



MEMORANDUM OF RECORD

Eric Alleyne
Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Aviation Safety - Eastern
Region

NTSB Case Number: ERA19LA144

Telephone and email
correspondence: Neil Smiley (Airport
owner and witness)

Date: 4/10-11/2019

Subject: Accident information

In a email from Neil Smiley, he wrote:

To give a perspective of the layout of our strip. It runs North-South. All airplane operations are land North, depart South due to elevation change.

Lee arrived at 07VA at 6:30PM Saturday evening for dinner at our house. He approached from the South and landed facing North. I drove him back to the helicopter a few minutes before 10 PM that same evening. We discussed his departure and he stated his plan was to lift off do a 180 degree hover turn to the left and depart southbound along the runway climbing steeply above tree top level. He lifted off, turned left but only 150 degrees or so and started his steep departure climb. He crossed the runway and impacted the tree line on the west side of the strip. The rotor blades made contact with the tree approximately 50' above the ground, 15-20' below the top of the tree. After impact the helicopter turned sharply right and fell nose down into the woods. I found Lee seated against a tree about 15' from the helicopter just after impact.

The helicopter sounded and appeared to perform normally. All lights, nav, beacon, and landing lights were functioning normally as well. This was not his first night departure from our strip at night. No weather. Clear skies, good visibility. W78 AWOS reported winds at approximately 3kts if I remember correctly. We checked for Va State Police report. No moon only stars. No lighting

what so ever in vicinity on departure area. And no this was not his first departure from 07VA at night. Previous departure was 2-3 weeks prior.

In a telephone interview with Mr. Smiley, I asked asked if reflectors were put around the perimeter of the runway environment would that have help the pilot see during departure. Mr. Smiley said it would be difficult to maintain and he normaly does not allow night time operations at his field and did not want to permit or encourage it. He said that *"if there are future night ops I can see setting up several reflectors in a line marking the center of the clearing for a departure path.Or as previously mentioned parking a vechicle down the runway as a reference point. Keeping it simple and effective."*