



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Brian C. Rayner
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

June 30, 2018

Subject: ERA17FA317 Medford, NJ
Name: William Knecht – Detective – Medford, NJ Police

Detective Knecht oversaw the police investigation for the Medford, NJ Police Department with regard to the accident listed above. He and his detectives interviewed Robert Drapala, an FAA inspector, and Michael Johnson, an instructor for the operator, during his investigation and forwarded the summaries in a chain of emails. The following summaries were excerpted from those emails.

Interview of Robert Drapala conducted by Det. W. Knecht:

09/08/2017 @1532

Location- Crash Scene

Robert Drapala

Mt. Holly, NJ

FAA- Aviation Safety Inspector Operations (30 years)

Philadelphia International Airport

- Drapala advised that he was at the Flying W Airport for the purpose of conducting a CFI check ride.

- Drapala said that Mindy Redner, the FPO Manager, contacted him and requested that he listen to the radio regarding a helicopter having a mechanical issue.
- Drapala said that he heard Bob Hoban, a designated pilot examiner, who knows the pilot, James Evan Robinson, speaking with him on the radio. They were discussing ways to get the throttle down to reduce RPM.
- Drapala said it was a runaway throttle and there was no way to shut the fuel off or bring the rotor RPMs down.
- Robinson said that he brought the throttle all the way down into the indent, however it did not do anything.
- Drapala indicated that Robinson had full throttle and was unable to slow the aircraft down.
- Drapala said that he got on the radio and suggested that Robinson do a running landing half the width of the rotor system getting ground effect then slowly pull the mixture off and do a running landing.
- Drapala said that Robinson talked about doing auto rotation and pulling the mixture out which he felt more comfortable doing.
- Drapala told Robinson to ensure that he was over the runway when he did this because the aircraft would basically come straight down.
- Drapala said that he got off the radio and went outside and observed Robinson come inbound.
- Drapala said that he did not hear anything that would indicate the engine had quit.
- Drapala said that as the aircraft came down he heard a steady high pitch sound from the rotor blades which continued all the way to the ground.
- Drapala said that the aircraft came straight down from where he started the auto rotation.
- Drapala said that he could not tell if the engine was on or off, however it had a rotor RPM that he could hear which would indicate that there was rotor inertia.
- Drapala said that after the crash he responded to the scene and observed the wreckage.
- Drapala then responded to the flight school and began gathering information regarding Robinson.
- Drapala said that the last contact he had with Robinson prior to this date was approximately 1.5 to 2 months prior.
- Drapala indicated that, to his knowledge, Robinson is an experienced helicopter pilot and instructor with a good reputation, however had low hours.

Interview of George Michael Johnson conducted by Det. M. Regan and Det. K. Gardner of the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office:

09/08/2017 @1436

Location- MTPD

George Michael Johnson

Assistant Chief Flight Instructor Herlihy Helicopters (4 Years)

Commercial Certificate/CFII

- Johnson advised that he was at the Flying W Airport on this date.
- Johnson said that this flight was a spur of the moment ride.
- Johnson said that Troy Gentry and associates came to the flight school area and were looking around. At that point, Gentry was asked if he wanted to go for a ride.
- This flight was supposed to be one lap around the traffic pattern.
- Johnson said that the issues with the helicopter were reported several minutes into the flight.
- Johnson said that he spoke with Robinson via radio.
- Robinson reported that he was unable to slow the engine down.
- Robinson reported that when he rolled the throttle there was no change to the engine RPM.
- They went through some trouble shooting steps to identify the problem with negative results.
- The parties involved decided that the best course of action would be to execute an auto rotation.
- Robinson was familiar with this procedure and has executed it many times.
- Johnson was on the ramp near the dolly and observed the helicopter come in and initiate the auto rotation.
- The auto rotation was started approximately 950 feet above ground level.
- Johnson said that the helicopter was quiet because the engine was off.
- Johnson said that he observed the helicopter blades slow down to the point where he could see them.
- Johnson observed the helicopter fall below the tree line and then heard a “thud.”
- Johnson said that prior to the crash, approximately half way down, he heard a high pitch noise which may have been from Robinson attempting to restart the engine, however he is unsure.