

Mark Ward
Aviation Accident Investigator
AS-ANC

Date: September 10, 2024
Subject: ANC24FA089 Witness Interview
Contact: Bryan Fender

Summary of a phone conversation with Bryan Fender. Bryan operates a Beaver floatplane operation located about 300 yards from the end of runway 18 at the King Salmon airport. He heard the helicopter start up and was surprised to hear the helicopter takeoff in the foggy conditions. He heard the helicopter fly over then everything went silent. He knew something had to of gone wrong. He went up the river access road and located the helicopter in the water. He saw the pilot and 3 passengers in the water. He called Branch River Services for boats. When the boats arrived, they hooked on to the sinking helicopter and dragged it towards the shore. They recovered the fourth passenger and began to perform CPR. The weather at the accident site was very dense fog. You could not see across to the other side of the river.



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Date: September 10, 2024
Subject: ANC24FA089 Witness Interview
Contact: Michelle Hansen

Summary of a phone conversation with Michelle Hanson. Michelle who is a pilot, was walking her dog along the river. The accident helicopter flew over her. The helicopter was flying very low over the tree line less than 100 feet above the water. She heard a pop (loud sound) then nothing, she ran towards the accident location and called in the accident to get boats headed that way. She noted that she had just walked past the accident location minutes prior and noticed 60 to 80 ducks in the area. She said the weather at the time of the accident was very foggy and you could not see the other side of the river due to the fog



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Date: September 7, 2024

Subject: ANC24FA089 Pilot Interview

Contact: Harold Egli - Pilot

Summary of a phone conversation with Harold Egli. The pilot reported that this was a part 135 flight. They were changing out sport fishermen from a fishing camp. It was a normal flight/mission, it was foggy but it was improving. He obtained a Special VFR clearance to depart from the King Salmon airport. He departed to the south and flew over the Naknak river. The water was calm, with no depth perception. Over the water they encounter a dense fog bank, and he experienced spatial disorientation. He lost sight of the ground. He attempted to maintain heading and altitude and the next thing he remembers is being upside down in the river. He did not believe there was anything mechanically wrong with the helicopter. The distance between shoreline was about 200 yards.

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Date: September 10, 2024
Subject: ANC24FA089 Passenger Interview
Contact: Mark Mahaffey - Passenger

Summary of a phone conversation with Mark Mahaffey. Mark said Martin was sitting in the front because of his long legs, Martin was 6ft 6" tall. There was three people sitting in the back, it was very tight. He was sitting on the right, Mike was in the middle and Fred was on the left. It was foggy when they departed. It was a 1-hour flight to the fish camp. They departed at 9:17 and were flying at about 50ft. It was about two to three minutes after departure the accident happened. He heard a "thud," maybe, not sure. The helicopter rolled to the right. In the water, his door was hard to open. The helicopter was about six to eight feet under water. Fred was stuck in the helicopter, The pilot, Bobby saved him. Mark credits his survival to the pilot's efforts to getting everyone out. Mark could only see one side of the river due to fog.