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U.S. Army helicopter crashes in Philippines — 12 missing

By Warren P. Strobel
Knight Ridder Newspapers

WASHINGTON (KRT) — A U.S. Army helicopter taking part in anti-terrorist operations in the Philippines crashed in the sea Thursday with 12 Americans aboard. The Defense Department said no survivors had been found, although a search was still underway.

The crash of the Army MH-47 Chinook helicopter comes as the United States is significantly escalating its involvement in the Philippine government's war against a homegrown terrorist group with links to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization.

If the death toll remains at 12, the crash would be the U.S. military's single biggest loss of life since President Bush declared a war on global terrorism in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Pentagon spokesmen said they had no reports that hostile fire brought down the helicopter.

The MH-47 was en route from Basilan Island in the southern Philippines to an air base at Macau with eight crew members and four passengers when it crashed into the sea about a half-hour after takeoff, said Marine Maj. Sean Gibson, a spokesman for the U.S. Pacific Command.

The crash occurred at about 1:30 p.m. EST, 2:30 a.m. on Friday in the Philippines, Gibson said.

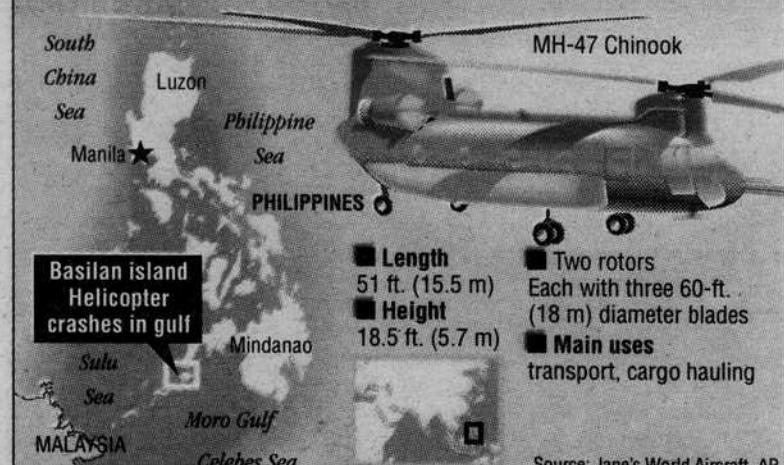
The Pentagon withheld the names of those aboard pending notification of next of kin.

"The helicopter was operating in support of U.S. efforts to train and advise local armed forces in counter-terrorist tactics, and to hold joint exercises. Under a U.S.-Philippine agreement, they are allowed to be present in combat situations, but are not supposed to fight except in self-defense."

A second MH-47 that was flying in tandem with the first remained over the crash site, while other aircraft were sent to the scene to search for survivors, according to the Hawaii-based Pacific Command, which oversees U.S. military forces in East Asia and the Pacific. The two aircraft had just delivered the last of 160 U.S. special forces troops to Basilan.

Crash in Philippines

A U.S. MH-47 Chinook helicopter carrying 12 Americans crashed north of Basilan Thursday.



Source: Jane's World Aircraft, AP

Pat Carr, Lee Hulteng Knight-Ridder Tribune
funds. It holds two U.S. missionaries, Grace and Martin Burnham, of Wichita, Kan., as well as a Filipino nurse, Ediborah Yap.

Michael O'Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, a Washington-based research center, said the U.S. mission in the Philippines, while a worthy one, is unlikely to make a major impact on global terrorism.

Abu Sayyaf "is a relatively fringe player in the broader scheme of al-Qaeda-related organizations," O'Hanlon said, and its operations appear to be primarily limited to the southern island of Basilan.

"They're now in the business of taking hostages and demanding money," he said.

The twin-engine MH-47 is the special forces version of the military's workhorse CH-47 helicopter, which is used primarily to move ammunition and repair parts and transport troops and weapons.

The Chinook, which was designed in the 1950s, has been in service since 1962. No information was available on the chopper involved in Thursday's crash.

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Web — duckweb.uoregon.edu. Candidates on the ballot are running for ASUO Executive, Student Senate seats, and other student government positions. Final results are expected to be tallied

by about 6 or 7 p.m., ASUO Elections Coordinator Courtney Hight said. Results will be posted Friday evening at www.dailyemerald.com.

— Kara Cogswell

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