

N5027P Crewmember Statements

7/11/2023

Pilot: Chief Pilot/DO conducted the interview. During the interview, the pilot gave a rundown of the day and the events that lead to the hard landing incident, as he recollected. The pilot conveyed the following:

“We were assigned to CVI (comprehensive visual inspections) of transmission power lines for PEPCO in Marlton MD on the 23062 – 23064 circuit. Our crew consisted of 2 inspectors and myself. I preflighted the aircraft, completed fuel sample inspection with healthy findings, and conducted my FRAT (flight risk analysis tool). We then completed the company JHA/tailboard. Shortly thereafter we started up and departed airport and once enroute performed a power assurance check with healthy results. I felt good today and everything was going normally. About two hours into the inspection, the rear passenger mentioned that the engine sounded different. I felt a subtle high frequency vibration in the collective. We all knew the tail rotor had recent maintenance done, but I did not feel anything abnormal in the pedals. We decided to head back. Once I pulled off the power line everything sounded and seemed fine, and all gauges read normal and did not indicate any issues. While enroute back to airport, I heard a loud bang and felt a hard left yaw. Everything went quiet. I immediately put the collective all the way down and started the autorotation. I did not note any gauge or light information during the maneuver. I located an open back yard and aimed towards it. There was a pond and fence in the area that I thought I could clear. As we approached the fence, I realized we wouldn’t clear the fence so I flared so the skids would hit it instead of the nose. I immediately shut off electrical power and rolled the throttle off. I asked the crew if everyone was ok. The rear passenger was the first one out of the aircraft once the blades stopped spinning. I was next out and the front passenger was immediately after. I secured the scene immediately until first responders showed up.”

Inspector (front right seat passenger): While the pilot and Inspector #2 (rear passenger) were still at the hospital, the front passenger was already back to the hotel. Director of Safety was the interviewer. The front passenger was still feeling some of the effect from the pain medication he was administered so the preliminary interview was brief. The information gathered from it is as follows:

“While we were conducting an inspection of a structure, the rear passenger mentioned the possibility of hearing a noise. We had two more left we could do with the remaining fuel load but decided to return to the airport due to possible noise. On the way back, I heard a bang and felt a hard left yaw. I started scanning for a place to land and pointed out a clearing but realized the pilot had already found a location. I scanned for people and children and did not see any. I remember being worried about the pond, but the pilot made it over the water and to the lawn.”

Inspector #2 (Rear passenger) : Sunday morning the crew arrived at 2W5 to begin our inspections for PEPCO lines 23062&23064. The crew set up PPE and Inspecting equipment in the helicopter as the pilot conducted his Pre-flight inspection and fuel sample. Crew gathered and discussed the JHA/tailboard

which included the operations for the day. Crew agreed on tailboard and understood the tasks for the day. The day was planned for one fuel load due to possible weather conditions in the afternoon. Work proceeded as normal. As the fuel load was coming to an end I vocalized with the crew that I heard an unfamiliar humming that seemed to originate from the engine/transmission. After alerting the crew of my observation we aborted the inspection to return to 2W5. Shortly after departing the power line the pilot stated that there were no abnormal indications in the instruments. However, the pilot did state that he thought he felt a high frequency vibration. After 10 minutes of fairy time back to 2W5 there was a sudden loss of power and the helicopter jerked to the left. The pilot took action and began to turn left towards a pond surrounded by houses. I could not see where he was going as I was laying down on my side and could only see out of the right back door. The only thing that came to mind was to say "You got this man" as I knew his skills and that he could land us with no harm whether it was the pond or shoreline.

Pilot, Inspector (front right seat passenger), Inspector #2 (rear passenger): Due to all crewmembers being evaluated as a precautionary measure, and the length of time they encountered in the waiting room at the ER, we decided to have a group discussion over a meal to better engage with them. The notes we gathered from the discussion with all 3 members of the crew:

"We completed the daily JHA (Job Hazard Analysis) and preflight inspection. Once we were airborne the pilot completed a power assurance check. We planned on flying one fuel load due to the forecasted weather for later in the day, and we knew we would be nearing the FRZ at the end of the line segment. We were all well rested and got good sleep last night. Everything was going well, and it was just like any other day. While we were nearing the end of the line to inspect, the rear passenger asked if anyone heard a noise. We all agreed that we might hear something but weren't confident that it was abnormal. It was hard to tell. If we had to describe it, maybe a higher pitched humming noise. The pilot felt vibration in the collective. We decided to fly back to 2W5 airport. We started back and roughly 10 minutes into the return flight heard a loud bang or pop noise and felt a hard left yaw."

At this time during the discussion the crew went into accounting each of their actions once the hard left yaw occurred. The rear passenger stated, "I laid on my side and got in the fetal position right away" and told the pilot "You got this man." The front passenger said "I scanned for a spot to land and pointed to a clearing but looked over and seen that the pilot already had a spot picked out, I started scanning for people and children. I didn't see any." The pilot stated "I aimed for the open back yard and thought I could clear the pond and fence. As we neared the fence, I pulled back so the skids would hit instead of the nose."