



PRESS RELEASE

Mississippi National Guard Public Affairs

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MISSISSIPPI NATIONAL GUARD UPDATE ON HELICOPTER CRASH

Story by Lt. Col. Deidre D. Smith and Mr. Daniel Szarek

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JACKSON, Miss. – The Mississippi National Guard (MSNG) hosted a joint press conference with the governor’s office regarding the helicopter crash February 23 in Prentiss County, Mississippi. Maj. Gen. Janson D. Boyles, the adjutant general of Mississippi, joined Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves to hold a press conference shortly after 2:00 p.m., Feb. 24, 2024, at the MSNG Joint Force Headquarters in Jackson.

The MSNG experienced a helicopter crash at approximately 2:00 p.m., Feb. 23, 2024, in a wooded area near Booneville, Prentiss County, Mississippi. A report from Prentiss County Sheriff Randy Tolar confirms the tragic loss of two Soldiers as a result of the crash. The AH-64 Apache helicopter was on a routine training flight when the incident occurred, according to the MSNG State Army Aviation Office.

Gov. Reeves announced the names of the fallen soldiers and praised them for their dedicated service to our state and nation.

“This is a sad time for the state of Mississippi as we mourn the loss of two of our own Mississippi National Guard heroes,” said Reeves. “Both Service Members served at the Mississippi National Guard Army Aviation Support Facility 2 located in Tupelo.”

Reeves announced the fallen MSNG Soldiers, “One Soldier, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Bryan Andrew Zemek, age 36, was in Alpha Company 1st Battalion, 149th Aviation Regiment serving as an AH-64 Delta Apache Standardization Instructor Pilot in Tupelo. The second Soldier, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Derek Joshua Abbott, age 42, was in Delta Company of the 2nd Battalion, 151st Lakota Medical Evacuation unit serving as a Maintenance Test Pilot in the Mississippi National Guard.”

“I want to extend my deepest condolences to the families and friends of our fallen soldiers. We will always remember these dedicated soldiers for their honorable service, and we grieve with the families during this tragic time.”

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The Mississippi National Guard (MSNG) is commanded by the Adjutant General of Mississippi, the state's senior military official appointed by the governor, and is comprised of the Mississippi Army National Guard (MSARNG) and the Mississippi Air National Guard (MSANG). The MSNG consists of approximately 12,500 Soldiers and Airmen that are “Always Ready, Always There” for Mississippi and the Nation. For more information about the Mississippi National Guard visit our website at <https://www.ng.ms.gov>

MSNG UPDATE ON HELICOPTER CRASH

Maj. Gen. Boyles echoed the governor's sympathy to the surviving family members of our fallen Soldiers in the Mississippi National Guard.

"Today is a devastating day for the Mississippi National Guard as we mourn the loss of two of our brave brothers in arms. This accident serves as a constant reminder of the selfless service, sacrifice, and commitment that our brave service men and women face while performing in the line of duty."

Boyles went on to address the next steps in recovery after the accident.

"Like all accidents, this incident is under investigation. We are not at liberty to discuss any details of the accident during an ongoing investigation," said Boyles. "Our paramount concern at this time is to ensure proper casualty assistance is available to support the surviving family members through this difficult time. The Mississippi National Guard is family. In fact, the National Guard is family. Our hearts are truly broken at the loss of these two members of our family."

Boyles also took a moment to thank the first responders and local authorities who responded Friday's accident at a moment's notice.

Reeves closed the press conference honoring the fallen Soldiers of the Mississippi National Guard.

"I want to once again pay tribute to the lives of Chief Warrant Officer 4 Zemek and Chief Warrant Officer 4 Abbott. Our state owes them a debt that can never be fully repaid. Their service to our state and our nation will not be forgotten, and we remain thankful for their comrades in arms who continue to serve, as they did, with honor and distinction," said Reeves.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Bryan Andrew Zemek, 36, was in Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 149th Aviation Regiment, serving as an AH-64D Apache Standardization Instructor Pilot. A native of Oxford, Mississippi, Zemek is survived by his wife of three years and their four children. His awards include the Army Commendation Medal with three bronze oak leaf clusters; the Army Achievement Medal; the Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal with two bronze oak leaf clusters; the Senior Army Aviator Badge; and many other decorations and state awards. Zemek was a graduate of New Albany High School, class of 2005.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Derek Joshua Abbott, 42, was in Delta Company of the 2nd Battalion, 151st Lakota Medical Evacuation unit, serving as a Maintenance Test Pilot. A combat veteran and native of Fulton, Mississippi, Abbott is survived by his wife of 18 years and their 3 children. His awards include the Air Medal with Valor and numeral 2; Army Commendation Medal with two bronze oak leaf clusters; Army Achievement Medal; Army Good Conduct Medal; Iraq Campaign Medal with one campaign star; Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal with two bronze oak leaf clusters; the Combat Action Badge; the Senior Army Aviator Badge; and many other decorations and state awards.

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Photos attached. (Courtesy of the Mississippi National Guard)

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