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Three held over death of British pilot in Tanzania

HANNAH AL-OTHMAN | Sunday 31 January 2016



Shot down: Mr Gower was reportedly targeted by elephant poachers *Tropic Air Kenya*

Three people have reportedly been arrested in Tanzania over

the shooting of a British helicopter pilot by elephant poachers.

The men were reportedly held by police in the East African country on Sunday over the murder of Roger Gower.

The pilot died a hero managing to land the plane successfully despite being shot out of the sky, saving the life of his colleague.



Mr Gower, 37, was a former accountant who qualified as a pilot in 2004 and moved to Africa around two years later.

He was helping authorities in Tanzania track the criminals when they fired on his aircraft on Friday, the Friedkin Conservation Fund (FCF) said.

He managed to bring the helicopter down in the Maswa Game Reserve, near Serengeti National Park in the country's north, but died from his wounds before he could be rescued.



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Pictures posted online show the badly damaged remains of the helicopter, including a bloodied bullet hole in the pilot's seat of the aircraft, which lay on its side in the savannah grass.

Mr Gower's brother Max said he was proud of him and how he had managed to land the helicopter and allow his passenger, a friend and colleague, to get out.

He said that his sibling did not want to sit behind a desk and quit as an accountant the day he qualified so he could go and work with the two things he enjoyed the most, flying and animals.

Max Gower told Sky News: "I'm proud of what he did. I'm proud he got his passenger down safely. I'm proud he got himself out of the helicopter and I'm proud that even after he was shot he was still laughing."

Max Gower [has set up a Just Giving page with the aim of raising £50,000](#) in his brother's memory, writing: "I am proud to have known him and to be able to say he was my brother.

"Those who knew him will remember his idiosyncrasies but also his principles, his morality and his infectious love of having fun."



Wreckage: Mr Gower's aircraft was fired on as he tracked elephant poachers in Tanzania

Mr Gower's South African colleague, Nick Bester, who also worked at the Friedkin Conservation Fund, was injured in the crash but survived.

According to a profile with his former employer Tropic Air Kenya Mr Gower he helped the British Army on exercises in the country.

In a Facebook post Tropic Air Kenya said it was "shocked and immensely sad" at the news that he had been killed "in the long and ongoing battle against elephant poaching".

It said: "Roger, only 37 years old, was a fantastic heli pilot in every way, and flew for Tropic Air for four years, leaving last August to pursue new flying ambitions #Tanzania,. Bye Bye Rog .. you will be greatly missed. Our thoughts are with his family."

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Tropic Air Kenya with Hannes Viljoen.

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We are shocked and immensely sad to hear the news that Roger Gower lost his life to a single gun shot wound fired by ivory poachers on Friday, in southern Serengeti while providing air support in the long and...

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In a message posted on its website, FCF founder Dan Friedkin said the organisation was "profoundly saddened by the loss of our dear friend".

He said: "Roger was killed while piloting a helicopter during a coordinated effort with the Tanzanian wildlife authorities to track down and arrest active elephant poachers. In the course of this action the poachers fired upon the helicopter and Roger was fatally wounded.



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"We are committed to honouring Roger and his work. We are also committed to ensuring that those responsible for this attack are found and brought to justice. We believe that Roger can best be honoured by redoubling our commitment to protect elephants and our priceless wildlife heritage.

"This tragic event again highlights the appalling risk and cost of protecting Tanzania's wildlife."

Tanzania is fighting a bitter struggle to stop ivory poachers, a report last year saying 60 per cent of its elephant population had been lost in the previous five years.

Additional reporting by agencies. ■

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