

# 8 Generals, 6 Others Feared Dead

The nation was yesterday thrown into mourning as an Obudu Ranch-bound Domier 228 military aircraft, carrying senior Army officers crashed at Vandekiya in Benue State, killing 14 of the 18 passengers and crew on board.

Confirming the tragedy in a statement in Calabar, Cross River State, the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt. Gen.

• *Bamali, Adesunloye on board*

## MILITARY PLANE CRASH

*From Donald Andoor in Abuja and Abel Orih-Idoma in Makurdi*

Owoeye Azazi, said the ill-fated aircraft was flying the senior officers from Abuja to Obudu for the Chief of Army Staff Retreat on 'The Future of the

Military in the Next Decade' when it crashed between 9am and 10am, 18 nautical miles from its destination.

The COAS, who would not confirm neither figure nor the identity of casualty until their families had been informed,

said rescue operations were on even as the military hierarchy had ordered investigations into the crash.

THISDAY information, however, has it that about eight Generals, including two General Officers Commanding (GOCs), two Lieutenant Colonels and four other officers might have been killed in the

crash that left only four survivors who were said to be in very critical conditions last night.

Unconfirmed information also said that the GOC, 2nd Mechanised Division, Ibadan, Maj.Gen. Nuhu Bamali, the GOC 81 Garrison Division, Ikeja, Maj. Gen. Adesunloye, and the Director of Operations Army Headquarters, Brig. Gen. S.M. Lemu, were among the

officers on board.

Preliminary investigations, according to further information, said the aircraft might have ran into bad weather.

The tragedy immediately attracted a condolence message from the Cross River State Government, which spoke through the Deputy Governor, Elder Walter Eneji.

According to a statement in

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## MILITARY PLANE CRASH *Cont'd from P1*

Calabar by the Press Secretary to the state governor, Mr. Joseph Ushigiale, the deputy governor had conveyed the heartfelt condolences of the people and government of the state to the Federal Government through the Chief of Army Staff.

Speaking to **THISDAY**, however, Director of Defence Information, Brigadier-General Felix Chukwuma, said on the receipt of the news of the incident, the Chief of Defence Staff, General Martin Luther Agwai, dispatched both the Army and Air Force service chiefs (General Azazi and Air Marshal Dike) to Cross River State to command the search and rescue operation.

Also speaking in a telephone interview with **THISDAY**, the Director of Public Relations and Information (DOPRI) of the Nigerian Air Force, Group Captain Emeka Ozoemena, said the General Officer Comma-

nding (GOC) 82 Division, Enugu, Major-General Abdulhafeez Adewuyi, who was scheduled to receive the officer on arrival, had to lead the search and rescue team that was dispatched to the scene of the crash.

Ozoemena assured Nigerians that the Nigeria Air Force would unveil the manifest of the crashed plane to the public today, explaining: "We want to avoid a situation where the press would begin to speculate on the names. It is proper for us to inform the families of the deceased before releasing their names to the press."

**THISDAY** gathered that immediately the news of the crash got to the military headquarters, a search and rescue team made up of a military helicopter, and another from the police were dispatched to the scene of the crash.

Reports from Makurdi, capital of Benue State, said a convoy

of the state Governor, Dr. George Akume, left the state capital for the scene of the incident as 6:25 pm, possibly with the Chief of Army Staff.

The Makurdi - Gboko Road became unusually busy as motorists eager to get to the scene of the accident, which was over 100km, were seen speeding off in their vehicles. Makurdi, the state capital, is in a gloomy mood with groups of people seen in secluded circles discussing the air crash in hush tones, worried whether any of the occupants of the air craft is some one known and dear to them.

Yesterday's crash is the most fatal air crash involving military officers since 1992, when a military aircraft plunged into the creeks in Ejigbo, few minutes after take off from the Lagos International Airport, killing 192 junior and senior officers, as well as the crew on board.