

Mark Ward
Aviation Accident Investigator
AS-ANC

Date: August 4, 2023

Subject: ANC23FA056 Interviews

Contact: Dave Jones – Director of Operations, Dennis Busch – Safety Manager,
Evan Brill-Kowles -Mechanic

Summary of a phone conversation with Dave Jones, Dennis Busch, and Evan Brill-Kowles.

Dave Jones- Tony (accident pilot) came from the military. Tony was in the military for 26 years. He had about 1900 flight hours in helicopters. This was Tony's first flying job after retiring from the military. He started with the company in October of last year. He was trained in and assigned the Bell 407. He flew that for a while, then in January he was trained to fly the Bell 206. His pilot training went great, he had no issues. He had no difficulty doing anything. This was Tony's first time flying in Barrow.

Dave was asked the following:

How accurate are weather forecasts? Dave said they are not accurate at all.

What is the typical flight altitude for operating in that area? They fly as high as they can. The only time they fly low is because of poor weather.

The aircraft's last reported position was at 88ft above the ground traveling at 93 knots. Based on your experience, why would he be flying that low and fast? Dave was not sure why the pilot would be flying that low and fast. Possibly weather, not sure.

Any past customer feedback on the pilot? Tony had good feedback. He has flown about 150 hours since he joined the company. He has flown for multiple clients. Everyone enjoyed working with him. Tony was the second most risk adverse person he knows, he was not a risk taker.

Any maintenance issues with the aircraft? No issues, the aircraft was in really good shape.

Are you in the loop of what the aircraft is doing in any given day? No, the client tracks the aircraft. DNR has better tracking with the inReach devices.

Dave said they should have gotten a notification through Honeywell that there was an issue after the accident, but that notification never came.

Dennis Busch - Weather forecasting is an issue up in that area. He can understand why he was so low if weather was a factor but staying over land for better contrast.

Dennis avoids flying over water in poor weather conditions.

Evan Brill-Kowles- Started working for Maritime on April 3rd of this year. He was staying in Barrow with the helicopter. He had traveled to Barrow in the helicopter on Monday before the accident. No issues with the helicopter, just routine inspections. They flew on Tuesday and Wednesday to the field sites. They took off shortly before 10am on Thursday. It was later than normal because of poor weather in the morning.

Tony normally flew around 800 to 1000 ft. He was a safe pilot. Never heard any complaints about the pilot.

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Date: August 26th 2023

Subject: ANC23FA056 Manager of the passenger on the helicopter

Contact: Trent Hubbard - Chief Hydrology & Surficial Geology Section DNR

Summary of a phone conversation with Trent Hubbard.

Trent Hubbard was the manager of the passengers in the accident helicopter. The passengers were part of a team working for the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources. The team stayed in Utqiagvik (Barrow) each night and would fly to remote field sites during the day. The team was required to send messages in the morning concerning plans for the day, and a check in message when they arrive back in Utqiagvik. Justin Germann (one of the passengers on the accident helicopter) was sending the required messages. Trent received three messages from Justin on the day of the accident. First one at 8:00am discussing the plans for the day. At 9:23am Justin informed Trent that they were waiting on the fog to lift. At 09:52 Justin texted that they were heading out.

Trent was familiar with the mission the crew was conducting and he had flown numerous times in the area. He said that per the permit they operated under that helicopter operations must be conducted above 1,000 ft above the ground level (AGL) and in some areas above 1,500ft AGL. He said that the helicopter would fly a lot higher than the minimum altitude and will only go lower because of weather as stipulated in the permit.

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Date: August 10th 2023
Subject: ANC23FA056 Witness to weather conditions
Contact: Alvaro Carbono - Pilot in area of accident.

Summary of a phone conversation with Alvaro Carbono.

Mr. Carbono departed Utqiagvik (Barrow) to the southwest on the day of the accident, between 9am and 10am. He was operating near the area of the accident all day. He said there was no ceiling, no altitude restrictions, and no issues with visibility. The temperature that day was one of the warmest days he had seen. When he returned to Utqiagvik that night he noticed the accident helicopter was not back yet. It was very unusual for him to be back before the accident helicopter. He called the FAA flight service center with his concern but was told they had no flight plan and no information on when the accident helicopter was returning.

Mr. Carbono said in general, if there is poor flying weather, he will fly around 800 to 1200 ft MSL. With no weather he will fly between 3,000 and 4000 ft MSL. When asked about the speed and altitude of the accident helicopter was flying at, he said based on his experience in that area that was "too fast" at those altitudes.

Mr. Carbono has not seen any methane gas bubbles coming up and out of the lakes.