

COAS, 10 others dead as plane crashes in Kaduna bad weather

Oyetunji Abioye, Adelani Adepegba, Jesusegun Alagbe, Tobi Aworinde and Godwin Isenyo 22 May 2021

Kindly share this story: [f](#) [t](#) [d](#) [in](#)



Lt Ibrahim Attahiru

• *Pilot forced to divert aircraft from military to civil airport –Sources*

• ***COAS died 115 days after appointment, burial holds in Abuja today***

The Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Ibrahim Attahiru, died in a plane crash in Kaduna on Friday.

Impeccable aviation sources had earlier told *Saturday Punch* that Attahiru, who was appointed Chief of Army Staff on January 26, died alongside 10 others who were on board the aircraft with him.

The incident occurred at about 6pm while it was raining heavily.

The aircraft, with registration number 5N-R203, was billed to land at the Nigerian Airforce Base in the Mando area of Kaduna before it diverted and attempted to land at the Kaduna International Airport.

The officers were said to be on their way to Kaduna ahead of Saturday's passing-out parade of soldiers from the Nigerian Army Depot in Zaria.

The Nigerian Air Force confirmed that there was an accident involving one of its aircraft in Kaduna but did not provide details.

"An air crash involving a @NigAirForce aircraft occurred this evening near the Kaduna International Airport. The immediate cause of the crash is still being ascertained. More details to follow soon," the NAF Director of Public Relations and Information, Edward Gabkwet, said in a statement.

A source in the Accident Investigation Bureau also confirmed the crash.

Also, an Aircraft Traffic Controller source told *Saturday PUNCH* that the NAF jet diverted from the military airport to the civil one due to weather,

touched down but skidded off Runway 05 and went into flames.

“The aircraft had seven persons on board and four crew members. The accident occurred at 1759 UTC. Safety services are currently at the crash site. Further reports from the crash site confirmed aircraft completely burnt, and unfortunately, there was no survivor,” the source said.

Another military source said bad weather forced the pilot to divert the aircraft from the military airport to the civil airport.

The source said, “The crash was probably a result of the bad weather caused by heavy rain that the state witnessed on Friday.

“That was the reason why the pilot diverted the aircraft from the military airport to the civil airport.

“The death is so sad because the army chief had a master plan to defeat terrorism in the country. Just while he was working with his other colleagues who are heading the airforce, the navy and even the chief of defence staff, death struck.

“He, being a military officer and a Muslim, and barring any last-minute change, will be buried according to Islamic rites at the National Military Cemetery on Saturday (today).”

However, the Nigerian Army on Friday confirmed Attahiru’s death. In a statement by the Director, Army Public Relations, Brigadier General Mohammed Yerima, the army noted that the incident also killed 10 others without revealing their identities.

The statement read, “The Nigerian Army regrets to announce the passing away of its Chief of Army Staff, Lt Gen Ibrahim Attahiru.

The sad event occurred following an air crash in Kaduna which also claimed the lives of 10 other officers including the crew. The COAS was enroute Kaduna from Abuja on Friday, May 21, 2021 when the unfortunate incident happened. Details of the sad incident and burial arrangements will be communicated soon.”

Meanwhile, the country’s security chiefs on Friday evening met with the President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

The purpose of the meeting held inside the President’s official residence was to formally brief him on Attahiru’s demise and others in the crash.

The security chiefs were led to the meeting with the President by the Minister of Defence, Major General Bashir Magashi (retd.). The Chief of Defence Staff, Gen, Lucky Irabor, and other security chiefs also attended the meeting.

A presidency source said, “It is just appropriate that the Commander-in-Chief is formally briefed of the death of his Chief of Army Staff and some other senior military officers. That was what those security chiefs led by their supervising minister did.”

Born on August 10, 1966, Attahiru hailed from Kaduna North Local Government Area of Kaduna State. He was a member of the Regular Course 35 of the Nigerian Defence Academy.

Before his appointment as the Chief of Army Staff, he was the General Officer Commanding 82 Division of the Nigerian Army, Enugu.

He was also a former Theatre Commander of *Operation Lafiya Dole* in the North-East.

Meanwhile, the NAF plane crash in Kaduna occurred barely seven weeks after a NAF Alpha jet went missing on March 31.

The NAF alpha jet was carrying out a mission against Boko Haram terrorists in Borno State when it went missing at about 6pm.

The plane which had two crew members on board disappeared from the radar and has not been found since then. The cause of the crash as well as the whereabouts of the pilots remain unknown.

The airforce had said its surveillance aircraft, NAF Special Forces and Nigerian Army troops were carrying out extensive search and rescue efforts.

Boko Haram sect had posted footage of burning wreckage of a plane, saying its fighters shot down the aircraft but this was denied by the airforce.

Also, on February 21, a Beechcraft KingAir B350i NAF aircraft also crashed while returning to the Nnamdi Azikiwe International airport after reporting engine failure en route to Minna.

Seven crew members on board the jet died. The NAF has yet to make public the investigation into the incident.

This brings to 17 the number of military officers who have lost their lives in the last three months in three crashes involving NAF jets.

Military combs crash site –Source

Meanwhile, a military source on Friday said the military had taken over the site where the NAF aircraft flying the COAS crashed.

He said, “The military has evacuated the bodies of the victims of the ill-fated plane crash. They have made the place inaccessible to civilians and other unauthorised persons.

Read Also

- ▶ Amao sets up serving, ex-officers’ panel over safety in NAF
- ▶ Kaduna crash: UI mourns postgraduate student, Olayinka
- ▶ Taiwo was billed to go on UK course from June 12, says sister of late pilot, Asaniyi

“They (military) have cordoned off the crash site. We too couldn’t even access the area (site) of the crash when we went there.

“The Chief of Army Staff was supposed to be the guest of honour at the passing-out parade of the Depot Nigerian Army recruits in Zaria tomorrow (today).”

Buhari, Malami mourn Army chief

The President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), in an emotional statement by his Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Femi Adesina, described the plane crash as “a mortal blow to our underbelly.”

The statement was titled 'President Buhari expresses shock, sorrow over death of Lt. Gen. Attahiru, others.'

Buhari expressed regret that the incident happened at a time that men of the Armed Forces were "poised to end the security challenges facing Nigeria."

The President was quoted as consoling the families of the deceased, the military, and Nigerians in general, saying they were "heroes who paid the ultimate price for peace and security in the land." He pledged that the departed would not die in vain.

The Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, also described the crash as a national tragedy.

Malami said he received the news of the crash of the military aircraft in Kano while attending to guests in preparation for the wedding ceremony of his second son, Abiru Rahman, billed for Saturday (today).

A statement by the media aide to the AGF, Dr Umar Gwandu, said Malami described the late COAS and members of his team as "dedicated patriotic Nigerians whose efforts to improve the security situation of the country was manifest."

"Malami prayed God to grant eternal salvation to all that lost their lives in the air mishap. He also prayed that the family members had the fortitude to bear the loss. The minister said the late Army officer who died in active service to the nation would always be remembered as a selfless and patriotic Nigerian who was passionate in duty."

Malami said his son's wedding fatiha would be low-key in view of the national tragedy and for strict observations of COVID-19 protocols and guidelines.

He said many of the intended functions would be shelved to honour the deceased.

El-Rufai, Obaseki, senator mourn

Also, the Kaduna State Commissioner for Internal Security and Home Affairs, Mr Samuel Aruwan, said the state government received the news of Attahiru and other senior military officers' death with sadness.

The commissioner quoted Governor Nasir El-Rufai as describing the Army chief as a "shining star," whose sudden death had "robbed Nigeria of an officer striving to bring new drive to secure the country against terrorists and other threats to national security."

Aruwan, in a statement, noted, "The governor said the news of Gen Attahiru's death has left him deeply shaken, with a sense of great personal loss. Coming so soon after his appointment had brought immense pride and a sense of hope to the people of Kaduna State.

"Governor el-Rufai, on behalf of the Government and People of Kaduna State, has extended his condolences to President Muhammadu Buhari, all branches of the military, especially the Nigerian Army, and the family of General Attahiru, as well as the families of all the officers who have lost their lives in this national tragedy."

Similarly, the Edo State Governor, Mr Godwin Obaseki, in a statement, expressed shock and sadness over the incident, praying that God would grant the repose of their souls.

“We pray for the repose of the souls of those who lost their lives in the unfortunate incident and urge the military to continue with the patriotic efforts to secure the country.

Lt. Gen. Attahiru served Nigeria meritoriously, bringing his skills, experience and expertise to bear in prosecuting the war against terror. He will always be remembered for his gallantry, commitment to service and dedication to our fatherland,” Obaseki said.

The Chairman, Senate Committee on Air Force, Senator Bala Na’Allah, in his reaction, said, “I am greatly diminished by the sad news of the death of a perfect gentleman in the name of Lt. Gen. Ibrahim Attahiru and other officers who paid the supreme price in the service of our great country.

“I, on behalf of the Senate Committee on Air Force, convey our heartfelt condolence to the nation, the Nigerian Army and the immediate family of the deceased.”

The Chairman of the Northern Speakers’ Forum, Yusuf Zailani, also expressed shock over the death of Attahiru and other military officers.

Zailani, in a statement issued by the Speaker’s Special Assistant on Media and Publicity, Ibrahim Dahiru, said the deaths were a great loss to Nigeria.

The Speaker of the Kaduna State House of Assembly said, “The unfortunate plane crash that killed the Chief of Army Staff alongside his aides is tragic and has thrown Nigeria into mourning.”

He condoled with Buhari, Governor Nasir El-Rufai, the Chief of Defence Staff, the Nigerian Army and his family over the loss.

Biography of the late army chief

The late Attahiru was born on August 10, 1966 in Doka, Kaduna Local Government Area of Kaduna State. He commenced cadets training in January 1984 and was commissioned into the rank of Second Lieutenant in December 1986 as an Infantry Officer.

He held a master’s degree in Strategic Management and Policy Studies from the Nigerian Defence Academy. He also had other degrees such as: Masters of Science in Human Resources Management and Development from Salford University in the United Kingdom, and a Graduates Diploma in International Studies from the University of Nairobi, Kenya.

He was appointed Nigerian Army Lieutenant General serving as the 21st Chief of Army Staff of the Nigerian Army on January 26, 2021 and served in that capacity until his death.

Prior to his appointment as the Chief of Staff, he had held several other appointments on the staff, instructional and command. He had a tour of duty with the United Nations in Sierra Leone as a Military Observer, where he facilitated United Kingdom military engagement, Operation BARASS in September 2000.

He was an Operation Officer and later Company Commander in NIBATT 19 ECOMOG Operations in Liberia. He also had the privilege of having commanded with distinction all through the chain of command in the Nigerian Army. Prominent among these appointments are Commanding

Officer, 146 Battalion Nigerian Army (Operation HARMONY IV) in the Bakassi Peninsula; Commander, 13 Brigade Nigerian Army (Operation PULO SHIELD); General Officer Commanding, 82 Division Nigerian Army. He was one-time Theatre Commander, Operation LAFIYA DOLE (the Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency Outfit in North-Eastern Nigeria). It is on record that he brought relative stability to the region with the surrender of several Boko Haram combatants.

He was an instructor at the Depot Nigerian Army, Nigerian Defence Academy and the Nigerian Army School of Infantry. He was later a Directing Staff and Chief Instructor at the Armed Forces Command and Staff College, Jaji – Kaduna.