



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

All persons listed were interviewed by Zoë Keliher

The following is a summary of conversation:

BRAIN GUENTHART

Mr. Guenthart is employed as a helicopter pilot for Rogers Helicopters. The accident date was his first day on the Hills Fire and he was piloting N811KA, a Bell 212. They were the only helicopters flying in that area for the day. After the morning brief, they both discussed and coordinated a plan at how to fly in and out of the dip site noting the poor visibility due to the smoke. The accident pilot departed about six minutes before him and they both flew to a small lake (the dip site) to fill up the external load buckets attached to their respective helicopters (Bambi Buckets). Thereafter, they flew to a predetermined area of the Hills Fire (division) and began to unload their water on the fire. After releasing the water, they would return back to the dip site. After the accident pilot delivered about two buckets of water to a division he moved to another division delivering about five buckets of water.

Mr. Guenthart recalled that after he departed the dip with a bucket of water, he heard the accident pilot communicate over the radio that he felt "abnormal noises and vibrations" and that he was going to make a precautionary landing. Mr. Guenthart dumped his water half way between the dip and the fire and then caught up to the helicopter planning to help assist him finding a good area to land; he remained a few hundred feet behind and above the accident helicopter. At this point, the helicopter was about a thousand feet AGL and airspeed between 60 to 70 kts. The accident pilot then stated that the helicopter's "temps and pressures are good." A few seconds later the accident pilot stated "it's my hydraulics." Mr. Guenthart told the pilot that he should make a right turn and fly down the ravine to less mountainous terrain (the flats). .

The helicopter started to make a right turn and then banked back to the left and started to loose airspeed. At that point Mr. Guenthart noticed the helicopter still had its 100' line and bambi bucket attached, he instructed the accident pilot "release your long line and get forward airspeed," The accident pilot then stated "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday."

The left turn steepened, and remaining in a level pitch attitude, the helicopter began to make three or four 360° rotations (rapidly swapping the front and back), while drifting north-east. The helicopter then pitched in a nose-low, near vertical attitude crashing into terrain. A fire immediately erupted and Mr. Guenthart orbited low level looking for the pilot. After it was unclear if the pilot survived Mr. Guenthart made multiple trips to the dip site to fill his bucket and drop water on the accident site. In between each trip Mr. Guenthart relayed the accident location and updates to the new fire to the Heli Base. He stated that the time between the pilot reporting abnormal noises to the time of impact was about 3-5 minutes. The wind was calm about 5 kts.

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Mr. Guenthart noted that this was the first time he had met the accident pilot. From his radio calls and professionalism he assumed that the accident pilot had experience flying helicopters for fire suppression purposes.