

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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ERA HELICOPTERS, LLC *

AIRBUS HELICOPTER CRASH NEAR * Accident No.: ANC16LA022

JUNEAU, ALASKA, MAY 5, 2016 *

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Interview of: JIRI HANIS
Accident Pilot
Era Helicopters, LLC

Harborview Medical Center
Seattle, Washington

Wednesday,
May 11, 2016

APPEARANCES:

CORY THERIOT, Vice President
Safety and Quality Assurance
Era Helicopters Juneau Base

DENNIS HOGENSON, Deputy Regional Chief
Western Pacific Region
National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. THERIOT: Okay. So this is May 11. So interview with Jiri Hanis at the Seattle Harborview Medical Center.

Witnessed by?

MR. HOGENSON: Dennis Hogenson with the National Transportation Safety Board.

INTERVIEW OF JIRI HANIS

BY MR. THERIOT:

Q. Okay. So I'm going to put this right here, Jiri, so it picks you up. Just if you can, the day of the event, if you want to kind of start us in the morning, you know, when you arrived at the office and just take us through your day up until, you know, we get to the flight.

A. Okay. It's just a regular day in Juneau. Got to work and we started some meetings, because the season is just getting started, so we had some meetings and briefing new guys. And in the meantime, there was a crew working in the dog camp who's been there for a few days, and we were in contact with them every 2 hours.

I was the pilot that day to be taking care of them. So I did the weather reports and watching weather because we need to do sling operation. So our mission, or my mission, for the day was get a good weather for slinging to set up a dog camp.

We already call about midday it's not going to happen, the slinging, and over the radio, me and Alex established that they

1 need to be pick up in certain time of the day. So every 2 hours,
2 we did the weather calls and see what time is going to be the best
3 time to pick them up according to the weather.

4 So about noontime, I remember Alex called me. I went to the
5 office and he said weather is fair enough from his side for them
6 to be picked up. So three guys need to get off the glacier, so
7 I --

8 Q. Do you remember the weather that day?

9 A. The weather was on and off. Like last couple of weeks in
10 Juneau was pretty rainy and foggy and hazy, but I had a really
11 good window there that day, so -- I've been doing a lot of weather
12 research. I've been lately on the top of it because we were
13 trying to set up the camp. High ceilings, like, in channel for
14 us, 2500 is like, you know, a nice ceilings in the channel. And
15 the cameras were looking good. They weren't looking right 100
16 percent, but they were looking good enough to start kind of moving
17 towards the dog camp.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. So that was from my side. And then we don't have any cameras
20 that are on (indiscernible) mountain, so it's between me and Alex
21 kind of talking on radio: I have this type of ceilings and stuff,
22 so come on in. And of course, if it doesn't work out, it doesn't
23 work out. But we don't have like the huge area that are covered
24 with the weather camera. So unless you fly there physically, you
25 will never find out.

1 Q. Right, right. So, okay, so back to started getting the calls
2 from dog camp, and if you can continue to take us there?

3 A. So, yeah, Alex called me. He said contact Dalton, which is
4 another manager. Alex and Dalton are both managers. They hire us
5 to bring them down. So they fill up helicopter with the stuff
6 they need there, so of course that would be beneficial. So they
7 loaded up helicopter.

8 I did my preflight, you know, I did my fuel, everything, did
9 my weather report and departed. So filed a flight plan through
10 radio with -- I remember with Wayne, I think, or the radio.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Because we've been doing flight plans later on, or like on
13 and off. I either call on a sat phone or if somebody is in a
14 dispatch cover, we will call them and get a cover them -- get
15 coverage from them. So I made a FM call to dispatch and Wayne
16 would file flight plan for me with Lake Charles.

17 Q. Um-hum. Okay. So take off out of Juneau base, and our base
18 in Juneau is actually not at the airport, so it's in the channel,
19 so we tend to actually have better weather at the Juneau base.
20 But if you can take us from your departure from the Juneau base,
21 moving down the channel, kind of explain how that went and
22 weather?

23 A. Um-hum. Departed Juneau base. I was flying just a regular
24 route. We fly 2,000 feet over city to -- noise abatement, and
25 went all the way down Marmion and crossed the channel towards

1 Salisbury. And I was able to halt, like, at one point 2500 feet,
2 so -- which is, you know, really nice weather for us in those
3 areas. So 2500, I remember all the way to Cooper, and from
4 Cooper, start descend like we always do to flat -- I think I was
5 still about 1500 around the flat, and then you start to go towards
6 the Norris Glacier, so you make a left turn over Grizzly Bar.

7 Q. Um-hum.

8 A. And that's where the weather kind of start to deteriorate a
9 little bit. However, I went around, and I had clear shot like all
10 the way to Norris. So I still had -- I just want to mention
11 visibility. The visibility at that time when I was flying through
12 the channel was at least 10,000 -- at least 10 miles.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. From Norris, I could easily have 5 miles because I know the
15 area, so I can guarantee I had at least 5 miles visibility in that
16 area. Proceed to Norris left-side-up. There was the Corner.
17 That's our kind of reporting point.

18 Q. Right.

19 A. And that's where the weather usually holds up, like, all the
20 kind of foggy weather and stuff like that. When get my reference
21 to the Corner, and then from Corner, you kind of climb up little
22 bit, and you should be able to see Guardian Mountain. Guardian
23 Mountain is where we set up the camp for the summer, base of the
24 Guardian Mountain.

25 MR. HOGENSON: You said Guardian Mountain?

1 MR. HANIS: Guardian Mountain.

2 MR. HOGENSON: Guardian --

3 MR. HANIS: Yeah. So from the Corner, which is, again,
4 that's our reporting point -- we will show you on a map if you
5 guys want to.

6 BY MR. THERIOT:

7 Q. Um-hum, yeah.

8 A. From Corner, I could see all the way to base of Guardian
9 Mountain. Ceilings were kind of low. I cannot tell like how high
10 I was AGL, but at that point Alex call me, I got you Jiri, and we
11 establish two-way radio communication. So I'm coming in and start
12 to do my normal approach like I do always there.

13 Q. Um-hum.

14 A. I kind of was aware that ceilings are low, but there was a
15 lot of flat light, like -- a lot of it. But my angle of approach
16 seemed, like, perfectly fine, just like I do every time, you know?
17 Of course I wouldn't do something silly, and if I didn't feel it
18 right, I wouldn't attempt to do that.

19 But I start to scan radar altimeter, had my landing zone,
20 which was like a tenth and a lot of doghouses, and I could see
21 where the guys are at. Proceeded approach and start to scan radar
22 altimeter. I had 200-feet AGL still. And I start to concentrate.
23 It's matter of seconds now, so --

24 Q. Right.

25 A. Last time I remember I scan my radar altimeter, 200 feet AGL,

1 and kept looking at my landing zone, and impact happened.

2 Q. So do you remember the communication back and forth with Dog
3 Road during that time?

4 A. I do remember he said we got you, come on in, I think,
5 something like that. And Alex was asking me what do I have, like
6 how much stuff I have in the helicopter, kind of radio. And I
7 said stand by because I was trying to concentrate on whether -- so
8 I remember, like, that was the last communication: What do you
9 have? And I said stand by. Kind of like let me concentrate on my
10 job right now.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And that was it.

13 Q. So as you approached the Corner, because I'm familiar with
14 that area, is the -- was there any indications with weather? I
15 mean, what was your overall feeling once you approached the Corner
16 before you started heading --

17 A. I really had -- it was like a perfect line, like straight
18 ceiling like you draw on it like a pen.

19 Q. Um-hum.

20 A. Beautiful line, and you could see the whole base of Guardian.
21 So I did have, like, the whole dog camp in sight. But, yes, the
22 ceilings were low and -- because my approach angle from the
23 helicopter, I could see exactly where I'm going, but the flat
24 light, it's just -- I had totally no expectation that there is
25 something higher, like on my approach angle basically.

1 So I wasn't even trying to turn or, like, struggling. There
2 was no struggle. There was no, all right, let's turn around.
3 There was kind of no hesitations. That was --

4 Q. So what do you estimate the ceilings in that area around Dog
5 Road at that time?

6 A. I can't say. I cannot recall.

7 Q. Okay. Okay. So you have -- at the time you have impact,
8 what do you remember next?

9 A. So after the impact, I remember -- I think I was hanging on a
10 seatbelt in tremendous pain. I remember the horn on, screaming,
11 and fuel, smell of fuel. I believe that's how it was. I got
12 myself released from the seatbelts and did like my emergency
13 procedure: turn off the horn, turn off all the master switch, but
14 I don't think it happened. I remember depressing the horn button,
15 but I'm not sure if I depress my all electronics off. But that
16 was what I was going for.

17 Q. Right.

18 A. So I was kind of looking for the console, depress the horn
19 because it's kind of, you know, noisy. But my point was depress
20 all electronics because I smell odor of fuel, kind of -- it was my
21 natural instinct after the impact. Then I lay on the ground and
22 Alex was there in seconds. I don't know how long it took, but
23 that was so quick they were there on the snow machine and start to
24 help me out.

25 MR. THERIOT: You have any other questions?

1 BY MR. HOGENSON:

2 Q. What is the distance between the heli base and dog camp?

3 A. Total distance? Like, if we go all the way around, which is
4 the -- if it's -- the weather is not that great, 35 miles.

5 MR. THERIOT: It's about a 25-minute flight.

6 MR. HANIS: Yeah, exactly. Um-hum.

7 BY MR. HOGENSON:

8 Q. And this was the first flight of the day for you?

9 A. This was the first flight of the day for me.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. And what time -- you estimated the flight was just after
13 noon?

14 A. I think it was between 1 and 2:00.

15 Q. 1 and 2?

16 A. I remember.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Yeah, between 1 and 2:00.

19 Q. And then what had you -- what time did you arrive at the heli
20 base that morning?

21 A. That morning, 8:00, I believe.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. 8:00. We had show times at 8:00 like last couple weeks for
24 the meetings, so every day we were showing up at 8:00.

25 Q. And how many consecutive days had you worked on the day of

1 the accident?

2 A. I'm not sure how many. It was a stretch, but it wasn't like
3 -- I wasn't feeling fatigue, anything. I believe it could
4 be -- actually, it's easy to calculate -- 15, 16, 17 -- what date
5 did it happen, the accident, May 6th?

6 Q. It was the 6th -- 7th?

7 A. Maybe, like, 2 weeks in a row I did. But we had, like, you
8 know, easy day -- easy days. It was more trying to set up the
9 days. I didn't feel fatigue at all. I was going to bed like
10 regularly 10:00, getting my 8 hours' sleep no problem, exercising
11 and eating well. I didn't feel any sort of fatigue like that.

12 MR. THERIOT: What was the -- prior to the accident, what day
13 was your last flight?

14 MR. HANIS: The day before?

15 MR. THERIOT: Right. So if you had the accident on Thursday,
16 what was the last day that you had flown prior? I know you didn't
17 fly on Wednesday.

18 MR. HANIS: I believe that's when we were dropping off the
19 stuff and people in a camp. So me and Michael Cook, I believe,
20 that day, we had two helicopters, and we -- both of us went in.
21 We had all us, you know, internals, internals and people dropping
22 off on a glacier.

23 So that was the day. And then we left, and we didn't fly, I
24 think, Wednesday, and then flew again on Thursday. So that was
25 the one flight of the day, I believe, and -- yeah.

1 All that week, we were like on standby with slinging weather,
2 so we were watching cameras, watching ceilings, trying to haul
3 stuff to the camp like long-line. But we never had good ceilings,
4 because we only can go like the shortest way kind of. So we want
5 to have very stable weather for that, and it didn't work out.

6 BY MR. HOGENSON:

7 Q. So, generally speaking, when do you -- you arrive at 8:00 in
8 the morning?

9 A. Um-hum.

10 Q. When do you typically go home for the day?

11 A. These days, like around 6:00, um-hum, since we like reported
12 to Juneau base and things started getting started. Of course it's
13 going to progress later on when we starting the tour, so it was
14 going to be maybe a little longer. But lately, 8 to 6, basically,
15 I would say.

16 Q. Do you have much of a commute to work from where you live?

17 A. It's a 5-minute drive.

18 Q. I want that job -- I want that commute.

19 A. Yeah, it's 5 minutes literally.

20 Q. That's (indiscernible). I was an hour and 30 minutes this
21 morning.

22 A. Oh, wow.

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. You should come to visit.

25 MR. THERIOT: Any other questions?

1 MR. HOGENSON: No, not at this time.

2 MR. THERIOT: Okay. We'll conclude.

3 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: ERA HELICOPTERS, LLC
AIRBUS HELICOPTER CRASH NEAR
JUNEAU, ALASKA, MAY 5, 2016
Interview of Jiri Hanis

ACCIDENT NO.: ANC16LA022

PLACE: Seattle, Washington

DATE: May 11, 2016

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.


Danielle VanRiper
Transcriber