

National Transportation Safety Board

Office of Aviation Safety
Central Region



CEN21LA187

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Kenneth Norman, Passenger/Mechanic

April 22, 2021

Interviewee: Kenneth Norman (Passenger/Mechanic)
Date/Time: April 22, 2021 / 0936 - 1032 CDT
Location: Telephone Call
Investigator: Andrew Todd Fox, NTSB Air Safety Investigator

NTSB Investigator Fox and Mr. Norman discussed the circumstances of the helicopter accident that occurred on April 9, 2021, near LeRoy, Kansas. Mr. Norman was a passenger on the accident flight.

Mr. Norman explained that he is currently employed as an aviation mechanic with a Part 135 helicopter operator based in Dallas, Texas. He was introduced to Mr. Mark Boyer, the current maintainer of the helicopter, a couple years before the accident by a Safran Helicopter Engines technical field representative. Recently, Mr. Boyer asked Mr. Norman to remove/replace the helicopter's windshields. Mr. Norman explained that he purchased the replacement windows a few months before the accident from Tech Tools Plastics, Ft. Worth, Texas.

On April 8, 2021, the day before the accident, Mr. Boyer flew his Pilatus PC12 to Dallas to retrieve Mr. Norman and the replacement windows. They landed at Claremore Regional Airport (GCM), Claremore, Oklahoma, where the windows were offloaded into Mr. Boyer's hangar. However, due to inclement weather, the helicopter was stuck in Topeka, Kansas, so the decision was made to continue to fly from GCM to Philip Billard Municipal Airport (TOP), Topeka, Kansas. Mr. Norman overnighted at the pilot's (Mr. Tereso Orozco) residence. Mr. Norman explained that he met Mr. Orozco for the first time on the evening of April 8, 2021.

Mr. Norman explained that the purpose of him flying to Topeka and staying the night was so he could examine the windshields and discuss their removal process with the helicopter present. The decision was made that Mr. Norman would fly with Mr. Orozco from TOP to GCM the following morning. Mr. Norman intended to return to Dallas for unrelated work on the afternoon of the accident.

On the morning of the accident, Mr. Orozco and Mr. Boyer completed the preflight of the helicopter while Mr. Norman waited inside the fixed base operator lobby.

Mr. Norman stated that Mr. Orozco, who was flying the helicopter, made an uneventful departure from TOP, but during cruise flight between 1,700 ft and 2,000 ft, at 100 knots, the low main rotor speed warning horn briefly sounded. The engine's free turbine speed (N_F) and main rotor speed (N_R) were "drooped" but there were no cockpit caution/warning lights illuminated.

Mr. Orozco used the collective to maintain main rotor rpm at 70% as indicated on the first limit indicator (FLI). As Mr. Orozco maintained a level altitude, the helicopter

decelerated from 100 knots to 85 knots. Mr. Norman and Mr. Orozco began looking for suitable fields to land in. About 2-3 minutes after the initial low main rotor speed warning horn briefly sounded, the horn resumed a sustained tone for the remainder of the flight. Mr. Norman did not recall seeing any caution/warning lights when the low main rotor warning horn resumed; however, his attention was outside the helicopter trying to locate a suitable landing area.

Mr. Norman explained that Mr. Orozco turned the helicopter to the right and made an immediate landing in a residential neighborhood. Mr. Norman was unsure if Mr. Orozco made an autorotation or if the helicopter landed hard, but the helicopter had a high descent rate when it touched down. After the hard landing, the engine continued to run, and Mr. Orozco twisted the throttle to OFF before selecting the fuel shutoff to OFF.

Mr. Norman stated that although the helicopter was equipped with dual flight controls, he did not take control of the helicopter at any point during the flight. He commented that Mr. Orozco appeared to be a competent pilot who remained calm throughout the emergency.

Mr. Norman stated that the helicopter and engine were operating normally before the loss of engine power, with steady engine power (no oscillations) and no indications on the FLI. However, when the low main rotor speed warning initially sounded the FLI displayed "7.5".

Mr. Norman stated that he was unaware of any unresolved maintenance concerns on the helicopter, believing that if there were Mr. Boyer or Mr. Orozco would have asked him for his opinion/assistance. Mr. Norman explained that Mr. Boyer was responsible for most of the maintenance completed on the helicopter. Additionally, Mr. Boyer did not mention any recent maintenance concerns in the days and weeks before the accident. Mr. Norman further explained that he does not hear from Mr. Boyer often. Before the windshield replacement discussion, the last time Mr. Boyer contacted him was about 1 year before the accident, concerning a fuel drain issue while the helicopter was operated in Branson, Missouri.

Mr. Norman stated that he is not a current pilot and has not logged any flight time for at least 5 years. Mr. Norman does not actively look to fly in smaller general aviation aircraft.

Mr. Norman was cooperative throughout the conversation.