

Statement of Jacqueline Dianne White
Regarding N874BB Accident
October 8, 2022

I hold an FAA Private Pilot Certificate, Airplane Single & Multi-Engine Land, Instrument Rating. Total Hours: 1,502. Current 3rd Class Medical Certificate.

Weather at the time of the crash was clear, visibility >12m and calm wind.

I was contacted by a group of helicopter pilots who were seeking someone to run what was described to me as the Bell pilots owner group. It was suggested that I meet with representatives of the group before a decision was made by them, and I agreed to meet at a fly-in event originating at Gateway Helipad, Colorado. I was told that Keith Steiner, who I did not know, was the organizer/chair for the Gateway event.

On Oct, 8, 2022, I was the sole passenger seated in the left front seat of Bell Helicopter 505 N874BB piloted by Keith Steiner.

We departed Gateway Helipad at approximately 9:30 am MDT for a sight-seeing flight. We were flying in trail with another Bell 505 helicopter piloted by Don Ratcliff. We departed southwest flying low level with the intent of flying along the Green River Gorge. During the flight we were in communication with the Ratcliff helicopter on 123.45. One of the stated objectives of both pilots was to perform an off-airport landing at a scenic location somewhere in the Canyonlands.

Once we reached the Green River Gorge, we proceeded to fly north along the river following the other helicopter. During the flight Mr. Steiner dropped below the edge of the rim while in trail. The terrain avoidance system provided an aural warning and prominent visual alert on the MFD, which Mr. Steiner disabled.

Mr. Ratcliff announced that he was going to land on a cliff ledge within the gorge. This is the same ledge that 4 helicopters – including Mr. Ratcliff – landed on the preceding day, October 7. (I have a video of that 4-ship landing that one of the pilots shared with me). Mr. Steiner answered in agreement and said he would follow him in. Mr. Ratcliff successfully landed on the far right side of the cliff ledge. Mr. Ratcliff suggested to Mr. Steiner that he land on the left side of the cliff. We orbited 1 time around above. Mr. Ratcliff stated he was going to keep his rotors turning during our landing to ensure he was secure and wouldn't be blown off by our rotor wash.

During the approach Mr. Steiner seemed visibly tense and agitated. He asked me: "Are you good with this?" I answered: "If you are good with it, then I'm good."

As we neared the cliff, Mr. Ratcliff again directed Mr. Steiner to land to the left side of the cliff. Mr. Steiner again asked, "You good?" Which I answered, "I'm good."

Mr. Steiner began to execute his landing and as we neared the ground, Mr. Ratcliff said, in what to me was an urgent tone, "Keith, you need to move up at least 20 feet." Mr. Ratcliff told me later that he feared the back of our skids would be hanging off the ledge if we had set down at the initial spot Mr. Steiner chose.

Mr. Steiner added power and we moved forward. At that point, I felt the skids touch the ground in a skipping manner, with the right skid seeming to grip the surface. Mr. Ratcliff again urged Mr. Steiner to move forward, which he acknowledged. I pointed ahead about 20 feet at our 11 o'clock position: "Look there – you can see the skid marks where the helicopter landed before." Mr. Steiner answered: "Where, where?" I again pointed to the skid marks and said, "There."

Mr. Steiner added power in what appeared to me to be an attempt to pick up the helicopter and we slowly moved forward. I felt the skids bouncing off the ground. Then the helicopter violently porpoised forward and slammed nose-first into the ground. We went backward into the air, hitting rearward on the skids, and porpoised violently nose first again. This happened at least 3 times before the helicopter began to spin to the right and roll onto its side. As this was happening my head was slammed back into the seatback then violently forward in my harness causing injury to my neck and cuts/contusions in my chest and neck from the harness. I also recall my right knee making painful contact with the center pedestal. My headset and sunglasses flew off my head.

As the roll-over occurred, the rotor hit the ground, which was deafening and violent. I could feel the rotors digging in and pulling us toward the cliff edge. I attempted to brace with my right arm against the top of the glareshield/pedestal, but was unable to hang on due to the severe vibrational forces. We stopped approximately 20 feet from the edge. After the shaking stopped the engine was still roaring and Mr. Steiner pulled the engine cutoff control.

The right side canopy was smashed in. Mr. Steiner began kicking it out to egress. I was hanging in my harness upside-down. Mr. Steiner reached over, and without warning me, released my harness which caused me to crash down on my head. As I fell, my left shoe caught on the left pedal, leaving me hanging by my foot and unable to egress. While waiting for help, I noticed the battery and avionics were still powered up and I switched all to "off."

Mr. Ratcliff and his 2 passengers ran over and stated they could see fuel coming out the top of the helicopter near the exhaust. They opened the left-side door to try to pull me out. They could not get me out and I could not reach my entangled shoe. I was afraid of fire. I asked them to either cut off or take off my shoe, and they were searching their belongings for a knife. I asked them to wrench my shoe off which finally was done successfully, and I crawled out of the front of the broken-out canopy and onto the ground in front.

I knew immediately I had a significant head injury, and my right knee had three cuts the shape of the corner of the pedestal. My Apple Watch and iPhone were alarming as they had sensed a crash.

Mr. Steiner had a laceration on his left forearm and seemed in shock. The others retrieved a first-aid kit from the other helicopter and began attending to his arm. He mostly sat in silence, except to state several times, "I don't understand what happened."

Mr. Ratcliff activated the SOS function on his Garmin Inreach (there was no cell service). Mr. Ratcliff then suggested it might be faster to contact another Bell pilot in the group to evacuate us. He cancelled the SOS and texted SARS that assistance was not required. In addition, they disabled the ELT on the accident aircraft (which they confirmed had been activated by tuning to 121.5 on Mr. Ratcliff's helicopter).

Mr. Ratcliff connected the Inreach to his phone so he could text via the device. He texted the Bell Helicopter representative that we needed to be evacuated. Approximately an hour after the crash, the Bell rep landed in a Bell 407 and evacuated us.

While we were waiting to be evacuated, Mr. Ratcliff's passengers stated they had video recorded the attempted landing and subsequent crash. They told Mr. Steiner that they would send it to him later and erase their copy. The group also discussed not sharing photos and/or deleting them. They also discussed not talking about the crash with anyone, and that it would be up to Mr. Steiner to decide who would be informed. Mr. Steiner asked, "I'll have to report it (the crash), right?" The others agreed and said all decisions and communication should rest with him.

We landed at Canyonlands airport so that Mr. Steiner could go to the hospital to receive care for his gash on his arm. Members of the Sheriff's Department were there due to the SOS from the Inreach device and they spoke with Mr. Ratcliff. Prior to him speaking to law enforcement, he conferred with the others on what to say and it was stated that everyone should keep the details and discussion at a minimum. No one from the Sheriff's Department asked to speak with me and I believe they were not told, and they did not know, that I was the passenger in the crash.

I flew back to Gateway, CO on board Mr. Ratcliff's helicopter and then was driven to Grand Junction airport to catch my flight home.

I went to the ER Monday 10/10.

When I requested a copy of the crash video from the person who video recorded it, this is the relevant part of the response I received:

"In regards to the video I will not be able to send it to you. I made a promise to Keith that this video will be only for him to view and that I will delete it after I send it to him. I am a man of my words. Please ask Keith to let you watch it and if you need to know more about what went wrong you should ask Don. He may be able to explain to you exactly what happened and what pilot input was made to lead to the accident."

I was told the video depicts the crash "up to the time that schrapnel started flying."

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Jacqueline Dianne White

Date: 23 November 2022