



Record of Conversation

Fabian Salazar
Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Aviation Safety – Western Pacific Region

NTSB Accident Number: WPR19LA194
Aircraft Registration & Make/Model: N3078G, Bell 47G
Accident Location: Mosby, MT.
Accident Date: July 13, 2019

Mr. Rick Potts
Property Manager, Brown Ranch

Mr. Potts knew the helicopter was coming into land so that the helicopter could be stored in the shop overnight. He was in a skid-steer tractor located on the north side of the shop. He watched the helicopter fly in toward the shop. The helicopter was coming from the east. Mr. Potts took two photographs of the helicopter as it approached the shop, one while it was approaching the building and one after it began to spin. He noticed that the helicopter was about 30 to 40 feet in the air when it turned [yawed] quickly to the helicopter's right, then left, then right again before flying directly over his location. He said that it "went back up a ways". He did not see the helicopter land at the designated spot in front of the shop and he said he heard a loud sound. He got out of the tractor and ran over to the silage pit and observed the helicopter had crashed in the silage pit. He saw one man who was already out of the helicopter and a lady who was in the process of getting out of the helicopter. He saw that a second man was still inside the helicopter. He went directly to the man, [the pilot] and asked him if he was OK. He and the first man removed the pilot and carried him about 100 feet away from the helicopter. He said the area was covered in fuel. Mr. Potts stated that there was no wind at that time, and the temperature was at least 90°. He called 911 to report the accident. He said he overheard the pilot mention to the other man that "he couldn't control it".



Photo 1. Helicopter observed approaching the building.



Photo 2. Helicopter as it was observed yawing to the right.



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Austin Wischhusen
Refuel Truck Driver
AV8-ORR
Benzien, MT.

In a phone interview with Mr. Wischhusen, He stated that he has been employed with AV8-ORR since July 2019. He said that the truck was always located at the same spot, about a half mile out of the community of Benzien, Montana. He said he refueled the helicopter about three to four time daily. He would top off the helicopter and it would take about 34 to 38 gallons. He said when the pilot would come into land, he would “take his lap,” meaning circle the truck and he would ask about the wind. Mr. Wischhusen would estimate the wind speed and direction based upon things that he saw. He said the pilot would fly towards the truck and get about 10 to 15 feet then hover down. Mr. Wischhusen thought that the pilot kept the nose straight ahead and only saw the nose of the helicopter move if there were winds. He said that he only saw the pilot have to go-around once due to a crosswind.



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Andrew Orr
Owner AV8-ORR Helicopter Services
July 24, 2019

In a phone call interview, Mr. Orr told me he started his Company in about 2009 and purchased the Bell 47G in 2018 because it was a good fit for the wildlife survey work. He said that it is also used for spraying. The company has an A&P mechanic, and they use a non-full time employee mechanic who holds and AI certificate.

He said he hired the accident pilot in about June 28, 2019. he trained the pilot on the Bell 47. He said the pilot had some difficulty in heading control but flew to an acceptable standard with additional training. The pilot had three or four solo opportunities. He went out and did a spray job with the operator accompanying with him as a safety pilot. After the spray job, the operator thought the pilot was competent and safe to go out and do the aerial survey job.

The pilot flew the helicopter to Jordan, Montana and that gave him an additional six hours of solo time. The operator stated that the pilot started the job on Wednesday, July 10, and flew about eight hours a day.

He said on the day of the accident there were forecasts for severe thunderstorms including hail. There was no indoor hangar space in Jordan, and one of the crewmembers received permission from a friend to park the helicopter in a building located on his private ranch.

The operator stated that the helicopter had provisions for closed circuit refueling and they did not normally top off the helicopter. He thought they were only putting on about 58 gallons of fuel.

The operator stated that there was a weather reporting station (Lufborough hill remote) that was not too far from the ranch. He said that at 2022 UTC, it was reporting temp 87.6°F, wind 6 mph at 145°.

The operator thought that the pilot had a good grasp of helicopter aerodynamics. He trained the pilot in pinnacle landings and confined area approaches. The pilot had told the operator that he had done a lot of training in a Robinson R-22 while flying in Caldwell, Idaho. Based upon what he had heard, the operator thought the pilot had some experience in those conditions.