

04/02/2017 – Received call from FAA ROCC regarding aircraft N911GE. Intended flight from Ocala, FL. Went missing then reported in Marion County Florida. There was one occupant taken to the hospital.

04/02/2017 – Contacted Marion County, FL. Fire Department Cpt. Cunningham. Capt. Cunningham stated that N911GE is located in the middle Bay Lake located in Marion County FL. Grid Coordinates, Latitude: 29 27' 46.39N , Longitude: 81 58' 41.43W. Pilot John Rawls was taken to the hospital with non-life threatening injuries. N911GE is in the middle of Bay Lake at this time at 2100 hours.

04/03/2017 – Received call from CPT Cunningham. N911GE is still in the middle of Bay Lake at 0800 hours. The helicopter was upside down in about 12 feet of water in Bay Lake making for a difficult recovery.

04/03/2017 – Contacted Don Standridge from Marion County Sheriff's office. Mr. Standridge stated they are trying to remove the aircraft from Bay Lake at this time. Pilot John Rawls is in surgery with a crushed vertebra at this time. N911GE a Bell 206 aircraft had a 70 gallon bambi bucket attached to the aircraft and was attempting to leave Bay Lake at the time of the accident according to Mr. Standridge.

04/04/2017 – Went to accident site located at NE 212th Lane; Fort McCoy; Florida. Met with Lieutenant Don Standridge from Marion County Sheriff's Office. Mr. Standridge is the Aviation Unit Commander. Took pictures of the accident scene. The helicopter was inverted in about 12 feet of water at Bay Lake and destroyed during the recovery from the lake. The tail boom was detached from the aircraft. The main rotor blades were partially cut off from the blade root. The fuselage at the cockpit was destroyed making this an accident with substantial damage. The engine was attached and internal components rotated to include the main rotor system. The tail rotor drive shaft was sheared directly under the engine. One tail rotor blade was damaged. The engine had oil in the sight glass. The hydraulic system had hydraulic fluid in the sight glass. The transmission and tail rotor gearbox had oil in the sight glass. There was a strong fuel smell at the accident site and the engine had fuel at the fuel line leaking residual fuel. The helicopter was placed on a trailer and transported to Marion County Sheriff's Aviation Hangar. This is a public use aircraft maintained under 14 CFR Part 91. Went to hangar and reviewed aircraft records. No discrepancies noted. Aircraft owned and operated by Marion County Sheriff's office.

04/05/2017 – Received pilot John Rawls statement from Don Standridge. John Rawls was dispatched to assist with a fire in the area of NE 212th Lane and Highway 315 near Orange Springs, Marion County, Florida at 1459 Hours. After preflight preparations were complete, pilot departed KOCF at 1519 Hours. Upon arriving near the scene the pilot chose a safe nearby landing zone, landed, inspected and attached the seventy gallon Bambi Bucket with 14 feet 6 inch cable and began firefighting operations. Pilot advised he had completed 25 and 30 drops, refueled and completed 3 or 4 additional drops when the accident occurred. Pilot stated that as he began to pull the bucket from the water he instantly encountered a severe out of CG condition to the right. Pilot was fully aware that he had likely gotten the cables from the bucket wrapped around the skid. Pilot attempted to release the water from the bucket to rectify the situation to no avail. Pilot then began to rock the aircraft in an attempt to free the bucket unsuccessfully. Pilot then released the bucket using the cargo release button, heard the typical "clunk" sound of the bucket releasing then another loud "clunk". At this point he began a violent spin and went

into the water. The second “clunk” was the Bambi bucket/cable contacting the tail rotor causing the violent spin causing the accident. The pilot was able to free himself from the aircraft, inflate his personnel floatation device and swim to safety. This is a public use aircraft maintained under 14 CFR Part 91. Aircraft owned and operated by Marion County Sheriff’s office of Florida.

John E. Breen

FAA Safety Inspector

Orlando FSDO