



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Central Region – Arlington, Texas

Record of Conversation

Person: James Little, Pilot

Subject: CEN12LA435

Date: July 11, 2012

In a telephone conversation, Mr. Little stated that the accident occurred during the first flight of the day. The temperature was 70 degrees and the density altitude was low. Prior to the flight, Mr. Little said he performed a pre-flight inspection of the helicopter, which included checking the fuel level. Mr. Little said he did not recall if he visually checked the fuel tanks, but did look at the fuel gauge, which was just above $\frac{1}{4}$ -tank. He said he normally relies on the gauge since you can't accurately see the fuel level in the tanks. Mr. Little also sampled the fuel and it was absent of debris and water. Mr. Little said there was no condensation build up over night and there were no problems with the fuel truck.

Mr. Little then began a series of short sprays. Approximately 26 minutes after he started the first flight, as he was spraying about 8 feet above the ground, the helicopter momentarily pulled to the left and a caution light flickered. He was unable to see which light it was. Mr. Little said his first thought that there was a fuel problem and checked the fuel gauge; it was two needle-widths below $\frac{1}{4}$ -tank. He then went back to spraying and seconds later the engine stopped producing power completely. He turned left toward a soybean field, made a quick stop and did a run-on landing. After the helicopter stopped, the main rotor blades flexed down and severed the tail boom.

Mr. Little reported that the tanks fed into one main line to the engine. The two tanks held 61 gallons total; of which 57.5 gallons were usable. He said the turbine engine burned 25 gallons per hour (conservatively).

I asked the pilot what he thought caused the accident, and he said that it was due to the low amount of fuel in the tank, which had ported out during the unusual flight attitude he puts the helicopter in while spraying. He described the maneuver as a "pull-up, then right torque turn, and then nose down." Mr. Little said nothing like this has ever happened to him before. The engine "ran fine...perfectly" up until it stopped operating. He also said there was nothing mechanically wrong prior to the accident.

Leah D. Yeager

Sr. Air Safety Investigator, NTSB

