



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Brian C. Rayner
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: April 6, 2020
Person Contacted: Eric Morales – Pilot
NTSB Accident Number: ERA19LA171 New York, NY

Narrative:

Mr. Morales was the pilot of the accident helicopter. He was interviewed by telephone, and the following is a summary of the interview.

Mr. Morales held a commercial pilot certificate with ratings for rotorcraft helicopter and instrument helicopter. He estimated he had 900 total hours of flight experience, 42 hours of which was in single-engine airplanes. He added that he had about 100 hours in the accident helicopter make and model.

According to Mr. Morales, he had just refueled on the fuel deck on the south side of JRA and was told to reposition to spot #4 on the northern side of the trailer that served as the office and passenger terminal for the heliport. He added that throughout previous flights that day the helicopter performed as designed, and that he had landed “two other times at JRA that day.”

Mr. Morales said that he attempted one approach to the pad but felt the onset of LTE (loss of tail rotor effectiveness) and aborted the approach and went around. He climbed the helicopter over the water, turned the helicopter back toward an easterly heading toward the helipad and again felt the onset of LTE. The nose of the helicopter began a yaw to the right, and application of full left pedal failed to arrest the yaw. The helicopter then entered an uncontrolled spin around its mast to the right. “I continued to attempt to maneuver the helicopter into the wind and gain some forward airspeed. This attempt did not effectively restore the tail rotor authority.”

According to Mr. Morales, the loss of altitude and the helicopter’s proximity to the water made a successful recovery of the spin unlikely, and he elected to deploy the floats and perform a controlled landing to the water to avoid any conflict with people or property on the shore.

When asked about the winds that day, Mr. Morales said they were “pretty consistent” all day. There is no automated weather at JRA, but the person manning the radio in the trailer provided a wind advisory when landing instructions were given. When listening to automated weather reports from Newark and Teterboro, Mr. Morales recalled hearing winds from the west, and later recalled seeing observations reporting winds at 11 knots gusting to 22, and 10 knots gusting to 18 knots. He added that traffic at Newark was landing on Runway 29, and that when traffic landed on Runway 29 “the winds had to be pretty significant.”

After we concluded the conversation, Mr. Morales stressed that once he decided on a water landing, the systems on board worked as designed. “The floats worked, and the vest worked.” He said that he had the presence of mind to make sure that the fuel was off and the systems were secured after landing. Mr. Morales then spoke about the rapid response of people and assets both on the water and on the shore.

Throughout the conversation, Mr. Morales was extremely candid. He stated that the helicopter performed as designed, and he also demonstrated that he had a working understanding of loss of tail rotor effectiveness. Mr. Morales further engaged in a lengthy conversation about power management, both in and out of ground effect, and understanding the anticipation of potential adversity while flying helicopters.