

Beat: Miscellaneous

Military chopper crashes during patrol in South Africa, killing 5

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USPA News - Five South African service members were killed Saturday when their helicopter crashed during an anti-poaching patrol in the northeastern region of the country, the military said on Sunday. The cause was not immediately known.

The accident happened at approximately 7 p.m. local time on Saturday when the Augusta A109 light utility helicopter went down in Kruger National Park, which covers nearly 2 million hectares (7,722 square miles) in South Africa's northeast corner. Few details about the crash were released. Brigadier General Xolani Mabanga, of the South African National Defence Force, said the helicopter was taking part in a scheduled aerial patrol as part of Operation RHINO, an anti-rhino poaching operation. He said the five service members who were on board the aircraft were killed. It was not immediately known what caused Saturday's accident. "We certainly hope that investigations will shed light on the circumstances of the crash but the whole country is saddened by the loss of our National Servicemen on duty," said President Jacob Zuma, noting that the crash comes just days after 13 South African soldiers were killed in the Central African Republic. "On behalf of government and the entire nation, we wish to express our sincere condolences to the families of these five soldiers and may their souls rest in peace," Zuma added. Other officials, including Defense and Military Veterans Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Ngqakula, also offered their condolences. In December 2012, eleven service members were killed when a Douglas C-47TP Dakota, a twin-propeller military transport aircraft, crashed in a mountain range near the border with Lesotho after encountering severe weather. It was not immediately known if the severe weather was the cause of the accident, which involved an old aircraft that was extensively used by the Allies during World War II. And in October 1986, Mozambican president Samora Machel and 33 others were killed when the Mozambican presidential plane crashed into the Lebombo Mountains in South Africa. Ten people survived the accident, but it remains the country's deadliest aviation accident to date.

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