

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
Office of Aviation Safety
Washington, D.C. 20594

December 2, 2015

Witness Statements

John Clark

A. ACCIDENT: CEN15LA104

Location:	The Woodlands, TX
Date:	January 16, 2015
Time:	1230 CST
Airplane:	Safari Helicopter, N416JB

B. GROUP IDENTIFICATION

No group was formed for this activity.

C. DISCUSSION

Witness statements were provided to the NTSB by the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office. Five of the witnesses were contacted to provide additional details. The summary of these interviews are provided below. In each case, the witness described where he was when he observed the helicopter, the position of the helicopter when it was first observed and the subsequent motion.

The geographic details learned during each interview were placed on google earth images. The images and statements were sent to the witnesses to verify the accuracy of the documents.

D. DETAILS OF STUDY

Summary of statement: Dave Marks

Mr. Marks was standing with Mr. Brad DePoy near the circle at the northeast corner of the church, see image 1. He referred to that as the "pop-up fountain." They looked up and to the north. Mr. Marks first saw the helicopter, slightly to the left of the large cross and fountain, over the east parking lot. The helicopter was moving from right to left in his field of view, as if it had come from over the school. It appeared to be twice as high as the cross from his perspective. It

was headed in the direction of the first building of the two buildings just west of the church auditorium.

He first observed the helicopter flying sideways, and then it banked sharply to the left. It seemed “pretty high.” The rotor was facing him (as if the rotor shaft was pointed somewhat in his direction. but the helicopter was not turning, it kept flying in a straight line. Mr. Marks started to run to the golf cart as he was expecting the helicopter to go down.

He last observed the helicopter while it was almost to the first building, it had not lost altitude.

Mr. Marks was surprised about the location of the wreckage. He expected it to be further away, given the altitude that he had observed.

Mr. Marks commented that Mr. DePoy saw the tail broken down. Mr. Marks noted that he did not make the same observation about the broken tail.

Mr. Marks has observed a number of helicopters in the area.



Image 1 – Google earth image consistent with Mr. Marks statement. The red “M” icon indicates Mr. Marks position. The cross, fountain, and school are depicted.

Summary of statement: Brad DePoy

Mr. DePoy was standing near an area described as “a compass area.” He was with a group building an ice rink. He confirmed that the area was just at the north corner of the right wing of the church and appears as a circular area in the google earth image, see image 2. He was walking toward the compass area when he first observed the helicopter over the parking lot. He stopped at the compass area. He described the helicopter as being pretty low.

Mr. DePoy heard a breaking sound, a “rotor snap and a pop.” The helicopter was past the pond when he saw the back rotor snapped down and was hanging. The helicopter turned sideways, made a left turn and went down into the trees. He never saw the back rotor come off, just hanging. The boom looked fine.

The helicopter was not spiraling, just turned sideways. The last attitude observed was flat and level, just as the helicopter was found on the ground. Mr. DePoy perceived that the helicopter was going down over the church or parking lot.

Mr. DePoy ran around the church to search for the helicopter.



Image 2 - Google earth image consistent with Mr. DePoy's statement. The “B” paddle at the circular area indicates Mr. DePoy's position. The red icon with a “B” in the southwest parking lot is the area where Mr. DePoy believed that the helicopter went down. He soon found the accident location.

Summary of statement: Jason Lapasinskas

Mr. Lapasinskas was standing by his car in the northeast corner of the rear parking lot, see image 3. He observed the helicopter flying toward him from the north or northeast. The helicopter was flying to the south or southwest.

When the helicopter was directly overhead, Mr. Lapasinskas leaned into the back seat of his car to retrieve some belongings. He was not observing the helicopter, but it seemed to get a lot louder and was sputtering.

Mr. Lapasinskas observed the helicopter across the parking lot, banking left, going sideways and losing altitude. The helicopter began to spin, then went straight down into the trees at the back of the parking lot.

During a search after the main wreckage was recovered he and others found the door at the tree line. The other door was in the yard of the private residence.



Image 3 - Google earth image consistent with Mr. Lapasinskas' statement. The red "J" icon at the parking lot indicates Mr. Lapasinskas' position. The red line denotes the flight path as described and confirmed by Mr. Lapasinskas. The red circle icon indicates the area where Mr. Lapasinskas next observed the helicopter turn sideways, bank, and descend. The location of the main wreckage is noted.

Summary of statement: Keith Ashby

Mr. Ashby was at the north corner of the east wing of the church, see image 4. He noticed the sound of a helicopter. He looked up and observed the helicopter across the church and over the pond. The helicopter appeared and sounded normal. The sound changed and the helicopter began to turn or “list.” The windshield fell out and the helicopter descended quickly below the tree line.



Image 4 - Image provided by Mr. Ashby. Mr. Ashby's position is noted at the red "A" icon to the right. He points out where he first observed the helicopter, over the pond. He also notes where the helicopter crashed. This image was created from an image provided by Mr. Ashby.

Summary of statement: Stuart Kessler

Mr. Kessler said he was talking with a group of fellow church members immediately after leaving the chapel. The chapel was at the west end of the north parking lot. He was halfway from the chapel door to the U-shaped portion of the drive in front of the chapel. As a point of reference, the main church was at his 2 o'clock direction, see image 5.

He first noticed the helicopter at his 11 o'clock position, behind a person with whom he was having a conversation. He was looking generally toward the high school and the helicopter was coming across the parking lot, above the trees. The helicopter was closer to him than to the fountain. He perceived that the helicopter was always closer to himself than to Fellowship Drive. Another reference was that the helicopter was over the swamp, possibly called Jacob's pond, toward the apex of Fellowship Drive and highway 242.

Mr. Kessler's attention was drawn to the helicopter because it was lower than normal, but above the trees. At first, the helicopter appeared to be about 200 feet high. He did not notice smoke or hear any unusual noise, and he did not note the orientation of the helicopter.

He then observed the helicopter arching downward. If it had been further away, he estimated that it could have descended on the main building, which he could not see. His final view was generally in the 4-5 o'clock direction over the volleyball courts at 40-50 feet and descending. The view was in line with a small building at the back of the parking lot. The small building holds golf carts.



Image 5 - Google earth image consistent with Mr. Kessler's statement. The red "K" icon near the chapel indicates Mr. Kessler's position.

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 John Clark
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 Office of Aviation Safety