



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Aviation  
Administration**

Flight Standards District Office, EA-23  
One Airport Way, Suite 110  
Rochester, NY 14624  
Ph: [REDACTED]

### **Accident Investigation**

#### **Hot Air Balloon, N69515, June 10, 2016, Fatal Injury of Balloon Handler**

**Amy D. Malcolm, AST, Rochester FSDO**

On Monday, June 13, 2016, I interviewed the pilot of the balloon which was involved in a fatal injury to a balloon handler on Friday, June 10, 2016. The pilot, Sean P. Quigley, holds a Commercial Pilot's certificate, [REDACTED] with a Lighter-Than-Air Balloon rating. Following is an account of the accident.

ON FRIDAY, JUNE 10, 2016, A CAMERON BALLOONS US A-225 HOT AIR BALLON, REGISTRATION NUMBER N69515, LANDED NEAR PICKET LINE ROAD IN THE TOWN OF NUNDA, NY. TEN PASSENGERS WERE DEBOARDED FROM THE BASKET WHILE FOUR GROUND CREW HANDLERS WERE HOLDING THE BASKET DOWN. THE PILOT WAS STILL IN THE BASKET AND KEPT THE ENVELOPE INFLATED. THE PILOT REPORTED THAT HE USED HIS CELLULAR TELEPHONE TO CONTACT THE LAND OWNER AND INFORM/ASK HIM ABOUT BRING HIS TRUCK AND TRAILER ONTO THE FIELD IN ORDER TO LOAD THE BALLOON ENVELOPE AND BASKET. DURING THIS TIME, THE FOUR HANDLERS WERE HOLDING THE BALLOON DOWN.

THE PILOT REPORTED THAT FOLLOWING THE TELEPHONE CALL, HE INDICATED THAT THEY COULD MOVE THE BALLOON CLOSER TO THE TRAILER AND THAT HE INFORMED THE HANDLERS TO DO SO. HE SAID THAT THE HANDLERS JUMPED DOWN AND WHEN THEY DID, THE BALLOON BEGAN ASCENDING. WHEN HE REALIZED IT HAD ASCENDED, HE STATED THAT HE NOTICED HE WAS HEADING TOWARD A ROW OF TREES AND ADDED SOME AIR IN ORDER TO GAIN ALTITUDE. HE STATED THAT HE HEARD HIS NAME AND THOUGHT IT HAD COME FROM HIS HAND-HELD RADIO. HE STATED THAT HE MOMENTARILY IGNORED THE CALL BECAUSE HE WAS ATTEMPTING TO DETERMINE HOW TO GET OVER APPROACHING TREES AND POWERLINES. HE STATED THAT HE HEARD HIS NAME AGAIN AND THEN REALIZED THAT IT WAS NOT COMING FROM HIS RADIO. HE ANSWERED THE CALLER, VICTIM RYAN ALMETER, AND ASKED HIM, "RYAN, ARE YOU WITH ME?" (NOTE THAT THE BASKET IS VERY LARGE AND THE PILOT WAS STANDING IN THE MIDDLE AT THE CONTROLS AND COULD NOT SEE OVER THE SIDES OF THE BASKET. ) THE VICTIM RESPONDED "YES" AND THE PILOT INSTRUCTED HIM TO HOLD ON, THAT HE WOULD GET HIM DOWN SAFELY. THE PILOT STATED THAT THE VICTIM RESPONDED "OK" AND THEN A MOMENT LATER, HE HEARD AN UNINTELLIGIBLE SOUND FROM THE VICTIM (DESCRIBED AS A GURGLING SOUND) AND SUBSEQUENTLY HEARD THE VICTIM FALL. THE PILOT THEN MANEUVERED THE BALLOON TO A SAFE AREA AND LANDED. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT THE VICTIM FELL NEARLY 100 FEET TO HIS DEATH.