



Hospital Wing Personnel Statements

ERA14FA010

I John Butora arrived at the Wing at approximately 0520. Charlie Smith was prepping for a flight to Bolivar Gen in Bolivar Tn. At approximately 0530 I viewed the HEMS WX with Charlie. Weather was reporting greater than 4000' ceiling and greater than 10 miles vis at KMEM. KMKL was reporting 1500 BKN and greater than 10mi vis. Corinth KCRX was reporting 1300 BKN and 8 miles vis. Charlie began completing a new manifest for the flight. I left the crew room. Shortly after The Lebonheur crew arrived they loaded and departed.


John Butora

10/22/2013
@ 1040 LCL.



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Stephen Stein
Investigative Assistant
National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Aviation Safety - Eastern Region

NTSB Accident Number: ERA14FA010
Aircraft Registration & Make/Model: N353HW; Eurocopter AS 350 B3
Accident Location: Somerville, TN
Accident Date: October 22, 2013

Note: The following interviews were provided to the Investigator –In-Charge (IIC) by Stephen Stein, NTSB, who formally documented the interviews.

Interview Summary

David Childress
Hospital Wing Chief Pilot

Interview date/time: October 24, 2013 1500 CDT
Hospital Wing

Interviewers were Hicks, Buttner, and Stein.

Background:

Mr. Childress stated that he has been with Hospital Wing since it opened 28 years prior. He “flew the line” for a long time and was also a repairman; airframe and powerplant mechanic. He was the Director of Training several years ago and is currently the Chief Pilot, flight instructor, and a check airman for the company. Mr. Childress has 14,000 hours in helicopter and 10,000 hours in fixed wing. He trained Charlie and three other new hires. Prior to coming online Charlie had 400 hours in the AStar with the Memphis Police department and was hired as a supplemental pilot. There was a big need to get him trained on NVGs because he had no prior NVG training and did not use them when he was with the Memphis Police. Mr. Smith received two weeks of ground school, flight training, and six hours of NVG training. His training was

brief because he already had 400 hours in Eurocopter aircraft and frequently practiced in the simulator. He flew 33 hours in the three months prior to the accident. Mr. Smith's priorities were golf and his family; he checked in with his wife frequently. Mr. Childress also remarked that Mr. Smith was a "good stick" and the nurses loved him.

Hospital Wing:

Mr. Childress stated that pilot morale is good. When they changed CEOs there were some issues with disgruntled pilots and policy changes.

According to Mr. Childress the Risk Assessment is considered to be a worthwhile tool. Pilots use the form for its intended purpose. Mr. Childress stated that he wants to see them complete more risk assessments.



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Interview Summary

Jason Cooper
Hospital Wing Pilot Wing 8

Interview date/time: October 24, 2013; 1330 CDT
Hospital Wing

Interviewers were Hicks, Buttner, and Stein. Attached is Mr. Cooper's written statement.

Background:

Mr. Cooper stated that he received his private pilot's license in 1994/1995. He became an airplane CFI in 1997 and started flying Army helicopters in 1998. During his time in Bosnia he flew an OH-58D. In 2003-2004 Mr. Cooper flew in Iraq. He was also an instructor pilot at Ft. Rucker from 2004 to 2007. After leaving active duty he remained on contract as an Army instructor pilot until January 2013. Mr. Cooper has a total of 6000 flight hours and has been with Hospital Wing for 9 months and is an instructor pilot and check airman.

Day of the Accident Flight:

The pilots switched out at 0530 CST on the day of the accident flight. Mr. Cooper clocked in that morning and checked the weather, which appeared to be 1500 BKN at McKellar. He noticed there was a helicopter dispatched to Bolivar, which was unusual because normally Brownsville would have taken the flight, but this was a PEDI [pediatric] flight. Bob Carter informed Mr. Cooper that they had lost contact with Wing 3 and asked him to attempt to make contact. Prior to the search flight McKellar was showing the ceiling as 4800 BKN. Eight to ten minutes later the aircraft was prepped and they were on their way. Mr. Cooper recalled flying at an altitude of 1200 ft. and estimated the cloud layer overhead at 2000 ft. He also noted that the air appeared hazy on NVGs. The crew had been briefed. While approaching the waypoint at their 11 o'clock they saw something burning. It looked like a small brushfire and he could smell plastic. They called dispatch, continued to circle and later talked the Sheriffs to the wreckage site.

Hospital Wing:

Mr. Cooper referred to the training program as professional and he feels Childress is highly knowledgeable. He is used to military style training. Mr. Cooper stated that they receive one-on-one training. He also remarked that the equipment is good, the manuals are good, there is good NVG training, and good CRM because everyone is very close. The flight nurses speak up if something is not right. Mr. Cooper stated that he did not attend Eurocopter school.

Risk Assessment Form:

The risk assessment form is printed prior to each flight. If the weather changes then a new risk assessment form must be printed. In the event the risk assessment form is a "no go" then it is up to the pilot to inform dispatch. Mr. Cooper stated there is no pushback from management if risk assessment is "no go."

Pilot Morale:

According to Mr. Cooper the morale is great at the Hospital Wing Brownsville location. The position has good compensation; they get paid whether they are in the air or on the ground. Mr. Cooper stated that two pilots quit recently, but remarked that they were disgruntled and had personal conflicts with the CEO. Mr. Cooper rated the safety program a 4 out of 5.

On 22 OCTOBER 2013, I arrived at my place of duty (Hospital Wing, Brownsville Base) at approximately 0520. Upon arrival, I checked weather on the HEMS TOOL website and recorded weather at Jackson, TN (KMKL) as ceiling 1500 BKN. I then began the morning tasks of pre-flighting the aircraft (Wing 8). At approximately 0628, I received a call from Wing Dispatch (Mr. Bob Carter) stating that we had an aircraft (wing 3) that we had lost communications with, and for me to launch to try and find them. I was given the last known location as N35 14.22 W089 22.47. It was my understanding that the aircraft had departed Memphis (2TNO) enroute to Boliver. TN. At this time I checked weather again and KMKL was now reporting 4600 BKN and 10 miles.

I lifted from the Brownsville Base at approximately 0635, in Wing 8 (EC-130) with med crew (Rita McCoy RN, and Lyle Holmes CCENT-P) direct to the above mentioned location. Enroute the ceilings appeared to be approx 2000 ft and visibility estimated to be 7-8 miles. It was before sunrise and still dark outside. As we crossed the Hatchie River the visibility began to diminish down to approx 4-5 miles but cleared to unrestricted within 3-4 minutes. Upon reaching the aforementioned last know location of Wing 3, I noticed a fire burning in a wooded area at our 11 O'clock position at approx. $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 mile from our position.

Upon arriving at the scene (N35 14.02 W089 23.05) we began a left hand orbit in an attempt to positively identify the nature of the fire. Dispatch was notified of the location. We continued to orbit in an attempt to determine an approach path of impact (broken trees, etc). In the darkness with NVG's, I was unable to see any impact scars). As daybreak began, I could make out some broken trees to the Northeast of the crash site. Ground rescue arrived on the scene at approx 0700 and I then contacted them on 155.340 (call sign Fire 1). We continued to orbit the scene walking the rescue team into the woods via radio.

At approximately 0746, we began our return to the Brownsville Base. Prior to leaving there were at least 3-4 rescue personnel at the crash site and the aircraft was unrecognizable due to what appeared to be fire damage.

Jason Cooper, Pilot



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Interview Summary

Jennifer Miller
Hospital Wing Flight Nurse

Interview date/time: October 24, 2013 1600 CDT
Hospital Wing

Interviewers were Hicks, Buttner, and Stein.

Ms. Miller stated that she flew with Charlie on the aborted flight that took place prior to the accident flight. Charlie came into the office, briefed, went over weather with the crew and shared the risk assessment sheet. Ms. Miller noted the evening prior to the flight as uneventful. She went to bed around 10 PM or 11 PM and was woken up at midnight for a mission to Fayette County. At the time the weather looked good and Charlie said they would check it out. They boarded Wing 4, departed and got about 1 mile from Memphis base when Charlie said “we’re going back.” At the time the cloud bottoms were 700 ft. They returned to Memphis base, landed and that was the last time Ms. Miller spoke to Charlie Smith. Ms. Miller recalled nothing remarkable about Charlie on the day of the accident; didn’t seem tired. Charlie Smith looked like he was in good health. She also remarked that Mr. Smith never pressed the weather.



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Interview Summary

Richard Smith
Hospital Wing Pilot

Interview date/time: October 24, 2013 1630 CDT
Hospital Wing

Interviewers were Hicks, Buttner, and Stein.

According to Richard Smith, he has been with Hospital Wing for three months as a PEDI pilot. The interviewee stated that he was on shift from 6 PM to 2 AM and was aware that Charlie Smith had aborted a flight around midnight for deteriorating weather. The interviewee regarded Charlie as a professional who flew “by the book” and was very thorough with his risk assessments. Charlie always flew within the safety parameters, was usually in good spirits and was a hard worker. The interviewee stated that he wanted to learn from him.



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Interview Summary

Glen “Buddy” Wilson
Director of Maintenance, Helicopter Wing

Interview date/time: October 24, 2013; 0841 CDT
Hospital Wing, 1080 Eastmoreland Avenue, Memphis, TN

Interviewers were Phelps, Hays, Hemann, Larimore, Hicks, Buttner and Stein.

Mr. Wilson stated that he knew Charlie a long time. Charlie was married with two kids. The helicopter, Wing 3, was coming up on its “T” inspection (600 hour inspection). Wilson didn’t want to have both Helo’s down so he kept Wing 3 on for “PEDI” [pediatric] flights. The squawk code for Wing 3, the accident helicopter was “0103.” The Hospital Wing airport identifier is 2TN0. Wing 3 was 30 hours into its remaining 60 hours (10%) until its 600 hour inspection. They expected to have their other helicopters back up and running by Wednesday, October 23, 2013. An oil sample from the engine of Wing 3 was sent out for spectral analysis in TX. In addition to the oil analysis they were allowed to extend operations of module 4 if they also performed a VOB check and inspection of module 4. The helicopter was equipped with EGPWS, HTOS, XM satellite, Garmin 530, Garmin 430, and Aspen Avionics 1000H PFD/MFD.

Each of their aircraft are Eurocopter AS 350 B3s with the exception of the EC130 B4, Wing 8. All maintenance is performed at Hospital Wing; some is farmed out to Turbomeca or Eurocopter. Hospital Wing has bases in Brownsville, Oxford, Selmer, as well as Memphis. During a 12 year inspection that was conducted in Johnson City, Tennessee, they found cracks in the aft bulhead, which Eurocopter replaced. Hospital Wing has a total of 4 mechanics each trained through Turbomeca and Eurocopter with the exception of his most recent mechanic addition, Daniel. Each of his mechanics are a Level 2 with the exception of Daniel who will attend training in the upcoming year. Daniel has worked on N353HW.

There was an oxygen bottle STC in 2001 put out for EMS configuration. Each of their helicopters has an oxygen bottle in the tailboom.

Pilots have been asked to document any maintenance issue and report them to Buddy immediately.



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Interview Summary

Curt Wren
Hospital Wing Director of Safety

Interview date/time: October 24, 2013; 1030 CDT
Hospital Wing

Interviewers were Hicks, Buttner, and Stein.

Background and History:

Mr. Wren stated that he started flying in 1985/1986 in fixed wing aircraft. He then joined the National Guard in 1986 the same year he started flight school. In 1989 he was stationed at Ft. Rucker as a W1. While working as a fireman, Mr. Wren flew fixed wing on the side. He also worked with ambulances and rescue trucks. In 1991, Mr. Wren attended National Guard Safety School as a W2 on a dual track. He was in the National Guard for 27 years, spent 23 years in safety and ended as a Brigade Safety Officer at the rank of CW5. In addition Mr. Wren is a Certified Hazmat Tech and OSHA qualified.

In 1996 Mr. Wren started with Hospital Wing as a line pilot. Bill Conway promoted him to Director of Safety in 2013 to demonstrate that safety was being taken seriously as Hospital Wing. Mr. Wren has been involved with safety at Hospital Wing for a year and a half and has been assigned to Jonesboro AR April 1st as base operational manager.

Mr. Wren's flight background consists of the following:

- Airplane SEL, MEL, Commercial
- ATP in helicopter
- 7800 hours total time
- 5800 hours helicopter
- 2000 hours fixed wing

Morale:

Mr. Wren stated that he believes "change is good." He does not have a lot of animosity but recognizes that it is taking time to get use to the new management. Two people quit in the last month and a half and Mr. Wren attributes this to "heartburn with Bill." Mr. Wren recalled one morale issue in the 2-3 months prior to the interview. In this example, a Brownsville based pilot accepted a flight, but en route to the destination he aborted the flight due to weather. Bill [Conway] called the pilot 4 times in 30 minutes of the aborted flight, around 01:00 AM, to ask why he turned it down. Curt investigated the event and it was resolved. His investigation determined that employees felt they were being pressured to make flights. In his opinion Bill could have handled the situation better and felt Bill being Director of Operations and CEO was problematic.

Charlie Smith:

According to Mr. Wren, Charlie Smith was not disgruntled at all. Mr. Smith liked his job and played golf on the side. Mr. Smith and his wife had two kids; 9 and 11 years old. Mr. Smith's wife had hoped he wouldn't fly as much. His wife worked as a computer programmer for Harrah's Entertainment. Mr. Smith flew frequently, but Mr. Wren and Mr. Smith didn't fly much together. Mr. Wren did not know whether Charlie was a sleeper during his duty shift. Mr. Wren also noted that Mr. Smith was not a complainer.

Mr. Wren stated they complete a Risk Assessment form prior to each flight.

According to Mr. Wren, a Safety Council had been started in October of the previous year. The council consists of four representatives including a pilot, a maintenance person, a nurse, and a representative from the communications center. Part of their mission is to address safety issues. They typically use e-mail and bulletin boards to distribute safety information.