



Memorandum for Record

Fabian Salazar
Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Investigator in Charge

NTSB Accident Number: WPR20LA007
Aircraft Registration & Make/Model: N131HA / Hiller UH-12
Accident Location: Susanville, CA.
Accident Date: October 13, 2019
Date of Conversation: October 14, 2019

Frank Knokey
Pilot

During an interview with the pilot, he stated that he was working a forestry support contract and was applying a mixture of water and herbicide. He had started his day about 0730 and on his first flight he heard a pop come from the engine and the helicopter yawed to the left. He attributed the pop to a compressor stall. He observed everything was operating within normal parameters, so he continued the aerial application flight.

Later in the day, about 4 or 5 hours after the first pop, and about 20 minutes after the last refuel, the engine "popped and then popped again." It continued to pop about 6 to 8 times and every time the speed of the engine and rotor would decay. He noted that he could hear the engine unwinding as it was popping. He estimated that he was about 50 feet agl when the popping started. He lowered the collective to reduce power and oriented the helicopter downhill to maintain rotor speed and began looking for a place to land. During his descent he turned so that he was not facing downhill and attempted to keep the helicopter in the air.

He stated that at this time he was in a hover about 5 to 10 feet above the ground. He thought that he remained in the air for at least 30 seconds after the engine began to pop. He stated that it was the blades contacting the hill that caused the helicopter to roll onto its left side. He said that the engine was still running after the helicopter came to rest. He initially tried to shut the engine down but could not reach the collective. He observed a liquid and thought that it may be fuel, so he then exited the helicopter. He estimated that the helicopter ran on its own for about a minute, and that it was not a full RPM but running very slowly before he heard it winding down. The pilot estimated that the

terrain was about 6000 feet mean sea level and the temperature was about 15°C. He also stated that the density altitude was high. He described the area as a 30° open clear-cut slope, with debris and slash throughout.