



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Witness Statement

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: May 3, 2021

Person Interviewed: Halle Montague, wife of pilot

NTSB Accident Number: ERA21FA200

Narrative:

Mrs. Montague was interviewed at a home near the accident site on May 3, 2021, at 1034 EDT. She provided a phone number of [REDACTED] and an email address of [REDACTED].

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the individual named above:

- Mrs. Montague arrived in a truck with her adult son and daughter about 2 ½ hours after I arrived at the accident site.
- She stated that she had been there at the site when the accident occurred, and that she had driven to the hotel and returned with their children and that she hoped to retrieve her husband's cell phone and iPad which contained photos of the family and their grandchildren. She explained that local law enforcement had retained these items yesterday.
- She agreed to an interview and stated that she worked with her husband spraying crops: he flew the helicopter, and she obtained her Commercial Driver's License to operate the truck and trailer that contained the chemicals and a landing pad for the helicopter.
- She stated that she was "over on Monroe Pageland Road" (she gestured across the wheat field) with a trailer that was very similar to the one closer to the accident site, which had a somewhat different tank configuration.
- She explained that her husband would land on the platform to refill his chemical tank and that they had just eaten lunch and her husband had refilled the helicopter's tank from the other trailer.
- I inquired as to whether he had uploaded any fuel at the time, and she responded "no" and that he had just uploaded the chemicals.
- She stated that he "had just taken off," and that she looked over and "saw him upside down."
- She yelled to John Anderson, a crew member who was working with them, and they got into the truck and drove to the wreckage. She stated that her husband appeared to be breathing but unconscious when she arrived. She added that John heard the crash but had not seen it.
- She stated that prior to the crash, "everything sounded normal."
- She stated that her husband had sprayed these fields before, and she thought he knew about the wire.

- She explained that her husband always flew high level and low level reconnaissance flights during which he “painted” the obstacles in the software that he used. She explained that he used his iPad when he flew; although she did not know if it “painted in the Ag-Nav.”
- She stated that they had been at this location for a couple hours that day before they had lunch; although she could not recall which portions of the field he flew in the morning.
- She stated that the winds were 5-6 knots and she had seen him flying in the area of the accident that morning.
- She explained that the company lost one of their pilots (Gene) during a spraying operation last year, and the accident made them much more selective about the jobs they did. They could have tried to pick up more work, but they chose instead to be more selective and enjoy their family.
- When asked if her husband had any health conditions, she stated that he had none. She stated that he had received the Johnson & Johnson Covid vaccine on March 6, 2021.

The digest was e-mailed to her for review on May 5, 2021. She replied on June 7, 2021, with comments that were incorporated into the narrative. The corrected digest was e-mailed to her on November 4, 2021.



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Eastern Region Aviation

Date: May 4, 2021, 1442 EDT
Person Interviewed: Adam Threatt
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21FA200

Narrative:

Mr. Threatt was interviewed in the driveway of his home which is adjacent to the accident wheat field. He provided a phone number of [REDACTED].

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the individual named above:

- Mr. Threatt stated that he had heard the helicopter flying outside before the accident occurred, but that he had left and was not home when the accident happened.
- He stated that he had watched it for a while and estimated that it was flying about 20 feet above the ground from his vantage point.
- He believed it was the first day of their spraying operation.
- He did not recall ever seeing that field sprayed via aerial application before.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Power Company Statement

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: 1650 EDT, May 4, 2021
Call From: Lonnie Kirkley, Union Power Cooperative Employee
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21FA200

Narrative:

Mr. Kirkley was forwarded my number in response to an inquiry I made earlier in the day about the power line repair at the accident site on May 2, 2021. He provided a phone number of [REDACTED], Extension [REDACTED].

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the individual named above:

- I inquired about the height of the power lines that were repaired shortly after the accident.
- Mr. Kirkley stated that the top wire was the primary wire, and was 29 feet, 1 inch above the ground at its mid-span, and that the lower wire was the neutral wire, and it was 25 feet, 8 inches above the ground at its mid-span.
- I inquired as to the gauge of the wire and he responded that it was 8A copper wire.
- I inquired as to the thickness of the wire and he stated that it was .199 inches
- He stated that he would email me additional information.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

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Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: May 3, 2021
Person Interviewed: Savanna Braswell
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21FA200

Narrative:

Ms. Braswell was interviewed at her home on May 3, 2021, at 1001 EDT. She provided a phone number of [REDACTED] and an email address of [REDACTED].

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the individual named above:

- Ms. Braswell stated that she had just returned from church when she heard the helicopter flying overhead.
- She stated that it then sounded as if the helicopter turned: It was a different sound that got much louder.
- She then heard a loud noise, and “the power went out.”
- She looked out the front window of her home and saw the helicopter “nosediving.”
- Her father ran out of the house and she followed.
- Soon after, the pilot’s wife and business partner arrived.
- She stated that in all the years she has lived in the home, she never recalled that field being sprayed by aerial application, although the other fields nearby had been sprayed that way.



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Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: May 3, 2021

Person Interviewed: Steve Braswell

NTSB Accident Number: ERA21FA200

Narrative:

Mr. Braswell was interviewed in the driveway of his home on May 3, 2021, at 1540 EDT. He provided a phone number of [REDACTED].

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the individual named above:

- Mr. Braswell stated that he had just returned from church, and saw the helicopter spraying the field in front of their home.
- He stated that the engine sounded normal, and then it was turning. He could hear the “pounding of the air” sound as it turned, and soon after he heard a loud noise then the power went out.
- When he looked out of the front window, the helicopter was out of control and “nose down” and he could see the underside, or “belly” of the helicopter.
- His sense from the sound and what he saw was that the helicopter had been flying away from their home and then hit the wires and “flipped over and into the ground.” He made a hand gesture to show what he saw.
- He stated that it appeared as though the helicopter became entangled in the wires before descending nose-first to the ground.
- He stated that he had never seen that portion of the field sprayed by aerial application.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

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Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: May 3, 2021

Person Interviewed: Taylor Montague, son of pilot and A&P mechanic

NTSB Accident Number: ERA21FA200

Narrative:

Mr. Taylor Montague was interviewed near the accident site on May 3, 2021. He provided a phone number of [REDACTED].

The following is a summary of interactions and conversations that occurred with the individual named above:

- Mr. Montague arrived in a truck with his mother and sister about 2 ½ hours after I arrived at the accident site.
- He explained that although he had not been on site at the time of the accident he was returning to the scene with his mother and sister.
- He stated that he was an A& P mechanic and I inquired as to whether he was familiar with the accident helicopter and he stated that he was.
- I asked if he knew if there were any engine monitors on the accident helicopter, or any devices with nonvolatile memory that might be able to be recovered, or any personal electronic devices that his father might have used during his spraying operations.
- He explained that local law enforcement had recovered and retained his father's iPad and cell phone.
- He offered to assist in the removal of the AgNav "head unit" or "display unit" and its associated GPS receiver. During a discussion about the equipment and the accident scene, he explained that his mother had been on scene with his father immediately after the accident, and he was aware of the scene and prepared to assist in the recovery of these devices.
- I permitted him to approach the wreckage and assist the FAA inspector in the recovery of these devices, after which he moved away from the wreckage area.
- At this time, I reached out to local authorities to recover the personal electronic devices. One law enforcement officer explained that they had been able to turn on the iPad; however, it was locked by a 4-digit code. I requested that the devices be delivered to me at the scene if possible.
- About 30 minutes, later, a law enforcement officer returned with the father's personal electronic devices, and Mr. Montague assisted in the unlocking of the iPad.
- Mr. Montague proceeded to show and send me the AgNav screen shots that had been saved on the device.

- He explained that the device had continued to track itself after having been recovered by local law enforcement officers, and therefore some of what we were seeing on the screen shots was actually where the device had travelled since it's recovery the day before.
- Mr. Montague turned the device to airplane mode so that the program would stop tracking.
- He stated that he would let me know if he could get any additional data from the iPad.
- He also suggested that we recover the power source for the AgNav unit when we examine the helicopter, to facilitate the recovery of data, and that we reach out to AgNav if we had any questions at all.
- Several hours after Mr. Montague left with his mother and sister, he called to let me know he had been looking at the screen shots that were saved on the iPad.
- He stated that in looking at the tracks, it appeared as though his father flew away from the location where they had eaten lunch, across the field and toward the house, then turned and flew toward the street, and over the power line. He then turned and came back toward the house at which point he struck the power line.
- He further stated that the Ag-Nav unit was called the "Moving Map Display" and the unit labelled "P-500" was the GPS receiver.
- He stated that he had all the manuals if we needed them, and that "Ramone" is the person to talk to at Ag-Nav should we require any assistance extracting data.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

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Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: May 7, 2021; 0836 EDT
Conversation with Taylor Montague, son of pilot and A&P mechanic
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21FA200

Narrative:

Mr. Taylor Montague called at 8:36 EDT on May 7, 2021.

The following is a summary of the conversation that occurred with the individual named above:

- Mr. Montague called to advise me that he had been looking more closely at the flight paths on his father's iPad and that it appeared to him that the after lunch run started on the north side of the field, then made a southerly run, turned, and came back, then made a wider turn that normal to turn southerly again.
- He wondered if any of the witnesses reported seeing the spray on when they saw the accident because the wide turn made him think that perhaps something had been wrong. He postulated that he was almost done with the field and perhaps he was looking at the Ag-Nav to determine where to go next.
- He explained that if his father stopped spraying, the Ag-Nav would stop recording his track and there would be no GPS, and that would indicate that something was wrong; but if he was continuing to spray, then that would indicate that things were normal.
- I asked him how many loaders (trailers with landing pads and loading tanks) were on the scene the day of the accident and he stated that there were two, and that John was the loader at the time. He stated that his dad had just loaded before taking off, and that the process took about 45 seconds.
- I asked him how high above the ground his father typically flew during an aerial application like this one and he stated that it depended upon the location, but generally 10-15 ft above the crops.
- He added that the helicopter did not have a laser altimeter, but that the Ag-Nav might contain this information.
- I asked how long they had been working in the area and he responded that they had been working the area for 2 weeks, and the day of the accident was his dad's first day on that field. He added that his dad has sprayed that field for 5 years, and he would paint a line where the wires were so that they showed red on his monitor.
- I asked how long his dad's lunch break was before returning to the spraying and he estimated 20 minutes. They ate wraps and the loading took only 45 seconds.
- He stated that the helicopter generally travelled at 45-50 mph.
- He asked if the witnesses had described any noises before they heard the impact, and I informed him that two witnesses reporting that they heard him turning.

- He stated that “when you pull collective” the rotor blade hits its own wash (“rotor slap”) and makes a distinctive sound. He postulated that if they heard that noise just before losing power, he might have been pulling back to avoid the wire or attempting a quick-stop or flare to auto-rotate to the ground.
- He stated that his dad finished his training in 2011 and started performing aerial application flights in 2012.
- He added that 48’ is a typical swath in this kind of spraying, and that his father was flying a smaller swath width this year in order to do a better job. It took longer, but he would get better field coverage. He also used 3 gallons per acre rather than 2, so farmers loved him.