

Beat: Politics

Guatemala army chief of staff among 5 dead in helicopter crash

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USPA News - The chief of staff of the armed forces in Guatemala, General Rudy Ortiz Ruiz, was among five people who were killed Wednesday when an Air Force helicopter crashed in the country's western region near the border with Mexico, officials said Thursday. The aircraft, a Bell 206 helicopter, had taken off at about 9:25 a.m. local time on Wednesday to inspect military units in the western department of Huehuetenango, where Mexican and Guatemalan drug traffickers are known to operate.

The helicopter was unable to land at its destination due to bad weather, forcing the pilot to head towards Las Palmas until it crashed in a wooded area near the village of El Aguacate. All five service members on board the helicopter, including General Ortiz, were killed in the crash, which destroyed much of the aircraft. The other victims were identified as Brigadier General Braulio Mayán, Colonel Rony Anleu, Captain Selvin Raymundo Donis, and Fifth Brigade Commander Colonel Juan de Dios Lázpez Gomez, who was piloting the aircraft. Guatemalan President Otto Páez Molina lamented the loss of the service members and sent his condolences to the families of the victims. "I want to express my feelings of sympathy and condolences to the families of the five officers who sadly died in northern Huehuetenango," the president said, praising the victims for their work. Páez declared three days of mourning for the victims. The cause of Wednesday's accident was not immediately known, but officials said the weather likely played a role. Miguel Domingo Paiz, the deputy mayor of El Aguacate, told the Prensa Libre newspaper that the helicopter was flying at a "very low" altitude when it made two turns before crashing in a wooded area near the village. In February 2012, three crew members and seven passengers were killed when a large Air Force helicopter crashed in northern Guatemala, in the municipality of San Luis near the border with Belize. The aircraft was initially en-route to the site of another helicopter crash but had been told their assistance was no longer required.

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