



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Samantha Link
Aviation Accident Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Date: February 2, 2018
Person Contacted: Ms. Samantha Malo (Operator)
NTSB Accident Number: WPR18FA074

Narrative:

During a telephone conversation with Ms. Malo, she reported the following:

- This particular job was originally planned for the R44 helicopter, however, it was still in Texas, completing a job that was running behind. Since the pilot was ready to work with the Hughes, he decided to cover a day or two to keep the new job on schedule.
- Normally they conduct the flight right at the start of daylight. However, this particular flight started later; which wasn't necessarily a problem, just different.
 - Ms. Malo spoke with the pilot that morning and he was having a "low-key" day in the office. He didn't seem rushed in any way.
- The fuel truck was nearby with the biologist, so the helicopter would have traveled light. There was the pilot, a mugger, and a gunner onboard.
- During the fuel stop, the pilot had called Ms. Malo.
 - He mentioned that it was windy, and the nets weren't opening very well.
 - They had captured and collared about 4-5 deer
- Ms. Malo explained that wind affects the nets before it affects the helicopters. When nets don't open there is no purpose in flying so they stop flying for the day.
- The day of the accident, she received a picture from the pilot indicating that they were potentially training the mugger as a gunner-in-training. Therefore, there were two guns in the helicopter.
 - Normally there is only one gun in the helicopter
 - The mugger has been working as a mugger for them for 1.5 years
- The net guns and nets:
 - They always capture deer into the wind.

- The guns should have a cone on the end of them, and they should have an empty cartridge inside.
 - The only time they have live ammo in the gun is when they are in close pursuit of a deer.
- They never disconnect the gun from a cone unless they are trading out cones. They don't want loose unfilled cones or nets laying around, particularly when the doors are off the helicopter.
 - The cones are held on by hydraulic couplers, so they are quite difficult to separate. Which is particularly helpful if the gun gets dropped out of the helicopter.
- Ms. Malo explained that sometimes weights can get stuck in the cone and the rest of the net (plus remaining weights) extend aft towards the tail. When this happens, the gunner is supposed to immediately drop the gun from the helicopter.
- To pack a net: They add a string to the center of the net so they know where center is. This is the first piece to go into the bottom of the cone followed by the remainder of the net, the weights go into the corner holders last. The goal is to package the net exactly how you want it to open when it's fired.
- The pilot always indicates when it is safe for the gunner to shoot. They cannot shoot without his indication.
- They keep the collars in the black pack behind the right front passenger seat. Once a deer is captured they send the mugger out of the helicopter with a collar and cone so they can take care of the deer and repack the net.
 - Once the mugger exits the helicopter to take care of the deer, the helicopter leaves the area and returns a short time later to avoid adding extra stress to the deer.
- While in the hospital, the gunner had mentioned to Ms. Malo that he heard a loud bang then the helicopter started to spin. However, he was heavily medicated due to his injuries.
- She mentioned that the pilot has never had an issue stopping flights due to weather related issues.
 - If there are nets on the ground, he will leave them to retrieve on another day. There has never been a need to fly or pick up nets in questionable weather.
 - The pilot has always said that a deer isn't worth anyone's life.
- The pilot's experience:
 - Has been around, and heavily involved with, helicopters since he was about 9 years old.
 - He has been conducting capture work for about 8 years
 - He has about 10,000 total hours:
 - About 300-400 in the accident helicopter
 - The company started leasing it about a year ago
 - About 5,000-6,000 in Hughes 500
 - About 2,000 Astar time
 - Everything else in an R-44

END.

Submitted by: Samantha Link