



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

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Sr. Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: February 3, 2021
Person Contacted: William D. Winegardner
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21LA121

Narrative:

Mr. William D. Winegardner was contacted by phone on January 30, 2021, at 1607 EST. He was called at [REDACTED] and left a voice mail message. He returned the call the same day at 1852 and it was agreed to talk again on Monday February 1, 2021 about 1200 EST.

He was called on February 1, 2021, at 1315 EST. He was called at [REDACTED] He provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED]

At the beginning of the call, he indicated that inspectors from the Federal Aviation Administration are planning to be at his house at 1500 EST. He indicated his certificate number is [REDACTED]. He holds a commercial pilot certificate with airplane single engine land, airplane multi-engine land and sea, instrument airplane and is type rated in the EA500S. He also holds a private pilot certificate with rotorcraft helicopter rating. He holds a 2nd class medical issued July 9, 2020, with a limitation to wear corrective lenses, which he was wearing at the time. He has about 9,000 hours total time in all aircraft and has about 250 hours in various rotorcraft. Of the 250 hours in rotorcraft, he has about 160 hours in the R66. He also owns a Piper Meridian.

He was asked the following questions -

Was it his first flight of the day?
Yes

Follow-Up Questions Continued –

When did he last fly the helicopter and how long was that flight?

The day before, or 1/29/2021 Mr. Winegardner flew from McGhee Tyson Airport (KTYS) located in Knoxville, Tennessee to Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge Airport (KGKT) located in Sevierville, Tennessee to pick up Aaron Young, who is a certified flight instructor. Mr. Young currently provides flight instructions in Robinson R22 and R44 but not in the R66 model helicopter. However, Mr. Young was going to the Robinson R66 school. Mr. Young needed to fly 1 hour in the R66 model, so he flew with Mr. Winegardner in order to obtain the required flight experience. The two departed KGKT and flew to Mr. Winegardner's property located in Landrum, SC. Mr. Winegardner initiated the takeoff, but Mr. Young manipulated the flight controls while enroute. During the flight Mr. Winegardner asked Mr. Young if the vibration he felt was "right" and Mr. Young responded that the vibration was normal. The aircraft was then flown back from Landrum, SC to KGKT where Mr. Young departed the aircraft. Mr. Winegardner departed KGKT and landed at KTYS. He then departed KTYS and landed at his home located in Knoxville, Tennessee. The total durations of the flights was approximately 2 hours. During the flights, there were no abnormal issues with the airframe, or engine.

What was the purpose of the accident flight flying to TYS?

That was where the helicopter was based. Mr. Winegardner had come home on 1/29/2021 for a dinner with friends.

On the accident date, he performed a preflight inspection of the helicopter in the morning and noted frost on the main rotor blades. He waited for the frost to melt and 1 hour to 1 ½ hours later went out and visually and tactilely there was no frost on the blades. The helicopter was positioned on a very slight slant. After starting the engine, and completing the checklist, he lifted to a hover at 6 ft. which was stabilized. Suddenly the helicopter was on its side.

Describe the vibration he initially reported to NTSB?

The event happened so fast. He doesn't know how to describe it. He indicated at this point of the conversation that he did not want to give an incomplete answer and would rather review the event. If NTSB wanted to follow-up send him an e-mail and he would respond.

At this point of the conversation, he was advised that the NTSB is a federal agency mandated by Congress to investigate aircraft accidents, and NTSB has no authority to take any action against any individual. He was also informed that the purpose of an NTSB investigation is for safety only, and any person NTSB talks with has the right to representation; he agreed to the interview without representation.

He did not know if there was any malfunction of the helicopter or its systems. The accident MAY have been caused due to the slight slope of the terrain and dynamic rollover. However, after reviewing the accident scene, talking with his instructor and Aviation Safety Inspector Rocky Davidson from the Federal Aviation Administration Mr. Winegardner believes that he may have lost tail rotor control. He had taken off from that same spot 30 or 40 times prior to the accident.

Follow-Up Questions Continued –

Did he hear any aural annunciations? Yes, but not sure if it was before or after the rollover as it happened so fast.

Did the helicopter yaw after lifting off? He doesn't know it happened so quick.

Was there any security video at his or a neighbor's house that captured the event?
He does not have any video from his house. The engine was operating post-accident and he thinks he secured it and the aircraft's battery.

What time did the accident occur?
Between 0930 and 1000 hours local on January 30, 2021.

Did any family members witness the accident? No.

Explain his actions after the event started?
It happened so quickly he did not recall his precise actions.

Did he lower the collective?
He did not recall. He had training in May 2020 in Atlanta, Georgia, at Prescott Aviation at the Falcon Field Airport in his helicopter. The training was performed by Les Gillespie. He was a certificated instructor in the Robinson R66.

Did you have training at Robinson's facility in CA?
Yes, June 2017.¹ He had no flight time in the R66 at that time. His training consisted of ground school which lasted 4 days, and about 2 hours in a R66.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on February 4, 2021. He replied on February 11, 2021, at 1129 EST with a corrected digest that was cut and pasted into this document. The corrected document was e-mailed to him on March 12, 2021.

¹ According to Robinson records, he flew a Robinson R66 as part of an instructor/pilot evaluation flight on June 29, 2017 and received his Pilot Safety Course Certificate of Completion the same day.