

# panorama



## I'm sad my husband missed promotion before death –NAF engineer's widow

**Mrs Esther Chinemerem Alaribe is the wife of the late Air Force engineer, Lance Corporal Daniel Nnamdi Alaribe, a crew member of MI-171E helicopter that crashed on August 14, 2023 in Niger State. She spoke to DENNIS NAKU, on their marriage, what it means to be married to a military officer and how she received the news of his passing**

### CAN you introduce yourself?

My name is Mrs Esther Chinemerem Alaribe; I'm the wife of the late Lance Corporal, Daniel Nnamdi Alaribe, a Flight Engineer that died on the 14th of August, 2023 in the crash that happened in Niger State.

I am a graduate of Religion and Cultural Studies, from the Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, Imo State. The school is affiliated to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. It is a four-year degree course. I finished in December, 2021.

### How long have you been married to him?

I got married to my late husband on the 23rd of May, 2021. We have a child, a boy. He will be two years by next month, precisely on 14th of October.

### How did you hear about the incident?

Normally he calls every morning and evening, due to the nature of his work. So, that Monday morning we spoke, and then in the evening I expected him to call, but he didn't call. So, I had to call, but his lines were off (not connecting). It was something weird because I have never experienced his lines not connecting since I got to know him. I was like maybe his batteries were down. Then I tried calling him the following day, been Tuesday, but I couldn't get him. It was tense and I panicked because this was unlike him. Before then I saw in the news that an Air Force Helicopter crashed. So, I started calling some of his colleagues whose numbers I have. One of them told me not to worry that he would give me a feedback later. I called another one, a lady, who also said I should not worry that she would give me a feedback much later. They knew what had happened, but they didn't want to break the news to me. I called all through Tuesday, nothing. I continued with the calls on Wednesday, still nothing. Then I had to rush to the Air Force Base (Port Harcourt), because I don't stay inside the base. But before then, one of his colleagues came to my house that I should come to the base. So, I had to rush to the base. Getting there, I saw some senior personnel. I went inside a room, they told me that yes, he went on flight, but that they have not concluded if he was among those involved in the crash. I had a feeling that he was involved in the crash since I could not reach him on his lines, which is very unusual. Meanwhile, one of the personnel conveyed me back to my house that day.

On Thursday morning, I got a call from one of his colleagues at the Port Harcourt Base, asking me to send my house address for them to visit for documentation. I asked what documentation? There was no reply, she hung up. I tried calling back, but she didn't pick up. She told me they were coming on Friday for the documentation. But much later that day around 2:30 to 3pm, she called me that they were coming that afternoon. So they came around, my house was filled with Air Force personnel. About 20 to 30 of them came. Even the Commander of the Base in Port Harcourt came and they broke the news that he couldn't make it. In the process my mother fainted. Their military doctors and nurses came for intervention. Thank God she is getting better now.

### What was your immediate reaction and how did you feel when they finally broke the news to you?

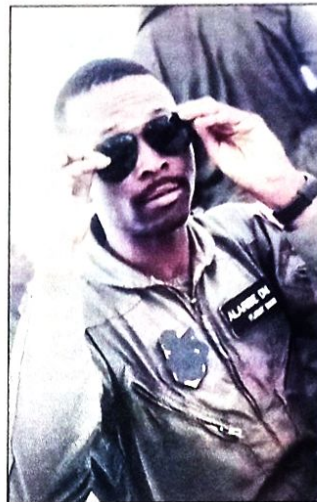
Even till now I still think it is a lie and that maybe he is somewhere, maybe he is hiding or something. Maybe they didn't see him there. In fact, I'm yet to gather it up or come to terms with it, even though the burial has been done in Abuja. I am yet to fathom that he is gone. I am trying to fix everything together and kind of imagine that he is not here after all the promises and the rest of it. This month is supposed to be his leave but it is quite unfortunate that he didn't come back to us again (fighting back tears).

### How would you describe your late husband? What kind of person was he?

He was a very calm and gentle person; even when I shout at him. Even when I am at fault, he will be the one to say, okay, sorry. And he loved his Job. Most time when we have issues, it was about his



• Esther and late husband



• Late Lance Corporal Alaribe

job. I would tell him to please create time for his family. He really loved his job and he would cover up for his colleagues who were not around. He doesn't mind, he doesn't complain even a bit. He is not somebody that grumbles because of work. Ever since I got to know him and we got married, I have not seen a day, even when he was sick. He would rather go late to work than not going at all whenever he felt sick. That was the kind of person he was.

### Is there anything that has made you sadder after this incident happened or even after he was probably buried?

Yes. What made me sadder is that he was almost due for promotion. He told me mama don't worry, you would be the one to decorate me that day. So... (fighting back tears). And funny enough most of his colleagues are on promotion now. So, seeing them, hearing it and seeing some of them post it. I feel it when I recall that he told me don't worry that I will be among the ones that will decorate him. Normally, the wife comes to decorate the husband and then salutes. So, seeing those things now makes me feel sad that I was not able to fulfill that part of what we had.

### You emphasized his love for his job. Can you say more about that?

His commitment, honestly speaking, was 101 per cent. I told you earlier that most of the issues we had as husband and wife was about his work. Most times when we were discussing, it is about work. And I would say, "babe" leave this thing. We are talking about us, I didn't tell you to talk about your work. There is no time he comes back that he would not give me gist that they were fixing this or doing that. It was always his job first.

### Does it mean you were not seeing often?

Yes, he was always away. You can imagine the last time I saw him was in May.

### But you were having regular communication?

Yes, we speak every morning and evening. In the afternoon, we rarely spoke because he was always at work then. But before he would go to work in the morning, we would talk. If he was free enough for a video call... because we do a video call almost every day. If we don't do it in the morning; we do it in the evening. He calls his family regularly, even when he is away.

### How have you been feeling knowing that there is a vacuum?

Honestly, I can't tell you that since 14th August, I have slept and slept comfortably. I might just close my eyes and the next minute, I think of maybe something he normally says. He is always the kind of person once I argue with him he would tell me "forget o, I'm the best husband." He would just make me laugh even when I am angry. He will tell me "it is God that sent me, I am the best husband." Those were always his words whenever we had problems. So, for over two weeks, nobody has told me that, nobody has called me those pet names he calls me. Nobody has spoken to his son. You can imagine the other day, our son, there is this sound they normally make, a game sound. My son was making this sound the other day. And once he starts making that sound, the next thing I do is just to call his dad, and the both of them will start making that sound together. But it is quite unfortunate that most times when he does

it now; it keeps bringing back those (sad) memories and the rest of it.

**You said your son would be two years old by next month?**

Yes, by the 14th October.

**Is there something that he has been saying or doing that makes you feel that he is thinking about his dad?**

Yes, those sounds they make together. Once in a while he does make those sounds. I would say 90 per cent of the calls that came into my phone were my husband's, his dad. So, once my phone rings, the next thing you will hear him say is "hello daddy". And since then, most times when my phone rings, my son thinks he is the one, and would say hello daddy, even when I don't pick the call.

**Before this incident, did you have any premonition, a sign that something bad was going to happen?**

No, I didn't. When I panic is when he tells me that he is going for a mission. But this one he didn't tell me that he was going. He didn't tell me anything. But

those once he normally goes and tells me, I panic. So, but this one I didn't know. I had no idea that he was going for anything that day. And even when I saw the news, I wasn't like he was involved because we spoke till 11:40am. So there was no clue that he was going to work that day. I didn't have any idea.

### Can you recall the last conversation he had with you?

During our last conversation, he asked after his son and why he didn't go for class that day. I told him that it was raining, that was why he didn't go. Then his haircut was not looking nice. I asked him who did this 'nonsense haircut', you understand. It was just more of yabbing and playing. There was nothing serious; just asking how are you and the rest, talking to his son. It was just our normal routine.

### Can you share some of the beautiful moments both of you spent together?

The time he proposed to me. That was in Bauchi State when I went to visit him. That was 2020 December when he proposed. It was a beautiful thing. I called all my friends to tell them, and it was jubilation. And when I got pregnant, sharing the news with him, the first thing he told me was "ahh! so, I'm going to be a daddy soon." He followed me through the journey of my pregnancy. He calls me every day. Once I tell him I'm having a headache and I say to him don't worry it will go, it's normal, he will say no, go to the hospital. Most times, I tell him the baby is kicking. He will say is it normal? He will say are you sure? If it is not normal please go to the hospital. He never missed a day to ask me about the pregnancy. He never stopped asking about the welfare of his family until that ugly incident happened.

### What is it that you are going to miss most about him?

I'm definitely missing everything; there is nothing left out. His talks, advice. We pray together on the phone. When he tells me okay I saw this and I like it. Don't worry, they will waybill it soon to you. Those little, little gifts he gets and the ones he gets for his son, in fact everything. There is nothing left out. Even the yabbing (joking abuses), I miss those yabbing. Intentionally he will yab me, me too I will yab him, you know those kinds of talks. So I'm going to miss everything.

### Are the Air Force authorities in touch with you and assuring you that you will get his benefits and all that?

Yes, they are trying. They've been a helping hand after this incident happened. Funny enough I was coming from there; they were trying to set up a board for inquiries then, so that the benefit and everything can be drawn. They promised catering for my son's education. So, we are trying to finalise everything and see how everything takes place.

### The Chief of Air staff flew in from Abuja to Port Harcourt personally to commiserate with you over your husband's demise. What does that visit mean to you?

I felt that they were concerned, for them to come all the way from Abuja. I think they had us in mind because he could just send delegates and not come in person. But I felt that for him to be here in person that day, he was concerned and he had us in mind.

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