



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Noreen Price
Aviation Accident Investigator
Alaska Regional Office

Date: June 14, 2019

Person Contacted: Mr. Steve Smith, pilot-in-command

NTSB Accident Number: GAA19CA344, N4085L UH-1H

Narrative:

Mr. Smith was the pilot-in-command of the UH-1H helicopter N4085L that landed hard near Bethel, Alaska, on June 6, 2019. This is a summary of the statements provided to Noreen Price, NTSB duty officer, via a phone interview on June 14, 2019.

- Mr. Smith has about 5,200 total flight hours and about 3,500 hours of that is in UH1 helicopters. He works for Yukon Helicopters.
- The helicopter was fueled by the owner prior to the flight. Mr. Smith stated that he did not visually check the quantity and assumed that the tank was full. The FUEL LOW light was illuminated the entire flight due to a known mechanical issue and Mr. Smith was not concerned about it. The fuel quantity indicator read 1300 lbs but should have been at 1450 lbs if full.
- Mr. Smith was sitting in the left seat and a pilot rated passenger was sitting in the right seat. He was helping with the load operation that day.
- On the day of the accident, he was performing external sling operation to move a boat 76 miles west of Bethel. The boat was not flying well so he had to go slow and also had to deal with a headwind. He realized that the flight was going to take longer than expected, so he put the load down and continued to Bethel to refuel.
- About 2 miles from Bethel, the engine went quiet and the helicopter yawed. Mr. Smith immediately performed an autorotation to the tundra. During the run on landing, the tundra pads on the skids caught on the thick vegetation and the helicopter stopped quickly and the tail went back.
- Mr. Smith stated that fuel starvation was the cause of the accident and the terrain was a contributing factor. He said he only flew for 2.4 hours and should not have run out of fuel, but perhaps they took off with less than a full tank.



NTSB RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Kate Benhoff
Air Safety Investigator
General Aviation Accident Investigation Division, AS-20

Date: June 28, 2019
Person Contacted: Steve Smith (Pilot)
NTSB Accident Number: GAA19CA344

The following is a summary of a telephone conversation with the above mentioned:

The pilot reported that he departed about 60 miles away from the destination airport and, according to fuel gauge, had a little below 600 pounds of fuel. During the flight, he flew around Vne at 120 knots with a tailwind. He planned to be in Bethel, AK as the 20-minute fuel light illuminated. Around 3 miles from Bethel, AK, the engine stopped, and he performed an autorotation. After landing, fuel gauge read about 225 pounds of fuel remaining.

He reported that, before the flight, he believed he departed with a full tank of fuel. He added that it was his own fault for not taking a flashlight and looking into the fuel tank. He did not think he should have run out of fuel.

He reported that there were no mechanical issues with the helicopter and that there were no unusual gauge indications when he departed from 60 miles away. He added that he did not look at the maintenance logs beforehand.

In a follow up telephone conversation on July 24, 2019:

The pilot verified that he departed about 60 miles away to fly to Bethel, AK with a little less than 600 pounds of fuel. He estimated that the fuel burn was about 75-80 gallons per hour. He added that the 20 minute fuel light did not illuminate in flight, but did illuminate on the ground.

He added that he did not know if anyone verified the fuel quantity after the landing, but that they did add about 50 gallons of fuel to fly the helicopter to the destination airport.