



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Tealeye Cornejo

Air Safety Investigator (Field)

Western Pacific Region

Date: June 18, 2020

Person Contacted: Brian Allen, FAA SAC FSDO Aviation Safety Inspector

Contact Information: [REDACTED]

NTSB Accident Number: WPR20LA163

Narrative:

Inspector statement

WPR 20 LA 163

On June 2, 2020, about 1330 Pacific daylight time, a Bell 206-L3, N65PJ, was substantially damaged during a Human external cargo (HEC) operation, in support of power line work .93 miles west of interstate 80 along Soda Springs Road, between Vacaville and Fairfield California. The commercial pilot and two linemen attached to a 60 foot line under the aircraft were fatally injured. The Helicopter was operated by PJ Helicopter Inc. under the provisions of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 133. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and no flight plan was filed for this flight in support of power line work. The day of the accident, operations began at Nut Tree Airport Vacaville, CA. (KVCB) where the aircraft was parked overnight. It is approximately 7.24 miles from the airport to the landing spot (LZ) that was used to work from that day. Power line construction equipment, a water truck and fuel truck were staged at this location which is approximately .74 miles from the accident site in rolling foothill terrain. The fuel truck driver stated he arrived at the LZ about 9:00 AM and the aircraft and pilot was there waiting. Flight operations began about 11:00 - 11:30. The terrain was low elevation 500 to 800 MSL steep foothills/canyons with the power line towers on the tops of the hills and the power line wires spanning the low hill valleys/canyons.

The information bellow is primarily derived from a witness who observed the accident sequence and heard radio transmissions from the pilot and linemen:

At approximately 12:50 the pilot was hailed on the radio to pick up the two utility linemen. The radio transmissions indicate that the pilot left the LZ and flew to the tower, approximately 3/4ths of a mile and descended with an empty longline to pick the lineman up as a human external cargo load from a tower. Based on the eyewitness and radio traffic he heard the pilot proceeded at the request of the lineman to fly them to the ground in the canyon between the towers they had just been flown from. The linemen were delivered to the ground and unhooked from the longline. The pilot then hovered or orbited in the area for a short period of time before being asked by the lineman to come back and pick them up. An eyewitness observed the helicopter descend back into the canyon with an empty longline, and the aircraft disappeared behind a hill that was obstructing the full view of the eyewitness. The eyewitness then reported seeing the helicopter ascend back into view, and while ascending the main rotor of the helicopter contacted a power line over the canyon resulting in the destruction of the rotor system causing the aircraft to fall into the canyon. The observer lost sight of the helicopter after it fell out of view but based on its resting place it is assumed that it fell straight down into the hill and then rolled down the hill and came to rest in a small drainage. The power line was severed, and a small grass fire burned up the opposite hillside. The aircraft was not damaged by the fire.

The linemen were still attached to the aircraft by means of the secondary hook, the main cargo hook had been released. There was fuel in the fuel tank (approx. 20-25 gal.) The ELT was triggered and operating. Most of the rotor blade sections were recovered and there is evidence of one blade contacting the power line.