopters on Tuesday, September 2, 2008.

“The matter has been handed over to the federal authorities and they have since mobilised resources to the site of the crash.

“The Cross River State Government has been unrelenting ever since on the search for the aircraft, which has yielded a positive result.”

Before the statement was made available to THE PUNCH, NEMA said that it had deployed helicopters and its officials to retrieve the wreckage of the plane.

NEMA’s Director, Search And Rescue, Mr. David Ashebu, who spoke with one of our correspondents from the state on Tuesday, said getting to the site from the ranch would take “some time.”

As at 7:30pm on Tuesday when one of our correspondents spoke again with him, he said that the helicopters had been parked at the ranch and that the officials were yet to get to the site.

He however said that he hoped that by Wednesday (today) afternoon, the officials would have located the wreckage.

In Abuja on Tuesday, the Minister of State for Transport (Aviation), Mr. Felix Hyat, also confirmed that the Cross River State Government had informed the ministry of the latest development.

The minister, who spoke with one of our correspondents through his Chief Press Secretary, Mrs. Rhoda Illya, said the Federal Government would verify the claim that the wreckage had been found.

The cautious stand of the minister might have been informed by the misleading information which he issued shortly after the plane was reported missing in March that it

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had been found in Dabu, Yalla Local Government Area.

The following day the minister retracted his words, saying that he was misled by information he received from industry regulator, the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority.

The handling of the matter had embarrassed both aviation and emergency managers in the country while exposing the weakness of the infrastructure in the air service industry.

The 19-pasenger aircraft with three crew members on board, left the Murtala Muhammed Airport, Lagos, on March 15, for Bebi Airstrip near the Obudu Cattle Ranch before it disappeared.

NEMA, after weeks of vigorous search for the light aircraft, claimed that it would be difficult to find it as Obudu had difficult terrain.

While efforts to trace it remained mysterious, the Federal Government, through the office of the National Security Adviser, set up a committee to investigate the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the plane.

The committee had Air Vice-Marshal S.A Atawodi (rtd) as chairman and Group Captain N. S. Kanwai as its secretary. Other members included the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Aviation, Captain Shehu Iyal; Mr. Abu Lili of the office of the NSA; Group Captain John Obakpolor of the Aviation Round Table and the Director of Operations, Accident Investigation Bureau, Captain M. I. Usman.


About a month ago, it was gathered that the committee submitted its report to the Presidency with a suggestion that it may no longer be possible to locate the aircraft.

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