Plane Missing After Possibly Being Hijacked by Drunken Revelers

June 12, 2012

An An-2 parked at Hullavington Airfield in Wiltshire, England, in 2005. **Adrian Pingstone**

A single-engine An-2 biplane with about a dozen people on board has gone missing in the Urals, and it may have been hijacked by drunken revelers eager to celebrate the extended holiday weekend with a fishing trip.

The plane, which was leased by its private owner to monitor forest fires in the Sverdlovsk region, took off from a small airstrip near the city of Serov at 11 p.m. Monday without permission from air traffic controllers, Interfax reported.

On board were the captain and a security guard for the airstrip.

The co-pilot and flight engineer found the plane missing when they returned from a brief visit to Serov, an industrial city of 100,000 located 350 kilometers north of Yekaterinburg.

They also found three abandoned cars near the spot where the plane had been parked.

Regional police, who were alerted at 8:30 a.m. Tuesday, said they believe 13 people were

on board.

"The pilot and the 12 or so people who flew away on this plane have not been found in a crash or in one piece," said Valery Gorelykh, a spokesman for the regional police, Interfax reported.

He also said the missing plane's crew members were not responding to calls to their cell phones.

A plane from Perm was dispatched to assist in the search for the An-2.

Interfax, citing unidentified local sources, said the passengers believed to have boarded the plane had been drinking alcohol.

The country enjoyed a three-day weekend from Sunday through Tuesday as part of the Russia Day holiday June 12.

Police are baffled about why the plane took off.

"One theory that the police are working with is that the group of people might have gone on a fishing trip," Gorelykh said. "Another version is that they went to a banya in a neighboring district."

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