



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Timothy W. Monville
Sr. Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: April 27, 2022
Person Contacted:
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA209

Narrative:

FAA Inspector Michael Loehlein contacted NTSB by phone on April 27, 2022 at 1556 EDT and advised that the pilot of the accident helicopter was available for phone interview. Mr. John “Ed” Edward White was brought into the conference call at 1558 EDT. He was called at his home phone of [REDACTED] Mr. White provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED] and a cell phone number of [REDACTED]

At the beginning of the conference call Mr. White 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 provided a home address of [REDACTED] O'Brien, Florida [REDACTED] His date of birth is [REDACTED] He holds commercial and private pilot certificates, certificate number [REDACTED] At the commercial level he has rotorcraft helicopter rating and at the private level he has airplane single engine land rating, last issued February 10, 2020. He was last issued a 2nd class medical certificate on September 4, 2021, with a limitation to possess glasses for near/intermediate vision. His total flight time in all aircraft was 16,644 hours, and his total time flying helicopters in agricultural operations is 16,571 hours. His total rotorcraft turbine time is 3,141 hours, and his total rotorcraft piston time is 13,340 hours. His last flight review was on September 3, 2021, in an Air Commander.

He was asked to explain when he first hired with Coastal Air Service, Inc. – Mr. Clubbs had owned the business for 20 years, and he was short of pilots. His first flying day with him was April 15, 2022. That day he flew N281SP (accident helicopter), and reported there

were no problems with the helicopter that day adding it, “was fine, totally pilot error.” The next day that he flew for the company was April 26, 2022.

He was asked to explain the day’s activities including any safety briefing at the start of the day and any after the accident involving N206BX –

He got up early to move equipment to the staging area. He sprayed one load, then returned for his 2nd load, and while on the ground adjusted the spray nozzles. Caleb Stewart advised him not to fly the second load and he was held up several hours because of the crash of N206BX at about 0717 EDT. They talked, had safety briefing and was advised the pilot of N206BX was ok. They continued spraying and the, “water was very slick that day like a mirror” which created a depth perception issue. The water was shallow and clear and you could see the sandy bottom. He was on the last spray cleaning up the edge, and he saw the helicopter flown by Caleb. He told Caleb that he was coming straight, and he looked up, then down to the GPS to look at the “clean up line” and the helicopter impacted the water. The sun was in his eyes at the time, but the “biggest factor was it was very slick calm day.” Caleb later told him that he too got himself low once, and he (Ed) got himself low twice earlier. He got his seatbelt undone and exited the helicopter.

What restraint were you wearing?

A four-point seatbelt and shoulder harness.

Were you wearing it loose or snug?

Not real loose but not cinched down tight, snug.

Explain was information was given during the 1st safety briefing and after the accident involving N206BX –

To maintain constant communications with the truck, normal talking. All pilots were very experienced.

Were the water conditions discussed before the 1st takeoff that day or after the crash?

No. they didn’t know there was any kind of issue until N206BX crashed. He did call Caleb at one point during the flight and told him the water was slick making the conditions very difficult. After his crash, he asked the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) if under the same smooth water conditions, they could put a buoy in the water to help with depth perception.

During the 1st briefing or the briefing after the 1st crash was altitude discussed?

Well no. Because when the 1st crash happened, the pilot was taken to the hospital and they did not know factually what had occurred, though they had some ideas.

Do you think establishing a floor under similar lake conditions would help?

Not in that type of flying, when a pilot is looking down at the GPS to follow the spray line.

FAA Questions –

What is the normal altitude and speed during a spray pass?

Between 7 and 15 ft above the water, though he was flying 15 to 20 ft above the water and 60 to 70 mph.

Was the helicopter equipped with any special equipment to help with the altitude like radio altimeter?

No. he set his altimeter on the truck. His crew that works for him full time discussed the possible risk mitigation if the water is slick and one possible measure would be to put gallon jugs on the water.

During your spray runs that day were you always flying into the sun?

He was taught the longer the spray runs the more money you make.

What was the fuel load?

Between 125 and 150 pounds. He was 5 seconds from being done. Caleb circled him after he got out of the helicopter and then he jumped onto the skid and was flown out. His safety briefing with his crew was that because of the alligators he had seen in the lake, if his helicopter went down he told them he would not be swimming out.

NTSB Questions Continued –

Was there anything wrong with the helicopter or engine that caused the crash?

“No. no.” That was very ... my feelings got hurt crashing it. “No, no issues with that helicopter at all.”

What direction were you flying before water contact?

East-southeast. He was cleaning up the border. He had made a turn, saw Caleb making a turn out, he finished his turn, looked up to Caleb, then looked to the GPS. The last leg was ESE almost directly into the sun.

What time did the accident occur?

About 1900 or just before. He took his last load from the fuel truck at 1845. The loading truck was about 1/2 mile from where he crashed.

Did you go to the hospital?

No. his shins were scraped.

Were you a contract pilot?

Yes.

What was he paid by flight hour, etc?

Commission percentage.

NTSB Questions Continued –

What is your business?

Helicopter spray business called Southern helicopter, Inc.

Have you sprayed that lake before?

Yes, on April 15, 2022.

On April 15th, were the lake conditions the same as they were on the accident date?

They were early in the morning when there was no wind, and during an early flight that day he caught himself once low to the water. Later in the day when the wind picked up the lake had ripples and that was enough.

How low did the helicopter get on April 15th?

Low enough to scare him and causing him to jerk on the controls.

Do you have any questions for NTSB?

No. but in thinking about how it could have been prevented maybe having an annunciation light on the GPS when the helicopter was flown below a preset altitude.

Have you made a written statement?

No. It was suggested by NTSB to prepare a written statement before too much time elapses as memory fades with time.

The call end time was 1700 EDT.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on April 27, 2022; he did not reply. The digest was again emailed to him on June 3, 2022. He replied on June 3, 2022 at 1126 EDT with, “Sorry for that oversight. No changes are necessary.” The FINAL digest was e-mailed to him on June 3, 2022.