

Beat: Local

U.S. helicopter crashes at American base in Japan, killing 1

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USPA News - A U.S. military helicopter crashed at an American base on the Japanese island of Okinawa on Monday afternoon, injuring three crew members and leaving a fourth presumed dead, officials said. The cause of the crash was not immediately known.

The accident happened at around 4 p.m. local time on Monday when the HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter crashed in the Central Training Area at Camp Hansen, a U.S. Marine Corps base on Okinawa island, which is located south of the Japanese mainland. The aircraft was based at the island's Kadena Air Base. The U.S. Air Force said four crew members were on board the twin turboshaft engine aircraft, which is typically used to conduct search-and-rescue operations. Three of the crew members were taken to a medical facility in a stable condition, but the fourth could not be located and was presumed to have been killed. It was not immediately clear what may have caused Monday's accident, which occurred during a local training mission. Local residents reported seeing thick black clouds of smoke rising from the crash site, and aerial footage recorded later showed most of the aircraft was destroyed. "The cause of the incident will be investigated. More details will be released as they become available," the Air Force said in a brief statement, giving no other details. Japanese firefighters and local officials were not allowed to enter the base to access the crash site, Japan's national public broadcasting organization NHK reported. "This accident is an extremely regrettable matter," Japanese defense minister Itsunori Onodera told reporters during a news conference. "We've asked U.S. authorities to disclose information quickly to investigate the cause of the crash and to take measures to prevent a recurrence." Monday's accident is the second accident for a Kadena-based aircraft in the past few months. An F-15 fighter jet crashed in the Pacific Ocean approximately 112 kilometers (70 miles) east of Okinawa island in late May, but the pilot was safely recovered by Japanese rescue squadron crews after ejecting himself from the aircraft. Nearly 50,000 U.S. military personnel are stationed in Okinawa, which was under U.S. control from 1945 through 1972. Local residents have repeatedly protested against U.S. forces being stationed in their communities after a number of misdeeds committed by American service members. Two U.S. Navy sailors were sentenced to lengthy prison terms in March after they pleaded guilty to raping a young Japanese woman near Kadena Air Base on October 16, 2012. Investigators said the men had approached the victim as she was walking home during the early morning hours. One of the most shocking incidents was the rape of a 12-year-old girl by three U.S. service members in September 1995, sparking huge protests and forcing the U.S. to relocate an airbase from central to northern Okinawa. It was followed by the arrest of a U.S. Marine in July 2000 after he molested a 14-year-old girl while she slept in her home, and an airman was detained that same month after a hit-and-run accident.

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