



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Elliott Simpson
Aviation Accident Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Interview Date: Aug 23, 24 2018
Person Contacted: John Brunner and "Skip" Tackett
NTSB Accident Number: WPR18FA232

Narrative:

During an in-person conversation at the facilities of Brunner Aerospace in Georgetown, Texas, the following was discussed:

- Brunner Aerospace (BA) was established in February 2014.
- It is a limited liability company, and about 80% of its business is conducted with its primary customer, the Department of Defense (DoD).
- In 2015 BA purchased Utility Aviation (UA), through which it attained UA's Part 133, 135, and 137 certificates.
- BA provides the DoD with niche training for the U.S. Army, specifically under the U.S. Army Security Assistance Training Management Organization (SATMO) whereby they train allied foreign nation partners.
- The DoD approves the syllabus. Mr. Brunner is in contact with the DoD contracting officer daily, and the DoD perform a site audit at least once every year.
- BA has seven full-time employees, John Brunner - Chief Executive Officer, Skip Tackett - Chief Operating Officer and flight instructor, Christopher Myers - Chief Marketing Officer, Michael Renz - Director of Maintenance (based in New Jersey), Mike Hawley – Instructor Pilot (MD530 specialist), David Fisher – Chief Pilot, Aimie Randall – administrative support.
- A part time AP/IA mechanic, Joe Marroquin who specializes in MD helicopter maintenance, works on the MD530 on an as-needed basis.
- The SATMO contract programs were managed and conducted by Mike Hawley and Skip Tackett
- BA owns one helicopter, an Airbus AS350FX, and leases the accident helicopter N530FU and A Bell 206B3.
- Ken D'Aillio owns N530FU, through the company Air 1 Sandpoint Helicopters Inc.
- Maintenance for N530FU is shared between BA and Sandpoint, with BA typically performing daily and routine maintenance utilizing Mr. Marroquin, and annual inspections and heavy maintenance performed by mechanics from Sandpoint.

- The helicopter's daily log sheets are sent to Sandpoint and Michael Renz on a daily basis, and the two companies then coordinate if maintenance is required, and who should do it. The most current maintenance logs were onboard, and likely destroyed in the fire.
- Mr. Tackett maintains operational control of the helicopter, and tracks maintenance events along with Mr. Renz (including airworthiness directives and service bulletins) with a spreadsheet. As such, Mr. Tackett makes sure maintenance is not required while the helicopter is scheduled for use.
- The accident flight was part of a SATMO contract to provide Emergency Procedure recurrency training in the Hughes 369FF to the Jordanian Special Operations Command, specifically members of the Prince Hashim Royal Aviation Brigade.
- The contract requires BA to provide emergency procedures recurrency training, conducted under *CFR* Part 91. A consideration was made to make the flights public use, but the decision was made to adjust the syllabus to allow it to be covered within the auspices of Part 91.
- BA has been providing this training to Jordan for the last 4 years. This was Mr. Hawley's second year providing training. Prior to his arrival, the training was provided by Mr. Tackett and Mr. Brunner. Mr. Hawley had no part in the 133, 135, or 137 aspects of the business.
- The syllabus is based closely on the Army 160th division's Flight Training Guide, and was updated by Mr. Hawley when he started, two years ago.
- Typically, 25 Jordanian pilots attend at a time, and all are experienced pilots who fly the MD530 helicopter in special operations environments. No such emergency training is available in Jordan. Each class consists of 5 aviators at a time for a 14 day period, for a total number trained that equals 25.
- The training helicopter is a similar helicopter- used in Jordan; The helicopter is configured for left-hand command, and the instructors all sit in the left seat, with the trainee in the right. In Jordan, the aircraft is configured for a right-hand command pilot, so the arrangement here works well to give them a sight picture they will see back home from the right side.
- All training is performed with the doors off.
- The pilots return for the training every year, and this was the second year the accident trainee, Mr. Al Khawaldeh had been back; he was a 1LT (First Lieutenant), second-in-command (SIC) pilot.
- The course includes ground training, with 9 hours of flight training.
- The training is conducted in the airport environment, but can sometimes include a local area orientation flight, and on the final day, a weapon firing flight conducted directly from the helicopter while over a designated firing range. It is not uncommon to fly to Taylor for local orientation or for anti-torque maneuvers.
- As an example, Mr. Tackett's last orientation flight was from Georgetown direct Taylor, then north to Temple. It was flown between 300-400 ft agl, 90 knots, with an initial climbout of Georgetown to 1,300 ft msl to avoid the fixed wing traffic pattern.
- During transitions between airports, the helicopters are typically flown about 200-500 ft agl. When flying from Georgetown to Temple, the route parallels about 2 miles east of Interstate 35 to avoid the power transmission lines and towers adjacent to the highway.

- Maneuvers requiring roll back of the throttle are only performed at Temple and Georgetown because they have Crash Rescue and firefighting capabilities. Taylor does not, so only anti-torque failure training is performed there.
- No simulated engine failures are performed enroute, because there is not sufficient familiarity with the low-level environment in the area and there is no flight following.
- There are some unique issues involved with flying Jordanian pilots, such as language barriers, so an instructor with a unique and experienced skill set is required – Mr. Hawley had significant experience flying in the middle east and had this set.
- All foreign pilots who fly this program must have a US language level 8 qualification, although there are often simple conflicts such as slang-like terms similar to, “cut the throttle”.
- No formal transition routes have been established, because the syllabus does not call for any low-level flight outside of the runway or target practice environment.
- The Jordanian pilots are usually either first or second in command (PIC, SIC) pilots, and the class leader is usually a Lieutenant Colonel who acts as a group leader. During the accident class, there was no Colonel, so “Mo” one of the Captains, acted as the group leader.
- Mr. Hawley is not based in Texas and stays at the same hotel as the students during the training period. Mr. Tackett lives locally. There is very little interaction with the students outside of class, with the exception of maybe one dinner during the week.
- Typically, each student flies one to two flights per day, with alternating days off, with the orientation portion flown during the first or second flight.
- With regard to the Jordanian pilot’s skill, they were all very well accomplished. One of the differences between the way they are taught to complete an autorotation and the way BA teach it is they immediately bring the airspeed back to 65 knots, which usually causes an immediate high rotor condition. BA teaches a gradual deceleration to approx. 70 knots and adjust from there, either faster or slower to maintain rotor rpm and to adjust for setting up the landing to a small area with near zero ground run. Another difference is the “check” (BA call it “initial”) with the collective at the end of the maneuver. They either do a sharp snap pull, or more of a progressive pull through the check to cushion. Some of this stems from using a Robinson helicopter as a trainer which uses a progressive pull just prior to and at touchdown.
- On some flights, the younger Jordanian pilots want to fly low-level high-speed maneuvers outside of the airport environment. Such maneuvers are not part of the syllabus, nor are they required in the DoD contract. Mr. Tackett surmised that this is based on the pilot’s youth and day-to-day flying experience, because the pilot’s typically fly low and fast at home during their routine and combat missions. The Jordanian pilot’s mentors received their initial training from the US Army 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), who are trained to fly in this style.
- Mr. Tackett stated that he has flown down to 150 ft agl on one occasion, and he was not aware of Mr. Hawley doing so. Flying low-level, nap-of-the-earth, gun runs, or similar during training are considered serious transgressions. He stated that he was not aware of the accident pilot being involved in such transgressions while with Brunner Aerospace.
- Mr. Tackett has an intimate familiarization with the low-level area threats, because he has flown hog eradication missions, which necessitate flying down to as low as 30 ft agl at times. Mr.

Hawley does not have the same familiarization with the area and is not a pilot in the hog eradication program.

- The training manual includes a request that all students approach Mr. Hawley if they feel any training or their experiences are unsafe. To date he has not been approached by any student.
 - 9mm Sub Machine gun automatic weapons are used for the target practice portion of the training, and although used shells are removed from the helicopter after all flights (a special vacuum nozzle is used), sometimes shells get trapped and hidden from view within the cabin. No guns were onboard during the accident flight.
 - On the first day during the accident week, lesson TD1 was started with the other two pilots in the course, but the flights were started late due to a misunderstanding by the class leader that all pilots were required to be at the course in-brief at 0800, and then they would fly only two pilots that day. By the time the miscommunication was resolved, and started they flying, it was after 1030 hrs. Due to the late start, Mr. Tackett made the decision to fly all periods straight to Temple and begin training and the local area orientation would be made up on the second training day for that set of pilots. The fourth period was cancelled due to bad weather in the late afternoon.
 - On the accident day, the class was planned to start earlier in the day (0700) due to the extreme heat in the afternoon, with flights beginning at 0730.
 - On the second flight day of the week, the plan was to accomplish the TD1 lessons for the second two pilots that had not flown on Monday.
 - On the accident day, Mr. Hawley flew the first flight, Mr. Tackett the second, and the third flight that day was the accident flight. The accident flight was the second time Mr. Al Khawaldeh had flown that day.
 - Mr. Al Khawaldeh had flown on the first sortie that day and completed most of his TD1 exercises.
 - The accident flight departed at 1205. Protocol requires that each instructor send a text to the training and operations staff just prior to departure stating fuel on board, departure time, and route of flight. This text was sent, with Mr. Hawley reporting 2.4 hours of fuel, departing Georgetown to Temple.
 - About 1225 Joseph D'Attilio called, stating that he received a call from the AFRCC that the N530FU ELT had been triggered east of Georgetown. Mr. Tackett then called both the Temple Crash Rescue that monitored the Temple Unicom frequency the Georgetown tower controllers and asked if they could reach N530FU. They attempted but did not receive a response.
 - Mr. Tackett immediately boarded the company AS350 and flew directly to the accident site at a high rate of speed, and altitude of between 200-300 ft agl. As he approached the plotted ELT locator provided site, he climbed to 500 feet agl to better visually identify a potential crash site, and finally climbed to approximately 800 feet agl to maintain radio contact with Georgetown tower. Once he saw the crash site, he notified the tower that he would be landing and off comms for an undetermined period of time.
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- Mr. Hawley joined BA in 2017. He was the Asst. program manager for the Jordanian training, and was a primary flight instructor. This was his only current flying job, and he was not working anywhere else.
- He was asked to join BA by Mr. Tackett who had initially met him in 1981 when they were in the 2nd Ranger Battalion together.
- Mr Hawley's flight experience was extensive. He joined the Army flight school in 1989, and flew multiple mission in Afghanistan, Iraq both with the armed forces and private operations during his career. He flew with the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, was also a flight instructor, and retired from the armed forces in 2003-2004. He continued to fly for private operators through 2014 and reconnected with Mr. Tackett in 2012.
- Mr. Tackett described Mr. Hawley as a pilot who always flew "by the book", was a perfectionist, and although he had extensive experience with low-level missions, he was aware of the risks, and therefore would not entertain flying with students on low level flights, even though they often asked to do so.
- Mr. Hawley lives in Alabama, and has three daughters, the youngest was age 6. He was a body builder, ate well, and Mr. Tackett had never seen him drink to excess.
- Following the accident, the Jordanian pilots contacted Mr. Tackett stating that they appreciated Mr. Hawley's strictness and discipline and recounted a story about how he reprimanded a pilot when he caught a pilot descending from 600 to 580 ft agl without permission.
- Mr. Tackett reiterated that the younger 2LT (second lieutenant) SIC pilots very often try to fly low, the 1LT PIC pilots are a little more responsible. He noted this year that Mr. Al Khawaldeh appeared to have matured since his initial training the year before. He did not appear to have any special bond with Mr. Hawley, and he was not aware of the two socializing, even though they both shared birthdays close to the accident date.
- The accident helicopter has a top speed of about 130 knots, and will start to feel uncomfortable, but safe around 110 knots.



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Elliott Simpson
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Western Pacific Region

Interview Date: Aug 22, 2018
Person Contacted: Mr. Theodore Spohn
NTSB Accident Number: WPR18FA232

Narrative:

During an in-person conversation at the residence of Mr. Spohn, at [REDACTED], Granger, Texas, the following was discussed:

- At some time between 1200 and 1300 on August 21, 2018, Mr. Spohn was sitting at a table under his carport, facing south.
- Helicopters are a normal sight in the area, however his attention was drawn behind him by the loud sound of a helicopter approaching.
- He turned around, now facing north, and watched as a black helicopter rapidly approached his house.
- It approached from the northwest, and was flying low over the cotton field, nose down about 30-40 ft above ground level, and he could see gold or metallic numbers on the side.
- He became concerned that it might collide with his house, and just as it got to within about 200 ft it began to rapidly climb up and over the power lines that bordered his street. The climb was accompanied by a popping sound, and he could see that the underside of the helicopter was white.
- He looked back out of the other side of his carport to the south, anticipating that he would see the helicopter, but it had passed out of his view behind adjacent trees.



Photo 1 – View from the carport, Mr. Spohn is standing in the approximate location where the helicopter began to climb. The power lines are about 33 ft above ground level.



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

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Western Pacific Region

Interview Date: Aug 24, 2018
Person Contacted: Shane Birchfield ([REDACTED]), Val Rosas ([REDACTED])
NTSB Accident Number: WPR18FA232

Narrative:

During two separate telephone conversations with Shane Birchfield and Val Rosas, the following was discussed:

Shane Birchfield

Shane Birchfield is a CFI. He was providing flight instruction to Val Rosas on the day of the accident in N6048Z.

They had just departed out of Taylor Municipal Airport (T74) after performing work in the traffic pattern and were transitioning over to Georgetown (GTU), when between 1215 and 1220 he heard over the GTU frequency a desperate sounding voice of someone saying, "oh god damnit, come on you piece of shit".

He did not hear anything else following. He stated that he was, "99%" certain he was on the GTU frequency of 120.225, and made his initial radio call to GTU a short time later.

Val Rosas

Val Rosas is a student, and was receiving flight instruction from Shane Birchfield.

They were flying over Granger Lake, heading back to GTU, but he was not sure what frequency they were listening on.

He then heard someone in distress for a second or two. Words to the effect of, "God damn it, oh god damn it".