Beat: Travel

South African military plane crashes into mountain, killing 11

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USPA News - Search-and-rescue workers in South Africa on Thursday recovered the remains of eleven service members at the site of a military plane crash in a mountain range near the border with Lesotho, the country`s defense department said. The Douglas C-47TP Dakota, a twin-propeller military transport aircraft, had taken off from Air Force Base Waterkloof in Pretoria at around 7:45 a.m. local time on Wednesday.

The aircraft, heading for Mthatha Airport in the Eastern Cape province, went missing at around 9:45 a.m. local time after encountering severe weather. "After the expected time of arrival and no communication from the aircraft, the South African Air Force (SAAF) activated a search and rescue operation," the country`s defense department said in a statement on Thursday. "Severe weather conditions in the area hindered the continuation of the search and rescue effort." The operation continued at first light on Thursday morning after which a rescue team located the wreckage near the Giant`s Castle mountain peak in the Drakensberg mountain range, near the South African city of Ladysmith and close to the border with landlocked country Lesotho. "The rescue team was airlifted to the top of the mountain by the very competent Air Force and South African Police Service Air Wing pilots in very difficult conditions," said Chris Botha, a spokesman for ambulance service Netcare 911. "After triaging they found that the eleven people onboard the plane had tragically died on scene due to the extensive injuries that they sustained." Botha said the eleven victims, all military service members, were removed from the scene by a police rescue team after an examination by a local pathologist. "Standing there today I was in awe of the fantastic team work displayed by the various services during the very difficult task," the spokesman added. It was not immediately known if the severe weather was the cause of the accident, which involved an old aircraft which was extensively used by the Allies during World War II. The defense ministry said it has convened a board of inquiry to investigate the circumstances surrounding the cause of the accident. In August 2011, thirteen people were killed when two Albatross planes crashed in a mountainous area of steep cliffs near Tzaneen, a town located in the Mopani district of Limpopo province. The planes had both taken off from a landing strip in Tzaneen and were heading to Rand Airport in Germiston. 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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