

RECORD OF	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> VISIT	<input type="checkbox"/> CONFERENCE OR	<input type="checkbox"/> TELEPHONE CALL	TIME	DATE
				11:00 AM	02/22/2017
NAME(S) OF PERSON(S) CONTACTED OR IN CONFERENCE AND LOCATION				ROUTING	
Brian Riener (PIC), Jasmine Riener (Spouse), Scott Smith (Republic Helicopters, Inc. Director of Safety), Nathan Simons (Ops ASI). The interview was conducted at University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB), Galveston, TX.				SYMBOL	INITIALS
SUBJECT					
Initial interview concerning the accident of Bell 206B, S/N 4075, N978RH, which occurred on February 6, 2017 near Galveston, Texas.					
DIGEST					
The interview was conducted with Mr. Brian Riener, who was the pilot-in-command of N978RH on the night of the accident. Mr. Riener was asked to describe the events which led up to the accident, starting with the start of his duty shift on the night of February 6, 2017. He stated that he was scheduled to work the night shift and was due to land on the deck of a tanker vessel at 1500 to pick up passengers, Mr. Simeon Anugwon & Mr. Warren Moore, both employees of SGS. There was a delay in the pickup, which required the helicopter to be shut down on the vessel Eagle Vancouver. Mr. Riener was not able to remember at what time the helicopter (with passengers) departed the vessel; however he stated that the weather was good prior to departing the vessel. After departure, he stated that he made contact with Republic Helicopters operation center to establish his flight plan, receive a weather update and to get a current altimeter setting. He mentioned that he had to call twice to get the altimeter setting, as he believes he didn't receive the full transmission on the first radio call. He stated that the information that was provided during these radio calls came from the company chief pilot, who was on duty, and that the weather information was from Automated Surface Observing System (ASOS) out of Galveston, TX. He stated that he was cruising at an altitude of 700' to 800' and made a comment that the company used 500' as					
CONCLUSION, ACTION TAKEN, OR REQUIRED					
DATE	TITLE	SIGNATURE			
02/23/2017	Aviation Safety Inspector				

DIGEST (CONT)

they approached Galveston Island State Park. He indicated that he had visual reference, with lights from Galveston and lights off of the water. At this point he stated that he did not recall anything else until he realized he was submerged in water and was attempting to release himself from his safety belt; he indicated that it took more than one attempt to release the safety belt and then he went to the surface of the water. He indicated that he was hanging onto the fuselage and was not sure how he had gotten there. When he surfaced he assumed he was in the bay and had crossed over the beach, as he could see lights on three sides. At that point, he recalls one of the passengers surfacing and joining him at the fuselage. He stated that he had inflated his life preserver and that he also inflated the life preserver of the passenger. He recalls telling the passenger to hang on to the fuselage, as there would be someone coming to get them. He noticed that the passenger was shivering and cold, so he moved closer to the passenger for body warmth, and kept engaging the passenger in conversation to keep both of them awake. Eventually they noticed a searchlight on the surface of the water from an approaching boat, at which time they were rescued from the water and taken to the shore. From that point forward, he doesn't recall anything until he awoke in the hospital. When asked if there had been any mechanical issues with the aircraft earlier in the day, or if he had experienced any issues just prior to the accident, he indicated that there had been no issues and that everything seemed normal.

An additional conversation was took place between myself, Nathan Simons and Scott Smith, Director of Safety for Republic Helicopters, Inc., Mr. Smith's concern was the lengthy time frame for the Coast Guard to respond once the organization had implemented their missing aircraft procedure in accordance with their emergency response plan.

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RECORD OF <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> VISIT <input type="checkbox"/> CONFERENCE OR <input type="checkbox"/> TELEPHONE CALL		TIME 1100	DATE 02/22/2017
NAME (S) OF PERSON (S) CONTACTED OR IN CONFERENCE AND LOCATION		ROUTING	
		SYMBOL	INITIALS
Operations Inspector Nathan Simons and Airworthiness Daniel Prince visited Brian			
Riener, at his room at the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) hospital in			
Galveston, TX at 11am on Wednesday February 22, 2017. Mr. Riener had been the			
SUBJECT pilot of helicopter N978RH when it crashed in Galveston Bay on Monday February 6,			
2017. The Director of Safety for Republic Helicopters and the airman's wife Jasmine			
DIGEST were also present during the interview.			
After introductions, I, Nathan Simons, presented the airman with a Compliance Philosophy brochure then outlined the Compliance Philosophy and the Pilot Bill of Rights. Inspector Dan Prince then asked the airman to share his story. The airman initially stated that he could not remember much of what happened, but then went on to provide extensive narrative about his ordeal, especially about what happened after the aircraft after the aircraft impacted the water. The airman stated several times during the visit that he could not recall some details, but continued with detailed descriptions of most applicable information. The following is a summary of his statements:			
"I think I came in a couple hours early. I took off to fly to a vessel. I can't really remember the name. Scott (Director of Safety for Republic Helicopters) was still on the vessel. We had a 1600 on another vessel. I wanted to go to another vessel maybe 5 miles away from the 'Eagle Vancouver'. I shut down and went to CCR with Warren Moore. Everything was going good.			
There was a problem between the two ships on gauging, and this delayed the flight. Eventually, Simeon came over to the Vancouver. The un-mooring was taking too long, so that caused more delays. After that, we loaded up and departed. When we took off, the weather was great at the ship. When I gave Republic my flight plan, everything was fine. En route, I got a weather report from Lyn (referring to Lyn			
CONCLUSION, ACTION TAKEN, OR REQUIRED (Continued on next page)			
DATE 02/23/2017	TITLE Aviation Safety Inspector	SIGNATURE Nathan T Simons	
		Digitally signed by Nathan T Simons Date: 2017.02.23 13:55:50 -06'00'	

Austin, Chief Pilot). I remember asking him for clarification about the altimeter setting. He asked me how it was out there, and I told him it was fine. I had the moon, the water, and more than six miles of visibility. I remember telling him that I saw the lights in Galveston.

The next thing I knew, I was fully submerged underwater. I had some difficulty with my seatbelt release. I remember thinking of giving up and thinking that I was going to die. But I put my mind to it and when I clicked the safety release, I shot up like a rocket. I don't remember how I got next to the fuselage. I remember gasping for air. Simeon was holding the fuselage and yelling for Warren. I told Simeon to hang on. I don't remember donning my life vest. But in the water, I felt mine and inflated it. I remember inflating his (Simeon's). I also yelled for Warren, but never heard nothin'.

I decided to stay with Simeon no matter what and hung onto him. I saw lights on three sides of us, so I was assuming we were in the bay. Simeon was cold, so I climbed on his back and tried to bear-hug him. Eventually, I ended up next to him again. I closed my eyes for about 10 seconds, but I forced myself to open them again. We talked off and on for what seemed like forever. Mostly, Simeon kept asking if they were coming to rescue us.

I eventually saw a light coming. It shone on us, and they saw us. That light... I can't describe that feeling. I'll never forget that. They came and threw the rope onto the fuselage. I yelled at Simeon to take it, but he didn't. They had to throw the line again. When they got me to the deck, I just flopped down on the deck. I was so cold. I just don't understand why it took so long for someone to rescue us."

...After Mr. Riener completed his narrative, both inspectors reflected in silence for several seconds before asking some questions. Inspector Prince asked the airman again about his weather brief. The airman stated that Lyn the Chief pilot was at the home base and spoke to him on the radio from there. The airman restated that the weather was beautiful when he left the ship, and restated that he had seen the "moon and the water – gorgeous."

I asked the airman why he had requested clarification about the altimeter setting. The airman stated that he had requested clarification because their radio communication had been "cut off."

I asked the airman if he had any idea of how they ended up in the water. He said that he "scratched my brain and couldn't figure it out. I could see the moon and lights, so visibility was ok."

I asked the airman how he maintained the flight attitude of the helicopter during night VFR over the water when there isn't much of a horizon. He stated that he had used his instruments.

Mr. Prince asked the airman if there had been any abnormal loud bangs or any other abnormal sounds or sensations. The airman stated that he had no recollection of any noises or other abnormal things before ending up in the water.

I asked the airman if his release from the base to fly to the boat was ok for only the trip to the boat, or if the release was good for the round trip. The airman stated that the release was good for the round trip. I asked the airman if delays such as those he encountered kept the release still valid – because weather and Notams can change. The airman stated that yes, the release was still valid and that they could check the weather again if there are any questions or concerns.

Inspector Prince asked the airman if all helicopter occupants had donned their life vests prior to departure. The airman stated that it is company procedure, and that they had donned their vests prior to departure.

We asked the airman if he had any other questions or comments. He asked what was next. I informed him that the NTSB is responsible to determine probable cause, and that our mission is to find and address all contributing factors in our authority to address. I told him that we did not have enough information at the time to make a conclusive determination, and that we really need his help with any more information or clarity that he could provide – especially if he could remember how they ended up in the water. I reiterated that our goal is to glean lessons from this event in order to help prevent these events in the future. I informed him that, for example, we wanted to know any possible training issues, system issues, operational control issues, and survivability issues, etc. that we could address to maximize safety.

We thanked the airman for his time, wished him well, and left. In the hallway, the Director of Safety stated that he was very concerned about the lack of response from the Coast Guard. He stated that the Coast Guard had not dispatched a rescue flight because a qualified briefer had not been available to brief the rescue pilots. We informed him that we would look into that matter as well.