



RECORD OF PHONE CONVERSATION

Fabian Salazar
Aviation Accident Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Date: August 29, 2018
Person Contacted: Justin Wick, Pilot N512TA
NTSB Accident Number: WPR18LA242

In a telephone interview conducted on November 20, 2018, Mr. Wick stated that he had been on the fire about 12 days or two rotations. On the morning of the accident, it started out normally. He included his mechanic in the preflight inspection of the helicopter. He stated that the mechanic was very knowledgeable in the Bell 212 helicopter.

He started the day doing some operations support flights, and then configured the helicopter for bucket operations. He stated that he departed the Bald Mountain helibase and flew to the Boulder Lake Dip site which was deep into the Sierra Mountains. He was approximately one hour into a two-hour fuel cycle. He thought the dip site was about 35-40 miles away from the helibase. He mentioned that he was not afraid of going back to the helibase with plenty of fuel and that he had no interest in pushing the fuel limits.

He stated that he had about 1000 hours in the 212 and really enjoyed flying it. He stated that he has flown the helicopter enough to become familiar with the more common sounds it made.

He stated that the fire intensity had died down and he took the time to work on the finer points of working his trade. He was working to improve his proficiency in his job. It was during this time that he could hear a one-per revolution whisper. He attempted to determine where the sound was coming from, so he released the water and flew away from the dip site. Everything felt correct at this time. He called the Air Attack (AA) controller and told him that he was heading back to the helibase. AA cleared him back at the usual high altitude. The pilot requested a lower altitude due to his experience that made him feel safer. AA approved him to fly back at the lower altitude. The pilot realized that AA had suspected something

was not right. He said AA stopped his operations and flew over to see if he could be of assistance.

He said a couple of minutes into the flight back to the helibase, he started to feel the one-per vibration and the helicopter started to shudder. Once he noticed it changed from a noise to something he could feel, he decided to go for any place he could find to land. He said he would rather be on the ground trying to figure it out than in the air trying to figure it out. He said he had few options. He decided to go to a landing area known as H1. It seemed to be the most obvious place to go. About the time the helicopter was about 60 knots, the vibration steadily and slowly increased in intensity. He felt confident that the people he was talking to on the radio could hear the shaking in his voice due to the vibration. The AA helicopter asked him if he knew where H1 was located, and he was having trouble seeing it. He said AA flew in front of him to show him where H1 was.

He said he was just about to look out the window to look for a place to drop the bucket when the vibration just stopped. He radioed that "it stopped, and he was looking good" and he would proceed to H1. At that time, he heard an extremely loud bang and then things happened quickly. He felt an extremely aggressive hop. He felt the nose go down. All he could see was earth and feel a vibration. He said it felt like a one-foot hop, and that it felt like he was being hammered. He said it felt like the instrument panel was coming off. Things were being thrown around the cockpit. He said he did not know if the control inputs were actually working but he manipulated them according to how he felt they needed to be to control the helicopter. His helmet was shaking so much all he could see was the darkness of earth and the lightness of sky. He said that it did not feel like the engine, or the C-box had failed. He still had power but did not feel like he had control of the helicopter. It ultimately contacted the ground. He thought the helicopter may have rotated once before hitting the ground but could not be sure. When it hit the ground, it rolled once. He tried to shut the engines off by pulling the T-handles and switching the fuel shut-off valve switches and boost pumps off. He extricated himself and walked away. He stated that he was injured in the accident and was held in the hospital for observations.