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Office of Aviation Safety - Eastern Region

Date: June 16, 2024

Subject: ERA24LA263, Record of Conversation/Interview

Contact: Robert Roper

Mr. Robert Roper contacted NTSB Response Operation Center (ROC) on June 16, 2024. The NTSB ROC contacted the ERA Duty Officer on the same day at 1458 EDT. Mr. Roper called to report an event involving N99TE, that occurred on June 14, 2024, about 1822 EDT, near Alma Airport (87FL), Alva, Florida. Mr. Roper provided a cell phone number of [REDACTED]. He provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

He was advised by e-mail when sending this document for review that it will not be released to the public until the investigation is finished and when published, any personal identifiable information (PII) such as cell phone number, e-mail address, address, pilot certificate number, etc., will be redacted and not viewable in the released document.

He indicated that his home address is [REDACTED], Alva, Florida 33920. His pilot certificate number is [REDACTED]. He holds an airline transport pilot certificate, with airplane multi-engine land and rotorcraft helicopter ratings. He holds a flight instructor certificate, with ratings for airplane single and multi-engine, rotorcraft helicopter, and instrument airplane and helicopter. He holds a commercial pilot certificate with airplane single engine land and sea ratings. He holds a ground instructor certificate with advanced and instrument ratings and is also an airframe and powerplant mechanic with inspection authorization.

His son (Timothy Roper), is an Army helicopter pilot stationed at a military base in Alabama, and was visiting for his (Tim's birthday) and also for Father's Day. Mr. Roper also indicated that both of them are flight instructors.

On June 14, 2024, the accident flight was their first flight in that type helicopter that was recently purchased¹. After purchase, he (Mr. Roper) had several instructional flights over the last month or so with a CFI experienced in Rotorway and was doing well with the helicopter. Mr. Roper performed the preflight check of the helicopter using the checklist. That preflight consisted of checking the tail rotor drive belt tension with a spring scale and it was within limits (10 pounds).

He (Robert Roper) performed the takeoff from their home and turned on course towards 87FL, then offered the controls to his son at about 200-300 ft. His son flew a “high recon” over 87FL and then flew in an easterly direction to the east/west oriented runway. During the approach his son he noted the main rotor rpm decreasing and applied corrections. Mr. Roper attributed this to be from the helicopter that was not equipped with a governor. While flying between 100 and 150 ft above ground level and between 20 and 30 mph, or just below effective translational lift (ETL), the flight encountered loss of tail rotor effectiveness (LTE). He took the controls from his son and applied forward cyclic and right anti-torque pedal to correct the left complete yaw, reporting that the helicopter was making a sweeping left descending turn with right anti-torque pedal input. The flight ran out of altitude and one skid impacted in a ditch and the other impacted the ground. The helicopter rolled and came to rest on its right side (Figure 1) in a north/south oriented ditch that fed a larger east/west oriented ditch. After coming to rest in an attempt to get out of the helicopter he damaged a section of the side window post and windshield. After coming to rest and getting out of the helicopter he and his son discussed the wind and observed it to be from the east at about 5 mph, adding that the type of helicopter they were in did not like a tailwind. Mr. Roper estimated that the entire flight time was 5 to 8 minutes total. The main rotor blades were damaged and there was crease in the tailboom (Figure 2).

Using Google Earth, the approximate accident site was 26.733286° north latitude and -81.574951° west longitude, which was just north of the runway at 87FL.

Although there was no fuel leakage noted at the site, because the helicopter was resting on its side and the fact that the ditch fed into a larger ditch with water, he moved the helicopter on June 15, 2024 without permission. He recovered it to his home address². During the recovery he noted one jam nut of the tail rotor drive belt tensioner was about 3 inches away from the plate it was designed to be against (Figure 3). During recovery of the helicopter he confirmed anti-torque pedal control cable continuity for both seats from the anti-torque pedals to the tail rotor pitch change mechanism. Prior to recovery he did not check the tail rotor drive belt tension but added that due to damage to the tailboom any check would not have been accurate. He also reported that all tail rotor drive belts were in-place.

Mr. Roper was asked the following questions -

¹ According to FAA records, Roper Aviation Services, Inc., purchased the helicopter on May 1, 2024.

² He was advised to keep it secured until contacted by NTSB and FAA.

Was there anything mechanically wrong with the helicopter that caused the in-flight loss of control?

He indicated that immediately following the accident if there was an issue, he did not see it. The “engine and airframe performed as advertised.” He also indicated that based on observations immediately after the accident in, “high likelihood it was pilot induced and not part of the aircraft.” During the recovery of the helicopter he noted the jam nut out of position for the tail rotor drive and questioned if that would have prevented the tail rotor from operating at full rpm resulting in lack of full right anti-torque pedal authority.



Figure 1: Helicopter at Accident Site.



Figure 2: View of the Helicopter During Recovery. Note the Damage to the Tailboom.



Figure 3: Arrow Points to Tail Rotor Drive Belt Jam Nut Out of Position.

The call ended at 1540 EDT.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on June 16, 2024. He replied the same day at 1914 EDT with comments that were incorporated into the narrative. The corrected digest was e-mailed to him for final review on June 17, 2024. He replied the same day at 1446 EDT with, "This looks good! I am on the phone with FSDO now." The FINAL digest was e-mailed to him, the NTSB investigator-in-charge and the FAA inspector-in-charge on June 17, 2024.