

Two pilots killed in helicopter crash

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Two Bell OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopters participate in the Han Kuang military exercises yesterday.

Photo: Liao Chen-huei, Taipei Times

This year's Han Kuang military exercises were marred yesterday afternoon by the crash of an army helicopter at Hsinchu Air Force Base that killed the pilot and copilot.

A Bell OH-58D Kiowa Warrior crashed at 3:28pm, the third crash of a Bell OH-58D in the past two years, although the first incident, in March 2018, and the second on May 10 did not result in any injuries or deaths.

The helicopter had made a provisioning stop at the base and then left at 3:25pm to return to Longtan Air Force Base in Taoyuan's Longtan District (龍潭), Army Command Headquarters said.

The pilot, Major Chien Jen-chuan (陳建勳), reported that the rotor speed was too low and he needed to make an emergency return to the Hsinchu base, Commander of the Army General Chen Pao-yu (陳寶裕) said.

The helicopter had reached an altitude of 400m before Chien reported that the rotor speed was too low, Chen said.

Chien tried to perform a 180-degree autorotation maneuver to land at the base and avoid civilian residences, but it could have been that the rotor speed was too low to complete the maneuver, Aviation and Special Forces Command 601 Brigade's Major-General Chang Tai-sung (張泰興) said.

Chien and Captain Kao Chia-lung (高嘉龍) were rushed to a nearby hospital, but resuscitation efforts failed and they were pronounced dead.

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The command said that it had grounded all 36 of its remaining US-made Bell OH-58D Kiowa Warriors until the results of a thorough investigations are known, but general safety inspections would be carried out in the meantime.

A task force has been assembled to investigate the incident, it said.

The command said that it would provide assistance to Chien's and Kao's families, who would receive pension payouts for the two men dying in the line of duty.

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) wrote on Facebook that she had told the Ministry of National Defense to provide the families with all the assistance they require.

The deaths of Chien and Kao were a sad loss for the army, as well as the entire nation, she wrote.

Tsai called on the military to keep its spirits up, and for the public to offer its full support.

Additional reporting by CNA

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