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Air Safety Investigator (Field)
AS-WPR

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Subject: WPR20LA244; Airbus Field Report

Contact: Seth Buttner; Sr. Manager, Accident Investigations, Airbus Helicopters

This investigator arrived on site on July 31st with the FAA and SHE to the July 29th, 2020, accident of the subject helicopter, N755AE. Which was found destroyed when it was involved in an accident in the mountainous and densely forested desert terrain area of Pioche, Nevada. At an elevation of approximately 6,741 ft. MSL. The pilot and passenger were fatally injured. The helicopter was operated as a Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 91 positioning flight; conducting long line operation for cellular tower maintenance and installation on a mountain ridge.

According to a witness the helicopter departed from the top of the mountain top ridge with the long line laid out and attached to the belly of the helicopter prior to departure. The flight path is not confirmed but presumed that the long line was flying and became entangled in the tail section as the flight was traveling down the hill. The main aircraft wreckage came to rest mid distance between where the flight departed east from the top of the mountain top ridge and its destination to its fueling LZ downhill and at the road (SR 320), east of the wreckage, where it was understood it was going to drop off a passenger before the start of the work for the day.

The helicopter came to rest in the forested terrain on its right side, with the nose of the aircraft facing west (from the direction the aircraft departed from). The forward windshield and cabin area was broken open from the impact with the ground. The right-side landing gear skid was damaged/broken, and the right-side cabin floor area was crushed up. Each door was broken off from impact damage and separated from the main wreckage.

The aircraft was equipped with single pilot controls (right seat).

The aircraft was equipped with a CRFS, which exhibited some impact damage, but this investigator did not smell fuel at the mishap site and did not notice any fuel leaking.

The aircraft was equipped with an Appareo Vision 1000, the SD card was sent to the NTSB for further exam.

The aircraft was equipped with a long line cargo hook system.

Approximately 21 ft of steel long line cable impacted the main rotor blades and was found entangled in the separated tail rotor system. The tail rotor had one blade attached the other broken off and not found. Approximately 30 ft. of long line and one tail rotor blade were not located. The cable end that was separated exhibited broom strawed broken ends, and some red paint transfer on cable.

The tail boom was broken off and partially attached at the lower aft bulkhead and by control cabling. Mid-length of the tail boom was broken with cable braiding signatures. The forward steel, short tail rotor drive shaft, was separated and found on the ground near the main wreckage. As well, portions of the aluminum tail rotor drive shaft broken mid length. Both horizontal stabilizers were still attached to the tail boom and damaged with blunt impact signatures.

The all three main rotor Starflex star arms were broken. The transmission system lift struts were broken; however, the transmission remained in the transmission deck area. The MRBs were attached to the rotor head but broken mid span with multiple blunt impact signatures. MRB skin material and the tail boom was found near the main wreckage.

Flight control continuity was established from the cockpit input devices to the rotor head and tail rotor system. Breaks and separations in push pull rods were consistent with blunt force impact damage. The cockpit instrument panel was broken and damaged from impact forces.

Two lap belts sections were found on the ground near the main wreckage with overload signatures. Both forward seats showed attenuation and overload signatures. A clasped together lap belt was found separated from the aircraft near the main wreckage. The inertial real shoulder harness of both forward seats were not attached to their 4-point center clasp.

The aft tail-cone was separated just forward of and with the vertical and ventral fin still attached and found the furthest south of the wreckage debris path (the tail cone and the vertical fin trailing edge exhibited cable braiding indication marks). The vertical stabilizers were approximately 365 ft. from the main wreckage.

No post-craft fire was observed.

Seth D. Buttner
AIRBUS Helicopters
Sr. Manager, Accident Investigations



Photo 1 – Aerial View of Accident Site



Photo 2 – Close up View of Undercarriage Note Long Line Cable wrapped around the upper skid



Photo 3 – View of the Undercarriage



Photo 4 - Long Line wrapped around Tail Rotor



Photo 5 Vertical Fin Note cable braiding signatures on the left side



Photo 6 Close up View of the Cable Braiding Signatures



Photo 7 View of Fuel Tank



Photo 8 Left Side View of the Main Wreckage