

## 2 Killed as Missionary Plane Is Shot Down in Peru

■Military: Pentagon panel advises Bush to use parts of Clinton program, add space- and sea-based systems.

By NATALIA TARNAWIECKI and SEBASTIAN ROTELLA, Special To The Times

LIMA, Peru--A U.S. Baptist missionary and her infant daughter were killed Friday when a Peruvian fighter plane on an anti-drug patrol shot down their private aircraft over the jungle near the Brazilian border, Peruvian government officials said.

The Peruvian air force pilot apparently mistook the downed Cessna 185 seaplane for a drug-smuggling plane, U.S. Embassy officials said. The pilot, one of the other three U.S. citizens aboard, was hospitalized with a gunshot wound to the leg and rib injuries.

U.S. officials hurried to the remote scene to assist the victims and investigate the incident, the first of its kind since Peru instituted a tough shoot-down policy seven years ago. Peruvian air force officials said they regretted the deaths, but they insisted that the pilot followed procedures and fired as a last resort after the Cessna ignored his warnings.

The Peruvian fighter's machine-gun fire killed the woman and her daughter and forced the Cessna to make an emergency landing in the Amazon River about 120 miles east of the city of Iquitos.

The dead were identified as Veronica Bowers, 35, and her daughter, Charity Bowers, 7 months, said David Southwell, a spokesman for the Assn. of Baptists for World Evangelism in Harrisburg, Pa. Also aboard were James Bowers, Veronica's husband, and their 7-year-old son, Cory. The pilot was identified as Kevin Donaldson.

The family's nightmare came near the end of a journey with a mundane bureaucratic motive, Southwell said. The Bowers had flown to the northwestern Peru-Brazil border, taken a boat across the Amazon and entered Brazil to get a visa for Charity. The infant had a temporary visa in Peru but needed to leave the country and re-enter to get a permanent one, Southwell said.

The Peruvian fighter plane intercepted the Cessna as it was returning to Iquitos.

"It was a freak accident," Southwell said. "I don't think the Peruvian government has any intention of shooting missionaries. It's a tragedy, but I'd hate for us to think poorly of the Peruvian government or people."

Southwell said the Bowers had been in Peru since 1994, living on a houseboat and traveling the Amazon for their missionary work. They taught the Bible, trained church leaders and helped with literacy and health programs. He said the Bowers were from Muskegon, Mich., and Donaldson was from Morgantown, Pa.

Southwell said that he spoke with James Bowers on Friday and that the missionary was "very stable. He said he and his son, Cory, hugged a lot and cried a lot." Southwell said that he had spent four days with the family on the river in October and that the missionaries were widely embraced by the local people.

"They loved the people, and the people would flock to them," he said. "They loved them. They would bring them fruits, vegetables. They had big and giving hearts, and we're going to miss them."

Before shooting at suspect aircraft, Peruvian air force fliers are supposed to contact the pilots by radio and try other nonlethal means to force them to land.

In a statement issued Friday night, the Peruvian air force said the fighter pilot intercepted the Cessna, whose pilot then ignored the Peruvian flier's repeated warnings. The fighter pilot followed international guidelines for such confrontations, according to the air force.

The shoot-down occurred about 11:20 a.m.

"The pilot of the unknown aircraft ignored the warnings of the Peruvian air force pilot and as a final recourse, the shots were fired," air force officials said in the statement. They promised an "exhaustive investigation."

Pilot Donaldson told his wife by telephone that the shooting was unjustified, according to an interview with the wife by a Peruvian television station.

"I don't understand why they kept shooting," said the woman, who was identified as Bobbi Donaldson. "I don't know why they shot my husband. He was bleeding while he was floating in the river."

Peru is one of the three countries that produces coca, the raw material for cocaine, and its borders are hotbeds of smuggling.

At least 25 craft have been downed since 1994, when Peru instituted a shoot-down policy against airborne drug smugglers. Along with aggressive eradication that reduced coca crops by more than 60%, the policy was part of a crackdown during the past decade that has been hailed as a success by the U.S.

The shoot-downs began after U.S. anti-drug officials gathered evidence that Peruvian generals and other high-ranking officers in coca-growing areas were protecting clandestine jungle airstrips used for flights of coca paste bound for Colombia.

Agents of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration went to then-President Alberto Fujimori with evidence that Peruvian officers pretended to destroy the airstrips with obstacles driven into the ground, then secretly removed the obstacles and continued to take payoffs from smugglers.

The shooting policy has remained essentially unchanged since the Fujimori regime fell last year and was replaced by a transitional government.

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Times staff writer Rotella reported from Buenos Aires and special correspondent Tarnawiecki from Lima. Staff writer Teresa Watanabe in Los Angeles contributed to this report.