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2 **COULTAS INTERVIEW**
3 **Zoë Keliher**
4 **National Transportation Safety Board**
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10 **Attendees:**
11 **Zoë Keliher**
12 **Jim Struhsaker, NTSB**
13 **Sean Moretz, Carson Helicopters**
14 **Chuck Taylor, US Forest Service**
15 **Chris Coultas, Interviewee's Spouse**
16 **Bill Coultas, Interviewee**
17

18
19 KELIHER: We have me, Zoë Keliher.
20

21 TAYLOR: Chuck Taylor.
22

23 MORETZ: Sean Moretz.
24

25 STRUHSAKER: Jim Struhsaker.
26

27 MRS. COULTAS: Chris Coultas.
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29 MR. COULTAS: Bill Coultas.
30

31 KELIHER: Alright, that's the only people present to the interview now. Um, we will
32 also give you a copy of the transcript --
33

34 MR. COULTAS: Okay, great.
35

36 MR. COULTAS: Okay, yeah, 'cause with that uh, I am -- I am drugged right now and I
37 have been for the last month and a half.
38

39 MALE VOICE: Yeah.
40

41 MR. COULTAS: Actually I'm taking uh, methadone. Uh, twice a day I -- I have to take
42 that in the morning when I wake up. I'm on methadone right now and then uh,
43 I'm on Percocet and I have to take those every four hours. So I did take Percocet
44 a couple of hours ago.
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46 MR. COULTAS: Just so that we're all aware of that.

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FEMALE VOICE: So we're [unintelligible] [LAUGH].

KELIHER: Again, the purpose of the interview. Ever since the accident occurred, we've been gathering as much information as possible. The first three days was gathering all the perishable information. All the witness statements, looking at all the different aspects of the wreckage we could get that might be disturbed like, uh, witness marks that might be disturbed and just gathering as much possible information. And you are obviously a key piece. And, since this is the first available time we could do it because of your condition. So I know a lot of time has passed and anything you can clearly remember. If you need some time during the interview, no problem. Just take as much time -- if you two want to go into the bathroom and talk and you -- don't worry about it. we're not here to try to make you remember something you don't.

MR. COULTAS: Yeah, and that's been part of my problem right now Zoë is there's a lot that I've -- I've -- I've -- more than anything, you know trying to figure this whole thing out. And uh, and there's a lot I just can't remember -- I don't know. You know, so as we go through this we'll -- we'll work through that piece --

KELIHER: Yep --

MR. COULTAS: But --

KELIHER: So --

MR. COULTAS: I'll do the best I can.

KELIHER: And then of course our condolences are to you. I know you've been through a really traumatic time, so anything we can do.

MR. COULTAS: Thank you.

KELIHER: Um, start off with background. Can you give us the correct spelling of your name?

MR. COULTAS: Uh, last name C-O-U-L-T-A-S, first names William but they call me Bill.

KELIHER: And your date of birth?

MR. COULTAS: -----

KELIHER: And at the accident, the best estimate you can give of your weight and height.

MR. COULTAS: Uh, 67", 155.

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KELIHER: And email address and phone number.

MR. COULTAS: -----
----- -- And the phone -- home number, cell phone -- you want 'em all, you want some?

KELIHER: How about cell.

MR. COULTAS: Cell is uh, -----

MRS. COULTAS: Temporarily suspended. [LAUGH] --

MR. COULTAS: Temporarily out of service.

KELIHER: Well we didn't find it. but um -- okay, so -- to start off, since we have the recorders I won't be doing that much writing but don't get distracted if I am doing anything over here. If you can just tell us as much as you remember, go through the days preceding the accident all the way up to the accident and thereafter. Anything you can possibly remember just try to give me a stream of conscious --

MRS. COULTAS: What day? That day, the day before?

KELIHER: Anything you can remember. Probably two days prior.

MR. COULTAS: Yeah, if I can go back that far, I mean. 'cause there was nothing really you know, eventful that -- that would spark a memory other than, you know, normal uh, normal morning briefings uh, don't believe we flew the last previous couple of days. I'm speculating there, so -- but I don't think we flew. There was nothing really memorable other than we knew that uh, we had known for three or four days that Roark was gonna take a check ride. His 135 cert ride with Jim Ramich. So we had been spending time preparing Roark for his ride. Uh, basic questions, uh, things that, you know from the uh, from the paperwork to the briefing, crew briefing to uh, load calc information. Um, uh, checklist procedures and then uh, the flight itself which would really be uh, going to a confined area operations uh, which then would lead to higher area recon and what acronym we were gonna use for that. the one that we decided was uh, SSBAT, size, suitability, barriers, approach, duration and where we were gonna terminate to the ground. And uh, you know, power check. Uh, low area recon. Um, so those are the items that we would be [RADIO] --

MRS. COULTAS: Sorry, forgot I had it on.

MR. COULTAS: The areas that we would be covering as far as that goes. And then uh, some of the other things that we were talking about would be um, settling power, dynamic rollover, um, slope limitations, um, you know, those -- those kinds of --

1 or -- [unintelligible] I guess. And uh, so we'd been working on that for the first
2 couple of days prior so, that's really about the only real significant thing I recall
3 from the couple of days prior. Uh, the day of, um, started out like any other day.
4 Uh, we went up to the top of the hill, to the helibase, we had breakfast, preflight.
5 We went to the morning briefing or be preflighted and we went to the morning
6 briefing. Uh, we got our -- our load calc numbers, altitude and temperatures just
7 like we always did. Nothing had changed from the previous. And uh, then we
8 went up, set around quite a bit. They did give us heads up that there was gonna be
9 some possible water drop admissions and -- and uh, there was rumor that there
10 was gonna be some personnel movement but they weren't talking about using us.
11 And uh, the -- about the only significant event for me that day was uh, my brother
12 had flown out from Florida the day that I traveled and went on the road, he and
13 his wife. Which was about four days prior to this. And he had gone to our house
14 and my wife and my whole family had a big barbeque at my place and I was
15 working. But uh, they were gonna be heading down to California and they
16 thought they'd just stop in for an hour or so and say hi.

17 So he was able to stop in and uh, say hi and you know, gave him a hug. And we talked
18 for, I don't know, maybe 20 minutes or so. The uh -- while that -- while he
19 showed up, the helitac crew was doing uh, you know, mock up training on the
20 helicopter and I had -- actually was inside the helicopter with the uh -- with the
21 crew. And uh, can't really recall what they were training on though, at this time.
22 Can't remember. But it was procedural stuff uh, that -- that specifically applied to
23 the helitac crew. I really didn't need to be in the aircraft other than I just wanted
24 to listen and you know, kind of get a feel for what it is that they do. And uh, so
25 that's when I saw my brother and then I exited the aircraft and we hung out for 20
26 minutes. And I just showed him the helicopter. We walked around the outside
27 and -- and then uh, helitac crew was still working and then we got a water drop
28 emission. So uh, the helitac crew got out of the aircraft, resecured all of the
29 seatbelts, uh, cleaned up all of their stuff. I gave my brother a last big hug and my
30 sister-in-law and I said, "Hey, I gotta go" and uh, they were gonna be leaving and
31 uh, heading back -- heading back further south. And uh, it was my cycle.

32
33 So uh, I flew as the pilot in command on that cycle. And uh, um, you know, got the
34 aircraft started and departed the helibase -- I can't remember where -- what
35 division it was that we went to. But we had been in there before and we had uh,
36 been in that same area dropping water before. And we were using the same dip
37 sites that we were using before. So you know, it's pretty routine. Uh, winds were
38 the same. The first part of it, fuel cycle but then at the end of the fuel cycle I had
39 to change the approach direction. Uh, from uh, I was approaching -- previous
40 we'd been approaching up river uh, into the dip with the uh, facing downstream.
41 Where towards the end of the fuel cycle the winds started to change in the canyon
42 there so we had to alter and come 180 degree the other way. So now I'm facing up
43 stream and -- but that was really the only difference in that. uh, flew a couple of
44 hours uh, till the end of that fuel cycle. Um, fire was -- fire activity was -- was
45 low, low to moderate. It wasn't -- nothing being threatened. And uh, so they
46 really didn't -- they didn't need us to come back after that fuel cycle. So we went

1 back to the helibase, we landed, shut down and uh, we ate lunch, you know, drank
2 some water. Uh, not a whole lot else for the next few hours. Uh, we did -- you
3 know, just talk about the check ride, hey, is Jim still going show up for the ride,
4 that kind of thing. And uh, we haven't -- uh, well we asked um, Sean who was
5 the uh, the helitac and crew boss up there -- and he said he hadn't heard from him
6 but it looked like everything was still a go. So we said okay.
7

8 The day just kind of just passed on. And then uh -- and then Jim showed up. Uh, the
9 check ride was mainly for work. Um, so, you know, all the -- once the
10 introductions were completed and uh, if uh -- even if we hadn't got emission to go
11 fly, we were probably still gonna go fly and fly at an area so that Jim could give
12 Roark his check run. Um so they had started the oral piece of it, you know. And
13 they -- were talking about the load calc information. And uh, just some basic,
14 basic stuff. Uh, I can't really recall exactly what -- what Jim was asking uh,
15 Roark and again, I wasn't really a part of that piece but yet I was still kind of
16 within the area. You know, the circle and listening to the questions and uh, but
17 really wasn't participating, if you know what mean. Um, then uh, then they came
18 up and said, "Hey, we gotta passenger haul emission" so uh, it's like, okay. And
19 then uh, it took -- it took about oh, a good 30 minutes I would say, from the time
20 we knew of the mission, uh, for the uh, for Sean uh, to uh, really develop the plan,
21 you know get the real -- get the overall concept of what we were doing and
22 developed a plan on how we were gonna do it.
23

24 You know, and essentially what it was is we were gonna move um, some uh, individuals
25 from uh, the top of the mountain, which we found out was helispot 44. And we
26 were gonna move 'em down to uh, another helispot which was down near the
27 highway by the river. Uh, by the Trinity River where they would be loaded up in
28 trucks and moved uh -- uh, to the ICP or -- I don't know where they were gonna
29 move 'em to. And uh, we didn't uh -- let's see, I can't remember if -- I think we
30 knew that there was gonna be about -- somewhere between three and five trips,
31 somewhere in there. Um, the plan was -- is uh, um, we were gonna take um 12 of
32 our helitac crew and we were gonna place six of them at helispot 44 to -- to brief
33 the individuals that were getting on the helicopter. Um, you know, seating, how
34 to work the seatbelts, how to get in and out of the helicopter. What was the
35 primary entry and exit. Where the fire extinguishers were, first aid kits, um, you
36 know, just loading, our helitac, those six individuals would load -- would guide
37 the individuals in and specifically tell them what seat they were in and then uh,
38 they would also uh, load all of those individuals gear, backpacks, chain saws, any
39 of that kind of stuff. So, they all approached the heli -- let's see, I don't want to
40 jump ahead of myself here. but anyway that was the overall plan. The six
41 individuals that we put in at the bottom -- and I can't recall the -- what helispot
42 that was, um, 37 or something like that. I can't recall. But -- and I'm gonna -- I'll
43 call it 37 just so that it helps me try to remember here. um --
44

45 KELIHER: 36.
46

1 MR. COULTAS: Was it -- okay, 36. uh, so we were um, gonna put the other six
2 individuals down at helispot 36 that their purpose was, was once we landed they
3 would open the door, download the passengers, move them away from the
4 helicopter and uh, and then uh, download all of their equipment. Get it off the
5 helicopter, resecure all the seatbelts, make sure that everything was secure in the
6 back of the helicopter, close the door, give us the thumbs up, that we were clear to
7 depart and then we would depart. So that was the overall plan of uh -- of what we
8 would be doing once the uh, transports were completed, then we would return
9 back to Trinity and that would be end of mission. So um, that was the plan as we
10 knew it before we departed uh, the helibase.

11
12 So uh, we all agreed to that. um, again, Jim was evaluating Roark so uh, you know, it
13 was important that we looked at our numbers and made sure all that was good.
14 Uh, Jim confirmed that, you know, our load count numbers were good. They
15 were based on uh, 6,030 degrees. That's what uh -- those were the numbers we
16 were using. Um, so we loaded up the 12 individuals, uh, Jim was on intercom
17 um, and none of the other individuals were um, in the back. And uh, so Roark
18 and I went through the checklist and got the helicopter started. And uh, go the uh
19 -- everybody secure in the back from Jim. And uh, we departed the uh, Trinity
20 Helibase. The plan was -- is we were gonna -- with the twelve individuals
21 onboard we were gonna fly up to helispot 44 and we were gonna look at BLZ
22 because we had never landed in there before. And had never been up there. Even
23 though they told us it was plenty big enough for us to get in there, we just wanted
24 to make absolutely sure that it was. Uh, before we committed ourselves to
25 actually conducting the mission.

26
27 So, we flew up to 44, we found it. uh, we flew around it at high altitude, a couple of 100
28 feet at least, maybe even higher. Uh, 300 feet, probably -- I would say in a left
29 hand orbit. I would say we flew over it maybe -- gosh, seven times at least. And
30 uh, we were going through our size suitability barriers, approach, termination, any
31 other safety considerations. And uh, determining the winds and uh -- and then
32 also looking at our temperature and our altitude. To make sure you know, that we
33 fell within the bounds of our load calc and everything was gonna be good. Uh,
34 we all agreed that it was -- that it met the criteria for uh, that we could get in there
35 and we could perform the mission. So we departed 44 and went down to 36. um,
36 and I was responsible for manipulating the GPS -- program the GPS and all that
37 kind of stuff. Program -- make it so we had the right frequencies in the radios and
38 uh, so we -- we had uh, punched back in 36 and we were heading down to -- down
39 to it. well, there was some confusion in that we were given the wrong latlong for
40 36. It was a few miles off. And uh, and we -- but we knew that it was down near
41 the river. Near the road, but the latlong that they gave us took us south of the
42 river and back into some -- back into the mountains, back into the woods a few
43 miles and you know, when we got to the spot, there is nothing there.

44
45 So, uh, we climbed back, started heading back to the river and we're just making calls in
46 the blind and we got -- we started talking to the individuals and they said, "Hey,

1 yeah, we heard you fly by and uh, so head back up to the river and you know,
2 come down stream or something” so anyway, they vectored us back in and we
3 found the -- the helispot -- helispot 36. and uh, so we started flying around 36.
4 uh, again, doing a high area recon, size, suitability, barriers, approach, termination
5 and uh, we had determined that it was plenty big enough for us to get in there and
6 vehicles weren't too close. There was a little road that um -- the landing site was
7 kind of up on a little bit of a -- a knoll or whatever. And, there was a -- a road that
8 was just off the nose of the helicopter but it was low, maybe 10 feet or so, 15 feet
9 and uh, they had uh -- and it went up to an intersection and they had individuals
10 there that had closed off the road and all of that kind of stuff. Um, so we uh, we
11 landed and the first six individuals got out of the helicopter. And uh, we tidied
12 everything back up. We ran our checklist oh, and when we landed we pulled the
13 throttles back ACS off, beeper trim on 'cause we knew it was gonna be a little
14 while before everybody -- to download and um, so uh -- they got out. The
15 identified individuals got out. They closed the door. Um, gave us a thumbs up
16 and uh, Jim uh, said we were ready in the back. Gave us a thumbs up for
17 everybody back there.

18
19 So we spooled her back up, beeper trim off, ACS on. Um, and uh, and then off we
20 departed, 36 back up to 44. [CLEARING THROAT], We started -- I can't
21 remember if it was at this point here where we started talking about fuel. Um, but
22 we knew because we had to -- we spent a lot of time up at 44 orbiting around 44.
23 and the uh -- little bit of the -- uh, the uh, problem we had finding 36, we'd
24 burned a little bit more fuel than what we had anticipated. Uh, so I can't
25 remember if it was here where we started talking about -- they were talking about
26 how many -- we were gonna make uh, five turns. And we looked and -- man, I
27 don't know if we're gonna be able to make five turns. It's gonna be close. I think
28 that's about what we were -- our thought process was at this time. It's gonna be
29 close. So we thought, okay, you know, we got plenty of fuel to do -- for -- you
30 know, fuel anyway.

31
32 So we departed at 36, went back up to 44. did a high area recon, confirmed everything,
33 looking at the winds. Um, and then uh, set up for the approach. And uh, shot the
34 approach to -- they had a -- a pink ribbon on the ground about where they wanted
35 us to land. Um, there was a pretty good size stand of trees off to the right front. It
36 was kind of a little rocky area to the front area. There was a -- a line of trees
37 down the left hand side and it kind of curved around to our front. And on the left
38 hand side, that's where the uh, the individuals whom we were talking to on the
39 radio, that's where they were hunkered down. Over in this tree line back over
40 here to our left and a little bit to our left rear and the winds were kind of blowing
41 at our -- what I thought was our one o'clock, two o'clock coming across like that.
42 so when we shot the approach, and -- again we were probably about 10, 15 feet --
43 the dust -- we were looking -- we were anticipating the, you know, dust. And uh,
44 so we -- because -- I'm gonna back up on ya. When we first did our initial uh,
45 with the 12 individuals when we went up to 44, we were looking at it thinking, it
46 might be a little dusty. There was a helicopter that was in the vicinity. We got

1 with Air Attack and asked if they could drop some water up there on it for us for
2 dust abatement. But I don't know how many drops that he made up there for us.
3 You know, three or four. Uh, but then it really didn't hit it in the really dusty spot
4 that we wanted it in.
5

6 So anyway, now we're -- we backshoot the approach. We get down to maybe it was
7 about 20 feet or so. Dust is starting to come. We get a little closer to the ground;
8 it's really, really getting dusty. And Roark says, "Man, this is -- this is pretty bad.
9 It's pretty dusty" and then, about that time, the uh, individual on the radio in the
10 tree says, "Hey, can you guys go around, you know, you're just blowing us out
11 here" and "It's really, really dusty". Said, "Yeah, no problem" so we pulled in
12 power, cleared the trees and you know, started going around. So went a couple
13 more times looking at it. And then we saw that, kind of up the hill a little bit and
14 to the right there was kind of a little rocky area where the dust didn't appear to be
15 that bad. So, uh, we thought, you know, hey, we could try it up in here, okay,
16 sure, yeah, give it a shot. So uh, again it was away from the pink ribbon where
17 they wanted us to land. So we set it all up and uh, shot the approach. Got up in
18 there and we landed and it was not as dusty. It was -- it was much better. Got it
19 on the ground. Uh, pulled the throttles back to 100 percent. Beeper trim on,
20 AFCS was confirmed off and then the individuals got out of the helicopter.
21

22 So this also created a little bit of delay and we actually burned a little bit more fuel than
23 we anticipated. [CLEARING THROAT], This -- here's where we confirmed that
24 uh, the altitude and the temperature, um, is 5,700 feet and it was 22 degrees. So
25 we knew then that obviously that temperature and that altitude was less than what
26 we had planned for. Um, so our numbers were good. As long as we stayed below
27 our 6,000 and 30 degrees we were -- our numbers were good. And uh, Jim
28 agreed, Roark agreed and I agreed, so -- and uh, so the -- our six guys, they get
29 out of the helicopter. Um, it takes a little while because they've gotta go now and
30 brief the first individuals that we're putting on the helicopter, which we really
31 didn't anticipate that either in the fuel planning. Um, I mean we had -- we did
32 have a reserve and that kind of stuff but it was just more time. And uh, so, all of
33 that, they get the first uh, load of individuals loaded on the helicopter.
34 Everybody's strapped in and uh, all the equipment was loaded. Doors closed,
35 individuals were walking away, they turned and they give me the thumbs up,
36 everything's clear on the outside. And then uh -- and then Jim um, was to check
37 everybody on the inside one last time. He said, "We're ready to go in the back".
38 Got the throttles back up, beeper trim off, AFCS on. Did our before takeoff. And
39 uh, and we -- we departed out of there with the first load of individuals. Um,
40 power was good. Uh, you know the wind was -- was uh, a help. I figured the
41 winds were somewhere around three to five knots, kind of out that direction. Off
42 the nose of the helicopter. Helicopter being here, the winds were out in here I
43 figured.
44

45 Stand of trees to the right. Kind of the way the trees were around to the -- to the front.
46 Our departure was up and then kind of slightly to the right and then just kind of

1 get her flying and then, you know, off with -- of the mountain we would go and
2 uh, again, paying particular attention to the trees on the right. We departed, went
3 down to 36. did a higher recon again and uh, set up for the approach. The
4 approach was the same approach direction that we had previously done. Uh,
5 everything remained the same at 36. shot the approach, landed, um, everything
6 was good. Uh, the uh -- the -- our helitac crew, the individuals we put on the
7 ground, hoping -- they were waiting -- I give them the thumbs up. They approach
8 the helicopter, uh, they uh, open the door and then, you know, motion to the
9 individuals, passengers, and everybody started to depart the helicopter. Uh, they
10 formed a single file line and then they had uh -- and I can't remember if it was
11 one or two of the helitac crew but they moved the passengers away from the
12 helicopter, outside of the disc and there was a vehicle, a truck parked probably
13 about -- I would say at least 50 yards maybe. Maybe not -- like 35 yards or so.
14 And it was kind of off the helipad um, on another dirt trail or something that went
15 down to that road that I previously talked about.
16

17 So they all moved out over to there. And then the uh, helitac crew downloaded all of the
18 equipment, chain saws, backpacks, all their stuff that they had had, and they piled
19 it kind of -- the right main gear is about here, off my right about six feet or so.
20 And they -- they stacked it just outside of that another few feet. So they didn't
21 hump it out from underneath the helicopter, they just piled it right there, waiting
22 for us to depart then they could come back in and get their gear. So uh, they
23 closed the door, um, our helitac crew uh, departed the aircraft area from under the
24 disk. Went back over to the passengers, you know gave us the thumbs up. So we
25 ran a checklist, got everything spooled back up. At this time it was -- it was
26 Roark, myself and Jim were the only three individuals on the helicopter. We
27 departed 36, went back up to 44 and did the -- made another trip. Now we're
28 starting to look at fuel. Uh, becoming an issue thinking that -- we got dark
29 coming and uh, dark was still another hour and 20 minutes away I think at this
30 time. Um, we knew we had, you know, these multiple trips to do. And uh,
31 because of the delay in finding 36, the uh, the extensiveness of the -- of the recon
32 that we did at helispot 44 when we first got up there. The uh, missed approach
33 that we did -- had at 44 because of the dust out and all that. we you know, we
34 knew -- we were thinking we -- probably for safety sake at some point will
35 probably -- during the middle here we're gonna have to go back and get some gas.
36

37 So uh, we made an -- and I believe this is when we really started talking about it. and uh,
38 so we went back up to 44. grabbed another um, another turn of -- of people.
39 Flew 'em back down to helispot 36. everything was the same. Uh, the departure
40 out of 44, had plenty of power, um, you know, no -- nothing notable about
41 coming out of there. Uh, nor was there anything really notable about the landing
42 back into helispot 36 with the second load of people. Same drill, uh, everything
43 was exactly the same as the first, as far as procedurally goes. Um, once we were
44 on the ground at 36 that's when we said, you know what, we were looking at fuel.
45 And we still felt like, we had enough fuel to do -- to make these other three turns
46 but it was like, you know, we're probably gonna be pushing our reserve. You

1 know, and we said, you know, fuel is only 15 minutes away. You know what, it's
2 not worth it. Lets just go get some gas. We've got time to do these next three
3 turns. Everybody knows the procedures now. So the uh, the second -- the second
4 turn of individuals was a little quicker than the first turn. And uh, you know, so
5 we felt like we were starting to get the system down. You know, everybody was
6 comfortable with what we were doing. So we went back to Trinity. We landed,
7 shut down and uh, and took on some fuel. Uh, we took on um, I believe we put
8 1,100 pounds in the forward and the aft and we put 100 pounds in the main. And
9 that put us at 2,300 pounds of fuel.

10
11 I think that's what it was, it was right in there. And uh -- but our load count was planned
12 at 2,400 pounds of fuel. So we knew we still had -- we were below our load calc
13 numbers. And uh, for safety. So, uh, then uh, so now we're shut down. The
14 check ride was -- Jim said, "Okay, here the check ride is complete. Roark, you
15 did good". He said, uh -- Jim says, uh, he goes uh, "Well hey" -- how did this go.
16 Uh, "I'll just stay along with you guys if you don't mind. And I'll just act as your
17 crew member in the back since we've got -- we've got a uh -- a routine going on
18 here and we'll just get this done and then when we're done, we'll come back
19 Roark and we'll do the paperwork and uh -- and you know, get your card updated
20 with your uh, 135" and uh -- and Roark said, you know, "Hey Jim, thank you very
21 much man that would really help us out" 'cause you know, now we're -- we've
22 got probably just enough time to do the three turns and get back uh, before
23 pumpkin time. And uh, so Roark said, you know, "Jim, thank you, we really
24 appreciate that. that would really help us out". "No problem" so we get it fired
25 back up. Everybody -- I drank a bottle of water and uh, I'm not sure what Roark
26 and Jim did but uh, if they drink anything or any of that. but uh, so we got it fired
27 back up. We went up to helispot 44 and uh, did a high area recon, confirmed
28 everything. The winds were the same. Uh, everything was good. Shot the
29 approach. Nothing notable about the approach. We landed right back to the little
30 rocky area. Everything was good. Um, no issues.

31
32 And then uh, so we loaded up the uh, next individuals. That went relatively quick. Uh,
33 'cause we had the system down now. And uh, the uh, helitac crew closed the
34 door. Uh, walked out from underneath the rotor system, gave me the thumbs up.
35 Uh, Jim just reconfirmed everybody was secured in the back of the helicopter. He
36 uh -- he said, "Everything's secured back here. we're ready in the back" and then
37 we went through the checklist, throttles, beeper trim, AFCS, uh, 36 was set and
38 uh, uh, radios frequencies. And uh, so then we uh, Roark pulled in, came up to a
39 hover. Checked the power, power was good. Um, and then pulled in more
40 power. We started the descent and uh, had a -- nothing notable about any of this.
41 The climb was good. You know, we had plenty of power. And then uh, started to
42 nose the helicopter over. Felt the nose tip a little bit, just like normal. Everything
43 is normal to this point and then all of a sudden I felt the nose dip again and it
44 dipped harder this time. And uh, and then the aircraft started to settle and we
45 weren't -- we weren't climbing now we weren't really getting any more forward
46 airspeed. And uh -- and then I -- I sensed the uh -- I could hear the rotor RPM's

1 start to decrease. And I was outside the bubble, outside my window, clearing the
2 trees, the stand of trees that was on my right. And uh --

3

4 FEMALE VOICE: [Unintelligible].

5

6 MR. COULTAS: And uh, so I'm watching the trees. I heard the rotor start to decrease.
7 I came inside, I looked at the uh, rotor RPM and I called out 103 percent. And uh,
8 and so now Roark's trying to get her to fly. Trying to work her forward but we're
9 still descending. Now, we start to descend down below the trees now. And then
10 uh -- and I could feel the rotor -- hear the rotor RPM decrease some more. I
11 called out 100 percent and uh -- and then Roark -- Roark said something, you
12 know, I can't really -- I can't recall exactly what he said, uh, but then um, and
13 then he started -- started tap -- we started hitting the tree. And it was -- I think it
14 was out on the -- about the ten or 11 o'clock area. Um, I don't think it was to my
15 right rear because we were moving forward. And again, I'm in and I'm out, I'm
16 in and I'm out. And I'm watching and the throttles all the way up and uh, and --
17 but I did notice debris, sticks and you know, trees, that kind of debris and the
18 aircraft started to do, you know the shutter back and forth, back and forth. And
19 then uh, and then I said -- I said, "Oh, fuck" and then uh, we started settling in
20 more. And -- and I knew -- I knew at that point there, that we were gonna crash.
21 That's when I knew that we -- 'cause there was no place to land in there. It was
22 real steep, it was lots of timber. Uh, there was no suitable landing area for a large
23 helicopter. The only suitable landing area was the one that we just took off from
24 and it's behind us now.

25

26 So I knew at that point there we were gonna crash. And that's where I go black. I
27 don't remember anything after that. um, I don't remember impacting the ground.
28 I don't remember any sounds, uh, any noises, um, I don't re -- I don't remember
29 nothing. I don't know how I got out of my seat. I don't know how I got out of
30 the helicopter. Um, I didn't see anybody, I didn't hear anybody. Um, I -- that's
31 where I go black. I can't -- and I've -- for the last couple of weeks I've been
32 trying and trying to remember and I can't. [CRYING]

33

34 KELIHER: It's okay. We're piecing together what we have too.

35

36 MR. COULTAS: So, [SIGH].

37

38 KELIHER: So what's your next memory?

39

40 MR. COULTAS: So I remember then being out of the helicopter. And I remember being
41 on fire. And uh, I remember trying to put myself out. Excuse me.

42

43 KELIHER: You want a minute?

44

45 MALE VOICE: Let's take a break.

46

1 FEMALE VOICE: You wanna take a walk?
2
3 MR. COULTAS: Yeah.
4
5 MALE VOICE: We'll stop these. I'm stopped.
6
7 [BREAK]
8
9 MALE VOICE: You there Jim?
10
11 MALE VOICE: Yeah, when he gets back to talk to you again, you might [unintelligible]
12 a little closer.
13
14 MALE VOICE: Okay, we'll put it closer to you. They're still in here they're just --
15
16 MALE VOICE: [Unintelligible].
17
18 MALE VOICE: No problem.
19
20 MALE VOICE: Alright, we're recording.
21
22 MR. COULTAS: Okay, so uh, like I said before they uh -- the last thing I remember was
23 uh, being out of the helicopter and uh, I was on my feet and I was on fire and it
24 was burning back up through my legs. Um, so I uh -- I started beating on my
25 legs. Uh, I think I even fell to the ground, I rolled around. I got my flight suit
26 down and -- uh, down around my boots and uh, and then the fire was out. Um,
27 uh, I think I stood back up or -- I'm pretty sure I stood back up. Um, and then I
28 started hearing voices and people getting closer to me. Um, and then uh, um, I
29 mostly recall -- there was about two or three people that got to me but I mostly
30 recall um, a girl that uh, she got to me and she just started talking to me. And uh,
31 and I recognized the voice 'cause she was part of our helitac crew. And uh, that --
32 she's Jessica Huntoon who uh, who I really remember. And she talked to me for
33 the next 30 or 40 minutes until the Medivac got in there. But uh, so I remember I
34 turned around and I looked at the helicopter and I saw it was completely on fire.
35 And uh, smokes bellowing out of it and it exploded and I remember saying, you
36 know, we need to get further away.
37
38 So we moved a little bit further away from the helicopter and then uh, Jessica uh, laid me
39 down on the ground and uh, she started talking to me. She just kept telling me,
40 "Hey, Bill it's gonna be okay. You're okay" you know, "Everything is fine".
41 Well, let me back up. When I was standing up, uh, before they got to me, after I
42 had put myself out. I looked down at my left arm and I saw that my -- the skin
43 and everything was just hanging off my left arm. I looked at the top of my left
44 hand and I saw all the skin was pretty much off my hand and I could see the bones
45 in the top of my hand. I kind of rotated it over and looked at the palm and again I
46 just saw more bone and flesh hanging and I -- that's kind of when I knew at that

1 point there that I just -- I just really hurt myself. Uh, didn't know the extent of the
2 rest of my injuries but uh, I knew my left arm was really messed up, my left hand.
3 And uh, so then they get to me and Jessica laid me down on the ground. And uh,
4 she's just talking to me. She's telling me everything's going to be okay. Bill
5 you're okay. You know, you're -- you've got a little bit of injuries but you're
6 gonna be okay. And uh, and then I started getting really, really cold, uh, very
7 cold, uncontrollable shaking and I'm freezing. And I told Jessica, I said, "Jessica
8 I'm cold". So she started barking and uh, they brought uh, I don't know what --
9 blankets or jackets or something over and they -- they covered me all up and I --
10 with these -- with whatever it was. And I remember starting to get a little warm.
11 And uh -- and then somebody brought down a backboard. She said, "Bill we
12 gotta put you on a backboard. We gotta get you up the hill" and uh, I was like,
13 "Okay". So they uh -- they kind of rolled me and lifted me and they got me on
14 this backboard.

15
16 Um, I do remember it was pretty steep. Um, you know, pretty rough terrain. Uh, but
17 they got me on. Uh, they strapped me down. And uh, four of 'em started
18 carrying me up the side of the hill. Uh, we got partially way up the hill and
19 somebody slipped or something and uh, they dropped me. And uh, I kind of slid
20 off the backboard and onto my left arm. And uh -- and I remember that just being
21 extremely painful, onto my arm. And uh, Jessica, she's saying, "Bill, I'm sorry,
22 I'm so sorry" you know, and I'm like, "You know, it's okay" and uh, so they get
23 me back on the backboard. They get me up to the top of the hill. And uh, she's
24 telling me -- again, she's just reassuring me that everything's going to be okay.
25 You know, "Bill you're okay" well I kept asking -- I kept asking about the rest of
26 the guys, you know. And uh, nobody would tell me anything other than, "Bill it's
27 okay". Uh, I -- can't really remember thinking much about it. But uh, then she
28 said, uh, "Hey, Medivac's gonna be here in a little while". I was complaining
29 about being cold. They covered me up. Uh, and then I asked -- I told Jessica -- I
30 started getting real sleepy. And I wanted to go to sleep and I asked Jessica, I said,
31 you know, I told her, I said, "Hey, I just wanna lay here and go to sleep for a little
32 while until the Medivac gets here" and she got real stern with me. She almost
33 kind of yelled at me. She said -- she started going, "No, don't you go to sleep.
34 You stay right here with me" and uh, I was okay, well, you know, you don't have
35 to get mad about it. and uh, she uh, she just kept talking to me.

36
37 So I stayed awake and uh, we just started talking about anything. Um, I can't really
38 recall exactly what we uh -- what we talked about. But I -- you know, it was just
39 stuff, uh, she knew that we road motorcycles so, you know, we were gonna go
40 riding and you know, do all this -- just -- I don't know. She just kept assuring me
41 that everything was gonna be okay. So then I remember -- I remember hearing a
42 helicopter out in the distance. And then she said, "Okay, your Medivac's
43 inbound, it'll be here on the ground in just a few minutes". I just go, "Okay" and
44 uh, and then I remember the noise getting louder and louder. And then, I
45 remember her lying over the top of me to shield me from the rotor wash from the
46 helicopter. The aircraft landed. She said, "Bill we're gonna load ya". They lifted

1 me up. They slid me in. I believe it was the left rear side of the helicopter. And
2 uh, uh, got me in, got me strapped down. Uh, I believe there was two nurses on
3 the inside. Uh, you know, they asked me my name, my age, uh, that kind of stuff.
4 So I was able to talk with them. Um, I don't remember much about the flight
5 from uh, from the accident site to wherever we landed. I have -- I do remember
6 uh, landing uh, some place. And uh, they uh -- they got me out of the helicopter
7 and they put me on a -- it was a wheeled gurney and they started wheeling me
8 down. I recognize it to be a sidewalk because of the grooves in the sidewalk and
9 the wheels would go chachook, chachook, chachook. I remember hearing that.
10 and I remember it being a little dark. You know, it was kind of almost nighttime
11 now. And uh, and then we went through -- I remember hearing these doors open.
12 Electric doors and uh, it got real bright going down this hallway.
13

14 And I remember the bright lights and then uh, wasn't too much longer after that, they
15 made a right turn and went into a room and it was really bright. And it was chaos.
16 There was probably about I don't know how many people were in there but it
17 seemed like there was a lot. And uh, they're -- they're barking out orders and all
18 kinds of stuff. And then I remember um, a guy -- well I assume he was a doctor.
19 Uh, kind of got down and got close to my face and he said, "Do you know your
20 name?" and I said, "Yeah" and I gave him my name. he was asking me how old I
21 was. He said, "Do you remember what happened?" and I said, "Yeah" you know,
22 "I was in a crash. A helicopter crash". And then uh, and then that's it. I don't
23 remember anything after that. Uh, the next thing I do remember -- really
24 remember was uh, waking up in the ICU uh, and -- at U.C. Davis and my wife
25 was there and that's -- kind of remember bits and pieces when I was unconscious.
26 People would come into my room and you know, "Hey Bill" but you know, I
27 can't really recall anything -- any specifics. Um, for that time that I was -- that I
28 was out.
29

30 KELIHER: And then from there until now, what's been happening?
31

32 MR. COULTAS: Uh, lots of wound care. Uh, extreme pain. Well, okay, so uh, I wake
33 up. And uh, my wife is there. And uh, uh, I remember just being in lots and lots
34 of pain. I had all these hoses and cords and IV's and all this stuff all over me.
35 Had no idea what all this stuff was. Uh, I remember Chris talking to me and
36 telling me, "Hey, you got life support on you" you know, uh -- "You got -- just be
37 still, don't talk" and uh, you know, "Try not to move" and any of that kind of
38 stuff. Um, and then uh, they started removing -- they started removing like -- I
39 think they took off the life-support first. Uh, but they wouldn't let me talk for a
40 little while. I could -- I don't know -- remember --
41

42 MRS. COULTAS: Well actually they -- one of his IV's infected so we had to have a --
43

44 MR. COULTAS: Okay, okay. I don't remember it getting infected. I remember the
45 infection afterwards. I do remember --
46

1 MRS. COULTAS: That's a whole different --
2
3 MR. COULTAS: Oh, okay, well then -- I don't --
4
5 MRS. COULTAS: [LAUGH]
6
7 KELIHER: Just more there after what happened, of your recollection or did you talk to
8 anyone about the accident?
9
10 MR. COULTAS: No, I've been specifically told that I can't talk to anybody so we
11 haven't. I've been told that I can't read newspapers, which I haven't. um --
12
13 MRS. COULTAS: His TV was broken in his room --
14
15 MR. COULTAS: My TV didn't work in my room. Um --
16
17 MRS. COULTAS: [LAUGH], That was nice for me --
18
19 MR. COULTAS: No, I -- uh, I just remember -- okay and then I -- so I woke up. Then
20 the physical therapy -- I was awake for that day. Physical therapist came in. they asked
21 me if I wanted to get out of bed. And I was like, yeah, man, heck yeah. I wanna get out
22 of this bed. So they uh -- they got a bunch of stuff disconnected from me and uh --
23
24 MRS. COULTAS: What they did is unconnected it and put him on a roll away.
25
26 MR. COULTAS: So they had one of these little hand -- you know these little roller cart
27 dealios where you stand up next to it and it has wheels. So I remember uh,
28 getting myself out of the bed and that was really painful. And I stood up and the
29 whole world was spinning backwards and sideways and uh, it made me nauseous,
30 uh, but I stood there for about -- probably about 10 minutes.
31
32 MRS. COULTAS: I don't think you made it that long 'cause you were throwing up all
33 over the place.
34
35 MR. COULTAS: Okay, so uh, anyway, I uh -- I got back down in bed and they hooked
36 me all back up. And then uh, my stomach -- one of the other things I remember is
37 my stomach was huge. Uh, just this great big ball looking thing. I didn't even
38 really recognize my stomach. And uh, and then that night it was about 11 -- well,
39 then they pulled my catheter that day?
40
41 MRS. COULTAS: Catheter was another full week.
42
43 MR. COULTAS: Well then see I don't remember that. I'm -- I'm ate up here. because -
44 -
45
46 MRS. COULTAS: [LAUGH]

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MR. COULTAS: I remember they pulled my catheter and then I -- it was --

MRS. COULTAS: During this time he would remember us coming in, bits and pieces, but we would come in for breakfast and then they would completely deltoid and Fentinol for wound care. And when we would get to come back four and a half hours later he didn't remember that we had been there, ever.

MALE VOICE: That's [unintelligible].

MR. COULTAS: So maybe I don't --

MRS. COULTAS: I mean we would [unintelligible] and all of that but --

KELIHER: Your time and space continuum was a little off.

MR. COULTAS: Yeah, I'm all -- I'm all -- uh, I just remember a lot of pain. Um, mainly was uh -- when they cleaned my face and my ears and my neck, uh, four times a day. Um, they would shave -- they would shave all the skin off my neck and my face. That was extremely painful to the point where I would be screaming. And I would be begging for them to stop. And I was all jacked up on lots of Fentinol and Dilotin, uh, Methadone and the pain killers. And uh, and it still wasn't -- wasn't enough. Um, it really -- that's -- I mean short of, you know the first time I went poop and all those kinds of things. I really don't remember --

FEMALE VOICE: Big milestones. [LAUGH] --

MR. COULTAS: I really don't remember much else. Well -- I mean it was. I mean we can go down that -- 'cause that's when I really knew -- after I did that, that's when I knew -- I knew that I was gonna live. You know, up to that point uh, not knowing the extent of how bad I was hurt. And nobody would tell me any -- I kept asking, you know, hey, what's the stat -- you know, where's Roark? You know, where's every -- nobody would tell me anything. And uh, it wasn't until about day three or day four, that finally I got pissed off and I said, "Some -- goddamn it, somebody better talk to me and tell me something". And uh, so everybody quickly left the room and my wife came in and she told me that -- she told me that Roark didn't make it and uh, you know, some other individuals in the helicopter that didn't make it either. And uh, so that was the first time that I knew that anybody had died. And uh -- it was tough --

MRS. COULTAS: But we had to tell him four times. He still the next day would wake up and ask again and the next day would wake up and ask again.

MALE VOICE: Sure.

1 MRS. COULTAS: Which was why we put it off as long as we did. 'Cause we knew
2 when he couldn't remember breakfast to lunch, he wasn't gonna remember day-
3 to-day.
4

5 MR. COULTAS: I took -- I guess I took a shot to the head. Um, I was seeing double of
6 everything. Uh, I had some pretty good cuts and scraps right here on the side of
7 my eye. Um, I took a shot to the uh, chest, left side chest area. Um, they were
8 uh, pulling blood out of my lung. Uh, I did take a shot to my right knee. And
9 then it was extremely sore outside of the burn. Uh, bruised, you know, down to
10 the bone type of thing. I don't know what that's all about. Um, I got a problem
11 with my shoulder right now. Um, like a rotator cuff or something. But uh, yeah, I
12 don't -- I don't know how any of that happened or what.
13

14 KELIHER: Um, have you talked -- I know you're -- we couldn't get the message across
15 instantly to you. But have you -- and it's fine if you have, I just want to know.
16 Have you talked to anyone about the accident?
17

18 MR. COULTAS: No, other than you know, just like this right here with my wife, trying
19 to figure out what happened.
20

21 KELIHER: So you've run through the scenario a few times --
22

23 MR. COULTAS: Through my mind and you know, I try to -- you know, tell Chris, you
24 know --
25

26 MRS. COULTAS: We never had backed up on time. He always was concentrating on
27 that minute, I think --
28

29 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, from the time --
30

31 MRS. COULTAS: 'Cause I didn't know the backups -- I never thought about backing up
32 --
33

34 MR. COULTAS: I know there's been a lot of people that have been wanting at me, you
35 know and uh, um, media, a lot of media. And they were doing stupid things.
36 They would tell -- they would call into the nurse's station and tell them they were
37 family members. And they were trying to play all these little games and uh, you
38 know, people that would come in and you know --
39

40 MRS. COULTAS: He hasn't talked to any media. And I have actually used you as my
41 excuse. That we can't.
42

43 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, somebody called me yesterday, an insurance guy, uh, for
44 workers comp. I didn't know who this guy was. Uh, he wanted me to talk to him
45 about the accident yesterday. And I told him I couldn't -- I couldn't talk to

1 anybody until after I talked to you guys. So I mean, you know, we've tried to stay
2 with that. uh --

3
4 KELIHER: Do you know anything surrounding the accident, circumstances that aren't
5 your direct recollection?
6

7 MR. COULTAS: Like, what do you mean? I don't know.
8

9 KELIHER: Have you heard about how many fatalities there were?
10

11 MR. COULTAS: Yes, I have been -- I was told that uh, there was a total of nine
12 fatalities. Uh, I don't know the names of the individuals. Um, other than Jim and
13 Roark. And actually I take that back, I know one, uh, Matt Hammer, his dad had
14 called our house and -- mainly in support and just -- he uh, his was, you know, if
15 you guys need anything at all, he would -- he asked me if we had enough
16 firewood to get through the winter. He'd bring us firewood. You know, that kind
17 of stuff. But, I mean really no.
18

19 KELIHER: Okay --
20

21 MR. COULTAS: I don't think anything out of the ordinary. But -- I'm hoping that,
22 through all this, you can tell me what happened maybe. You know, I'm hoping
23 that at the end of this that maybe you can shed some light for me. And make me
24 feel a little better as I leave this room. I don't know if you have the latitude to do
25 that, but -- I'm hoping that through this, you know, I can learn something too.
26

27 KELIHER: Yeah, um, what I'm gonna do now is go through specific questions. Again,
28 they're comprised of just boiler plate questions that we ask during every accident,
29 along with some specifics of things that we've learned. Which is not to say that
30 all these are going to be leading you in a certain direction. That's not the
31 intention at all. it's just to try to get as much information, raw memory that you
32 have, that we can learn from -- so I'll start with the accident day of -- do you
33 remember what time you woke up?
34

35 MR. COULTAS: Mmm, what time did I get up? Uh, I usually get up about six. I mean
36 I'm pretty consistent when I'm on the road. Um, you know, I get up about the
37 same time every day. Make a pot of coffee. Flip on the news, you know, uh, I
38 usually uh -- take a dump and then you know -- and then uh, take a shower. Get
39 dressed so it was about six o'clock, six o'clock in the morning.
40

41 KELIHER: Okay, so morning after you take a shower, what's your procedure?
42

43 MR. COULTAS: Uh, pack my suitcase uh, and then meet uh, the other pilot out in the
44 parking lot at the car. And uh, I think we met that morning I want to say it was at,
45 7:25 was uh, link up with car time.
46

1 KELIHER: You pack your suitcase every night?
2
3 MR. COULTAS: We take it with us every day. Every morning, we clean out our -- we
4 keep our hotel room. We don't check out of our hotel room. But we take all of
5 our bags and everything with us. Because we don't know if we're coming back.
6
7 MR. TAYLOR: SOP.
8
9 MR. COULTAS: Uh-mm.
10
11 KELIHER: 7:25, meet up and then what did you do?
12
13 MR. COULTAS: Uh, we just drove straight up to the uh, helibase which was about a six
14 or seven mile drive, ah, maybe further, I don't know, 10 miles or so.
15
16 KELIHER: And then you arrive there --
17
18 MR. COULTAS: Arrive there, uh, unbutton the helicopter, start preflight. And then
19 mainly just do as much of the preflight as you can. Hopefully you can get it all
20 done and uh -- see that morning I believe we did get her all done. Then we
21 walked down, we did the morning briefing and uh, and then they were bringing
22 breakfast up to the helibase every morning. So we did the morning briefing and
23 then we were able to eat something and that's -- at the morning briefings where
24 we get our load calc numbers. So then we go back up to the trailer. Uh, our
25 numbers were the same that day as they were previous. So there was real -- no
26 changes to the uh -- to the load calc other than the date, you know, that kind of
27 thing. And uh --
28
29 KELIHER: How was the food they'd been serving?
30
31 MR. COULTAS: It was alright. I mean it was -- it was good.
32
33 KELIHER: So you guys weren't starving yourselves?
34
35 MR. COULTAS: No, no, no, I mean we're -- no, and that's one of the things about
36 working for the forest service is, I think they've got us -- I think they have a
37 regulation in that they don't want you to ever get hungry. 'Cause they feed ya all
38 the time, you know, you have more food than you know, you care to have.
39 Sometime, you know, it's just -- it's too much actually. You can't eat all your
40 lunchy, you know, that kind of thing. So, no, there's -- food was good there was
41 no problems.
42
43 KELIHER: First flight assignment of the day, you said you did water dropping.
44
45 MR. COULTAS: Yep.
46

1 KELIHER: Do you know what time you got there?
2
3 MR. COULTAS: What time did we get there? It was mid afternoon. Um, it was in the
4 mid afternoon time.
5
6 KELIHER: And on the conclusion of doing your water drop, how do you know that all
7 the water was out of the belly?
8
9 MR. COULTAS: A couple -- I mean there's a couple of ways. One, we have a quantity
10 indicator. When you release all your water it goes down to zero. Um, two, you
11 can feel it in the amount of power it's taking you to fly. Um, just, you know,
12 that's mainly it. uh, and you -- and three, I mean you're looking out the window
13 when you're dropping your water and you're holding the button. And you can see
14 the water go away and then you're still holding the button in and there's no water
15 no more, you could, you know, relatively assume that all the waters out of the
16 tank. And then the doors close automatically once you release the switch. So, a
17 couple of different ways.
18
19 KELIHER: Is there any possibility that there could be water left over in the tank that you
20 wouldn't know about?
21
22 MR. COULTAS: No, no. No because even if -- no, there wouldn't be.
23
24 KELIHER: Okay. You touched on this but when exactly in the -- not necessarily time
25 wise or anything. But when in relation to your day did you know that you were
26 going to go to H44 to pick up passengers?
27
28 MR. COULTAS: It was probably around four o'clock, 4:30 probably somewhere in
29 there. 'Cause then at -- once we knew we were going to do that mission, well --
30 we knew we were doing the mission but we didn't know exactly where it was at.
31 So maybe the correct answer would be, we knew we were doing the mission
32 probably about four or 4:30 but might have been a little bit later that we were
33 actually going to 44. But it wouldn't of been too much later 'cause it all part of
34 the planning, uh, you know, developing the plan before we ever even went up
35 there.
36
37 KELIHER: So was there -- a gap of time after the water drops and you get back where
38 there was down time?
39
40 MR. COULTAS: Oh, yeah, yeah, from the time we finished the water drop until the time
41 we picked up this next assignment was -- geez, probably a good two or three
42 hours at least.
43
44 KELIHER: Okay. And you already answered this. You had not been to H44 before.
45
46 MR. COULTAS: No --

1
2 KELIHER: Had you been to H36?
3
4 MR. COULTAS: No, never been there either.
5
6 KELIHER: When you first were going into 44 --
7
8 MR. COULTAS: Yes.
9
10 KELIHER: You said that fire activity was moderate to light. Can you describe the ash in
11 the area?
12
13 MR. COULTAS: Um, the -- what I was talking about earlier, in the fire, that was when I
14 -- when I was dropping water on that -- that previous division. 44 was no - wasn't
15 near the area that we were dropping water on. Earlier in the day. The ash in the
16 area -- uh, I don't recall any ash in the area. Um, I mean around the helispot it
17 didn't really -- I mean it seemed like there was some fire and stuff out there but
18 there wasn't -- I mean I don't recall any ash being in the area.
19
20 KELIHER: So throughout the whole day describe the smoke activity and the ash in the
21 areas -- anything abnormal?
22
23 MR. COULTAS: No, no, it was actually -- for that particular area and what it had been
24 doing in the previous days and weeks, it was actually light. Visibility was very
25 good. Um, uh, much better than it had been in previous, so --
26
27 KELIHER: And -- I'm going to skip forward a little bit. Prior to the accident do you
28 remember or recall what you called out for the weather?
29
30 MR. COULTAS: What I called out for the weather?
31
32 KELIHER: Yeah, as far as the OAT, do you remember what it was?
33
34 MR. COULTAS: Uh, 22 degrees when we were up on the hill. 'Cause I did look down
35 once we were on the ground and we had landed at 44. I did look at and saw 5,700
36 feet and then I looked up and saw 22 degrees and uh -- and then just confirmed
37 that, that our load calc was based on 30 and 6,000. our numbers are good. And
38 then we were below the 2,400 pounds that we had calculated on the load calc for
39 fuel. At that point there, we were around uh, 1,900 pounds of fuel or something
40 like that. I mean I just kind of glanced at it but I knew that we were below the
41 fuel because we never took on that much fuel back at refuel. So, I knew we were
42 below it.
43
44 KELIHER: You already described the first passenger flights from H44 but I'm going to
45 ask for some specifics. And if you don't remember, just --
46

1 MR. COULTAS: Okay.
2
3 KELIHER: That's fine. Do you remember what the NG speeds were?
4
5 MR. COULTAS: No.
6
7 KELIHER: Main rotor speed, do you remember?
8
9 MR. COULTAS: Um, you know, we normally fly -- set it at 106 percent. I mean it's not
10 uncommon for it to droop down to 105 or 104. You know, uh, but no, I don't
11 remember specifically what it was when we were coming out of the hole.
12 Nothing abnormal, everything was normal.
13
14 KELIHER: Okay, the gauges did they ever reach their engine topping speed?
15
16 MR. COULTAS: Um --
17
18 KELIHER: At H44?
19
20 MR. COULTAS: Not that I recall. Again everything was normal on the previous lifts.
21 Uh, sounds performance, uh, she did exactly what she uh -- what the book said
22 she would do.
23
24 KELIHER: So when you say that you experienced droop of a few percent, do you
25 remember if you did on the flight—or not 'cause it's such a non event?
26
27 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, it's such --
28
29 KELIHER: Do you remember any of the engine torques percent
30
31 MR. COULTAS: I remember uh, 106 is rotor RP -- uh, I remember when we did the uh -
32 - on the uh -- on the incident, we picked up and we were seeing about 72 -- 74
33 percent when we were hovering. And that's when I called out power was good.
34 Because we know that we need uh, a minimum of 15 percent torque from max
35 torque available versus power required or max power available versus power
36 required. To transition from in-ground affect to out of ground affect. So, we had
37 20 uh, we figured that our uh, our max torque was 96 percent, 94 to 96 percent.
38 So, we had plenty of power. Um, to transition to in-ground to out of ground.
39
40 KELIHER: From doing the load calcs prior, you figured the 94 to 96?
41
42 MR. COULTAS: Uh-mm, yep, yep.
43
44 KELIHER: Okay, and then you had attained 72 and 74?
45

1 MR. COULTAS: 72 uh, 72/74, that was when we picked it up to a hover, in-ground
2 affect.
3
4 KELIHER: Okay --
5
6 MR. COULTAS: And then -- and then looked at it. Because that's really where you
7 make your determination of am I going to commit to this takeoff or am I not. And
8 if you don't have the power to transition from in-ground affect to out of ground
9 affect then you terminate it. you put it right back down on the ground.
10
11 KELIHER: So those are the numbers you got for your [unintelligible] when you were
12 first departing?
13
14 MR. COULTAS: That's when I would -- say that again?
15
16 KELIHER: The first two passenger flights were 72 and 74 --
17
18 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, they were all right in there. Um, it's a -- it's a analog gauged.
19 So when you pull it in, if you get any kind of wind or if you mix any kind of
20 peddle input, the gauge sits there and moves on you. So you kind of look at it and
21 you -- you know, you do your best um, to interpret what it's saying, but yeah, they
22 were always the same.
23
24 KELIHER: Okay.
25
26 MR. COULTAS: 72/74 percent. [TO WIFE] I'm trying honey but my leg is killing me.
27 I'm sorry.
28
29 KELIHER: And your primary job as second in command was to do what during those
30 flights?
31
32 MR. COULTAS: Uh, monitor systems, um, clear the -- the right side of the helicopter.
33 Um, you know, uh -- power management. Insure that he doesn't pull too much
34 power. Uh, if you go above your 94 percent then all -- the rotor will start
35 drooping. Um, systems managing -- or monitoring the systems. Um, uh, power
36 matching, matching the torques, throttles. Um, making sure that the passengers
37 were uh -- the coordination between our ground crew and the passengers -- that
38 the passengers were loaded. The aircraft was ready for flight. I get the thumbs up
39 from the ground crew. Then I come back inside the cockpit and I say, "Okay,
40 we're ready" you know, "We're clear on the outside, ready for takeoff". Um, you
41 know, those types of things are my responsibilities.
42
43 KELIHER: Will you describe the refueling at Trinity.
44
45 MR. COULTAS: Uh, we came in, we landed. We shut down. They uh, drove the fuel
46 truck down to the pad. They -- being the fuel truck driver. Um, the helitac crew

1 pre-positioned individuals, helitac individuals. Uh, manning fire extinguishers,
2 one near the fuel truck. One off the nose of the helicopter. Um, I drank some
3 water. Um, I know uh, Jim -- Jim had said, as we were spooling down, while we
4 were still on the intercom, hey, you know, check rides complete. Roark he did a
5 real good job. Um, and then that's when we uh -- Jim said that he would just stay
6 on board, act as the passenger -- crew member for us. And then we'd do
7 paperwork -- Jim would do the paperwork for Roark when we got back. Uh, you
8 know, earlier in the evening and uh -- you know, Roark said, "Hey Jim" you
9 know, "Thanks a lot, appreciate it" you know, "You don't have far to drive do
10 you?" and Jim said, "Oh, no, I just live down here in Reni, it's not too far here". I
11 think he said -- I think he said it's just around a half an hour from here. So uh,
12 um, it was uh -- there was no dilly dallying around, you know, 'cause we -- we
13 knew we had to get back up on the hill and we had three more turns to make. So,
14 you know, we wanted to get the fuel and get out.

15
16 KELIHER: Do you keep the power on, any kind of battery connected to power?
17

18 MR. COULTAS: No, um, the only time you do -- and yes, we did in this case because
19 we -- we monitor how much fuel is going onboard the aircraft. If you want to just
20 fill the tanks, then no you don't have to. But we did in this case here.
21

22 KELIHER: And you're doing that by gauges inside the cockpit?
23

24 MR. COULTAS: Yes, yep.
25

26 KELIHER: Okay, and who is doing that --
27

28 MR. COULTAS: Who did that?
29

30 KELIHER: It's okay, if you don't remember.
31

32 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, I -- you know, I don't recall 'cause we were all sitting there.
33 Roark was there, I was there. Jim was sitting right here. we're talking. The guys
34 got it plugged in and then we're watching um, I think -- I wanna say Roark did
35 'cause the switches are on his side of the cockpit. And then as were just sitting
36 there talking, you know, as soon as it got up to the 1,100 pounds, you know, shut
37 off that -- fuel going into that tank. And uh, and the center refuel, that's even
38 further on his side. I have to reach all the way across. Extend my left arm
39 completely and kind of bend way over to get to it. I wanna say -- I don't recall. I
40 wanna say Roark did it but I -- I can't recall specifically.
41

42 KELIHER: Did you ever do pressure fueling?
43

44 MR. COULTAS: That's what we were doing.
45

46 KELIHER: You were doing pressure fueling?

1
2 MR. COULTAS: Yeah.
3
4 KELIHER: Okay. Although you did get out and got back in --
5
6 MR. COULTAS: Yes -- yeah, once we were done with the fuel, we shut everything off.
7 We did get out of the helicopter, you know, just to stretch our legs a minute, drink
8 a bottle of water and then come -- you know, just make -- walk around the
9 helicopter and make sure nothing was dripping and just basic stuff.
10
11 KELIHER: How did Roark do on his check ride?
12
13 MR. COULTAS: Did good, he did real good. There was no problems. Roark was really
14 smooth, you know, Roark is -- Roark is a uh -- he's real methodical. Uh, Roark is
15 an old logging pilot and I've flown with a lot of different guys. And some guys
16 are -- you know, they just yard in the power and they muscle their way out of
17 things. But that's not how Roark flies. Roark flies very smooth, very controlled
18 on his power. Um, you know, uh, yeah, Roark did very good. But Roark -- I
19 mean he'd flown people before, uh, when he worked with Columbia. I mean he
20 did work at an ATP. You know he'd done off shore stuff, IFR, I mean work is
21 very experienced. And he did a great job on his briefing, covered all the stuff, I
22 mean -- you know, I thought he did really good. I didn't see any problems.
23
24 KELIHER: He was PIC for the whole time after the water drops. So on the --
25
26 MR. COULTAS: Correct, yeah.
27
28 KELIHER: Okay, you've already described your approach into H44 but I just want to
29 reiterate that it was the same as the last two times?
30
31 MR. COULTAS: Right, yep.
32
33 KELIHER: And can you go more into detail on the landing?
34
35 MR. COULTAS: Um, where and when --
36
37 KELIHER: H44 uh, just prior to the accident.
38
39 MR. COULTAS: Uh, coming back from refuel?
40
41 KELIHER: Uh-mm.
42
43 MR. COULTAS: It was -- we landed back into the little rock area. Um, dust wasn't an
44 issue. Um, the winds were relatively the same. We figured somewhere around
45 three to five knots. Um, there was a little bit of wind there. You can kind of feel
46 it. you could see the tops of the trees moving. Which -- we like, you know, the

1 61 loves a little bit of wind and as soon as you put a little bit of wind in those
2 blades, it makes a big difference. And so, you know, we're constantly looking
3 around for that wind to take advantage of it. Just so happened it happened to be
4 out -- we figured it was out at our one or two o'clock. Somewhere out in there.
5 Based on, you know, the way the trees and everything were.
6

7 KELIHER: When they were doing the passenger loading, I know Jim would be able to
8 get a better visual than you. But did you look back at them?
9

10 MR. COULTAS: Yes. I look -- I watched 'em approach the helicopter. 'Cause I'm
11 leaning out the window. They were all in a single file line. Um, they were all
12 carrying their own packs and they would approach the door and then, um, when
13 they got to a specific point at the door they would all -- somebody -- one of uh,
14 the helitac crew would take their pack and they would pile 'em right there next to
15 -- just outside the door. Neatly, and then the individuals would get onboard the
16 helicopter. And then there was uh -- one of the helitac crew would tell them
17 specifically what seat to sit in. so I was out the window, looking as they came in.
18 I gave 'em the thumbs up to come in. and then as they were boarding, I would
19 turn all the way around and I would look back this way and as they were placing
20 them in their seats. So I was both sides, looking outside and looking inside.
21

22 KELIHER: And then when they placed them in the seats, how does -- how does that
23 work? What do they do?
24

25 MR. COULTAS: They just tell 'em where to sit. You know, he points, that individual
26 sits in that seat. And then uh -- and then they start working on their seatbelt. And
27 then if they have problems then the helitac crew individual would come over and
28 actually do their seatbelt for them. Shoulder harnesses, seatbelt and there was a
29 few that did have problems. They couldn't figure 'em out. And uh, so the helitac
30 individuals would do their seatbelts for them. Most of the individuals did it
31 themselves.
32

33 KELIHER: Do they show them how to release it?
34

35 MR. COULTAS: Uh, I believe so. I believe it was all part of their briefing also. I mean
36 'cause part of the briefing is, you know, how to release the seatbelts and all of that
37 kind of stuff. So, I would relatively assume that, that had all been taken care of.
38

39 KELIHER: Do you know if your seatbelts were the same as the passenger seatbelts?
40

41 MR. COULTAS: Uh, you know what I can't recall. I don't -- I don't remember.
42

43 KELIHER: That's fine.
44

45 MR. COULTAS: I don't remember. That's kind of a silly question not to know, but --
46 never thought about it.

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KELIHER: Are you aware of who specifically briefed the passengers?

MR. COULTAS: No, I do not know. It would of been one of those six individuals that we put up on the hill. Of the helitac crew.

KELIHER: So what were Jim's duties as being part of the crew --

MR. COULTAS: Um, to insure that the passengers were seated, safely in their seats. That the uh, seat -- all individuals had their seatbelts on. That the seats that were empty, those seatbelts were secure. That there was no loose items around the cabin area. And that the uh, gear that was loaded in the uh, back of the helicopter, in the box, that it was loaded and then the um -- there's like a big uh, bungee cord, um, net thing that goes over the top of it. that that was all secure. And then uh -- and then, his responsibility was to verbally and/or with a thumbs up, indicate to us that the cabinet area was secure for takeoff. And for landing --

KELIHER: And he's on com --

MR. COULTAS: And he was on com also.

KELIHER: Anyone else?

MR. COULTAS: No, nobody else was on com.

KELIHER: Do you brief any performance members before takeoff?

MR. COULTAS: Do we brief any performance --

KELIHER: Between each other or Jim?

MR. COULTAS: No, not before takeoff. We -- we run through a checklist, a before takeoff checklist. And that checklist doesn't have you uh, specifically state any numbers.

KELIHER: Looking over the manifest, do you talk about the load?

MR. COULTAS: The uh -- the load um, number was given to us on those individuals that got onboard the heli -- onboard the helicopter along with their gear. So they would -- they would uh, tell us you know, hey 2,850 or whatever the number was. And uh, and then as -- and you take that number and compare that with our load calc number based on the uh, temperature and the altitude as long as that number was less than, we were good to go. But again, we had so much safety margin built in that we never exceeded -- that number never exceeded what our load calc number was. But then, we were 300 feet lower, we were eight degrees cooler.

1 We had a little bit of wind that's not factored in. so -- so there was some
2 additional safety margin built into this.
3
4 KELIHER: Do you remember the takeoff weight?
5
6 MR. COULTAS: No, I don't recall.
7
8 KELIHER: Do you know what the max would have been?
9
10 MR. COULTAS: Uh, no, I mean I -- I have close but I don't recall what it was. It's --
11
12 KELIHER: That's fine --
13
14 MR. COULTAS: Too long ago.
15
16 KELIHER: When you're doing the load calcs where are you getting your altitude and
17 temperature from at the beginning of the day?
18
19 MR. COULTAS: You're getting that from the morning briefing. When you show up at
20 the morning briefing, your forest service manager gets that information from uh,
21 air ops from the day briefing of -- hey, this is the area that we're gonna be
22 working in today. This is the elevation that they're gonna be at and then this is
23 the temperature. So air ops gives that in a morning briefing to your manager.
24 And then when you show up for your morning briefing with your manager, and
25 you're crew, then he passes that on to us. So we get that from them.
26
27 KELIHER: And where do you get your empty weight from?
28
29 MR. COULTAS: We get that from the chart C out of the uh, flight manual.
30
31 KELIHER: Um, can you, in a little bit more detail [LAUGH], if you don't remember,
32 that's fine, but describe the liftoff for the accident flight.
33
34 MR. COULTAS: Um, it wasn't any different from any of the rest. You know, it uh -- it
35 was smooth. Um, you know, Roark again wasn't -- isn't one of those pilots that
36 um, you know, just yanks in all the power and takes it right up to your max torque
37 available or your max power available and then just muscles your way out of it. I
38 mean there's guys out there that fly that way but there's no need for it. the
39 aircraft, you know, it -- um, Roark is real smooth. He's a real smooth pilot. You
40 pull in, you get yourself a good steady rate of climb, an ascent and I mean if you
41 don't need to take it up to red line then don't. And -- and uh, and Roark didn't.
42 You know, he didn't just yank it in and muscle the thing off the ground. It was
43 very smooth, very controlled. Um, I mean I didn't see -- there was no problems
44 with the uh, take off. At least from where I'm sitting.
45
46 KELIHER: That takeoff was the same departure, flight path as the others?

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MR. COULTAS: Yes, that was the plan.

KELIHER: Okay.

MR. COULTAS: Yep, we were going the same way every time. Because it afforded the best opportunity for obstacle clearance as you're heading out.

KELIHER: Do you remember any of the last words following -- I guess, "Oh fuck"?

MR. COULTAS: After that? I don't remember anything after that.

KELIHER: Okay, that's when --

MR. COULTAS: That's when I knew -- in my mind when I said that and then in my mind I knew then I honestly knew that we were gonna crash. 'Cause there was no place -- there was no options to land. It was gonna be some form of crash, you know, whatever. There wasn't an open area. The only place to land on the top of that hill was back behind us where we just took off from. So, I knew in my mind that we were gonna crash. I don't remember anything after that. that's my problem and that's where I'm struggling here because I mean I've never gone through anything like this before. Nothing -- anywhere near this traumatic. But I just don't understand how the mind can shut itself down like this. It makes absolutely no sense to me. And it's extremely frustrating. I've always known -- I mean even when I've gotten really drunk, I've always -- I've never taken myself to where I don't remember. And uh, this is the only time in my life that I cannot recall an event. And I just -- and it's just frustrating the living heck out of me.

KELIHER: You know a lot of times people find that it comes back later on, too.

MR. COULTAS: I'm hoping so and I'm -- I mean I'm really hoping so. 'Cause I would really like to know.

KELIHER: Uh, were there any malfunctions that you can recall that would of resulted in a loss of power or a reduction of power?

MR. COULTAS: No, the aircraft was running great. I mean we had two strong motors. Uh, one of the motors was a plus four and the other motor I think was a plus five. Uh, which is pretty significant. Um, all of our numbers, based on our load calcs are all based off min spec, meaning zero engines. And when we did our load calc we did not take that plus four and plus five into account. We went back to min spec so that we knew there again, is an additional safety margin built in. we knew we had the power to do this and uh -- and there was no need, based on the plus four engines, the three to five knots of wind and the altitude and temperature, there was no reason to muscle this aircraft. You know, we had plenty of power.

1 And uh, for dual engine. And she would do everything and she -- everything was
2 nice and smooth.

3
4 KELIHER: So nothing that you can remember specifically about that engine or aircraft
5 performance?
6

7 MR. COULTAS: No, the only thing that I do remember, is when we started to transition,
8 which is a normal -- this is a normal flight characteristic. When you trade that
9 assent for forward airspeed you dip the nose a little bit. So you push the nose
10 over. You don't change the power so much in the collective, you just hold that
11 steady, you apply forward cyclic and you begin to fly forward. You push the nose
12 over. She kind of drops, you know, five degrees or so. And you keep -- that's
13 how you get your forward airspeed. Well, when Roark dipped the nose and we
14 started moving forward, that's when she dipped again and she dipped a little bit
15 harder this time and then that's when we started to settle. That's the only
16 indication that I had at that time that there was a problem. Was that second dip
17 because that is not characteristic of a normal departure. Nor was it characteristic
18 you know, of Roark unless he sneezed or something like that, which he did not.
19 Uh, you know, it -- that's the only indicator that I have, that something was
20 wrong. Was that second deep of the nose. And then she dipped and she came
21 back and then that's when the rotor started to decay. That's when the rotor started
22 to bleed off and I felt it and I heard it. I came inside, I called out the 103 percent
23 and we were continuing to descend. But that was my only indication that there
24 was a problem.
25

26 KELIHER: Any smells that you can remember?
27

28 MR. COULTAS: No smells, no noises. You know, uh, I don't remember there was --
29 there was no uh, uncharacteristic noises. I don't recall anything like that. Um, I
30 don't -- I didn't smell anything. Um, you know, the aircraft was really -- flight
31 controls and all that appeared to be normal through the entire event. It just that
32 we didn't have the power to get back out of the hole.
33

34 KELIHER: How fast do you think you were going?
35

36 MR. COULTAS: Once he nosed it over, we started creeping forward, it's hard to tell.
37 We weren't above ETL.
38

39 KELIHER: Okay, that's what I was getting at --
40

41 MR. COULTAS: Um, we were probably, I don't know, maybe -- maybe five knots
42 maybe. I don't know, it was just -- it was real slow. But it's hard to judge, you
43 know, you're that big and kind of moving through the trees.
44

45 KELIHER: A fast pace?
46

1 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, fast, brisk walk, maybe. Maybe.
2
3 KELIHER: Um, again, some of these sound redundant but it's just --
4
5 MR. COULTAS: That's okay --
6
7 KELIHER: So we don't have to call you ever again.
8
9 MR. COULTAS: That's alright.
10
11 KELIHER: Can you remember all the gauges that you saw?
12
13 MR. COULTAS: Really the only gauge -- once I -- once -- I was more concentrated Zoë
14 when we took off, of not drifting into those trees to my right. That was a big
15 concern of mine. And -- and it's simple -- it can -- where a guy takes off and he's
16 concentrating on the trees on his side and he doesn't want to get too close to 'em
17 so he inadvertently starts to drift away from them, you know, and I didn't want
18 that to happen. So, I was really concentrating on those trees out my right side.
19 Uh, once I had the throttle set, when he picks it up off the ground, powers good. I
20 insure that the throttles were matched. And the torques were matched up. And
21 then um, once all that's good then I take my hands off the throttles and uh, you
22 know, clear on the outside of the helicopter. The only real gauge that I really
23 went to when I sensed that the rotor was bleeding off was the rotor RPM. That's
24 the gauge I went to first. And then it was the 103. It should have been up at the
25 106, 105 range. It was down at that 103. And uh, and I cleared. I came back
26 inside. I could sense the -- it was spooling down even more. And then I saw 100
27 percent. Um, and again, that was after the dip, the dip of the nose when we were
28 starting to settle into the descending below the uh -- the trees now. That we had
29 just had gone above.
30
31 KELIHER: Are you following along?
32
33 MR. COULTAS: No, my hands are not on the controls.
34
35 KELIHER: Okay, uh, did you use the emergency manual throttles?
36
37 MR. COULTAS: Um, not that I recall.
38
39 KELIHER: Okay.
40
41 MR. COULTAS: I -- I don't -- after -- yeah, after I said, you know, my thing and -- I
42 don't remember anything.
43
44 KELIHER: Just so we can get it out there for the record, did you remember what NG
45 was?
46

1 MR. COULTAS: No.
2
3 KELIHER: Okay, and did you ever see the engines reaching their topping limit?
4
5 MR. COULTAS: No.
6
7 KELIHER: And you didn't observe the engine torque?
8
9 MR. COULTAS: No, I mean -- no, only there at the hover. And when I called out
10 power, it was good. And uh, you know, Roark has a torque gauge right out his
11 bubble. So he's looking at torque also.
12
13 KELIHER: Uh-mm.
14
15 MR. COULTAS: Uh, but no, I don't specifically remember looking at it and uh -- you
16 know --
17
18 KELIHER: Would you be communicating that back and forth to each other? If Roark
19 saw that, would he tell you?
20
21 MR. COULTAS: Torque?
22
23 KELIHER: Yeah.
24
25 MR. COULTAS: Um, yea -- he may. If I saw it, I defin -- I do communicate it. You
26 know, 'cause part of my responsibility is to make sure that we don't over torque
27 the helicopter. But you can tell on a takeoff -- if a guy just yawns in the power,
28 then you can suspect that you're right up in there and that's when you are coming
29 to the gauge. It really depends on the technique of the guy flying of what systems
30 that you monitor and you know what gauges you're specifically looking at.
31 Because everything happens so fast. This was a very smooth, very controlled um,
32 you know, deliberate takeoff. Um, that didn't require you to start bouncing
33 around looking at gauges going whoa, we're over torquing here. It wasn't like
34 that. um, you know I don't really recall coming back in and looking at torque and
35 making absolutely sure that he was over -- wasn't over torquing so that I had to
36 push power back out of it. Unlike we do when we're on the water. When we're
37 sucking water, we'll calling out torque, 65, 70, 75, you're at 80 percent, stop
38 pumping. 80 percent stop pumping, he's not stopped pumping, you shut the
39 pumper off or, you know or when you're coming out of the hole, and you got 94
40 percent and he's pulled it up to 97 percent or say you get 103 percent which is our
41 limit and he pulls it up to 105 percent. It's the responsibility of the guy in the
42 right seat to push that [unintelligible] back down to get you down below that 130
43 percent. And then if you start to droop, then you either stop -- and you emergency
44 jettison some of the water and he pickles some of it off on his side.
45
46 KELIHER: Got it.

1
2 MR. COULTAS: But again, it's all -- that technique is a little bit different in that, you
3 just know when you guy -- we had a guy flies -- I mean there's guys out there that
4 fly that way and that you really have to monitor that. But, Roark is not one of
5 those guys. I mean he was a very smooth, very controlled um, you know, very
6 clean takeoff. Uh, which makes a guys life in the right seat a little bit easier.
7 Where you don't have to bounce around so much. Um, where I could concentrate
8 on the trees on the right. And uh, and then make sure that the torques were
9 matched up. But uh, you know, I don't -- I don't specifically recall.
10
11 KELIHER: Will you draw your flight path, that you can recall?
12
13 MRS. COULTAS: This aughta be good.
14
15 KELIHER: [LAUGH]
16
17 MR. COULTAS: Let's see. There was a row of trees here. There's a row of trees over
18 on this side and it kind of went like this. And it kind of went like that. And there
19 was these trees -- the ones that I was concerned with were over here. This about
20 in here was -- this went out like this. This is about where they wanted us to land.
21 That was where the [unintelligible] but it was all the dust and all that and we
22 actually moved up over into here it seems like. So this would be one, this was
23 two. The plan was to -- and these trees are, you know, they're pretty tall. I figure
24 uh -- I figure they were approximately 100 feet -- 80 to 100 feet, something like
25 that. These here were maybe a little bit smaller, 75 to 85 feet. Uh, and then so
26 the departure was to come up and then to kind of go like this, out that direction,
27 like that. And then, uh, the terrain started to drop off down here. But there were
28 still big trees down in there but again the terrain started to roll away from you. So
29 it was kind of more like a -- like that I would say.
30
31 KELIHER: And um, flying this --
32
33 MR. COULTAS: Does that make sense?
34
35 KELIHER: Can you show me where your nose is?
36
37 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, nose is --
38
39 KELIHER: With the pen like if that was the helicopter -- okay, yep, yeah --
40
41 MR. COULTAS: So that's how we landed and then when we picked up, you started
42 moving forward and then we kind of went to the right.
43
44 KELIHER: Okay, so you didn't --
45
46 MR. COULTAS: No, you don't pick up and do a pedal turn any like that --

1
2 KELIHER: No, I mean uh, would you skid over like that?
3
4 MR. COULTAS: No, no, no, no.
5
6 KELIHER: Okay.
7
8 MR. COULTAS: No, um, it was -- it's all one -- one continuous movement.
9
10 KELIHER: And then will you mark with an X of where you did the first transition?
11
12 MR. COULTAS: Um, it's right --
13
14 KELIHER: To forward flight --
15
16 MR. COULTAS: It's right in here.
17
18 KELIHER: Okay.
19
20 MR. COULTAS: Right in here.
21
22 KELIHER: And then where was -- do you know where the first contact was, when you
23 touched the trees?
24
25 MR. COULTAS: I'm thinking it was out over in here somewhere. Out in this area.
26 'Cause we were creeping forward and uh, and it was after the second nose dip,
27 called the 103, now we're still descending down into the trees. And then uh, and
28 then we started -- I saw the debris and -- and I think -- I thought the tree was out
29 in here some place that we were hitting. So to me it would -- you know, it was out
30 in this area here.
31
32 KELIHER: Okay, where's north on that?
33
34 MR. COULTAS: Where would be north. North would be kind of back over like -- that,
35 I believe.
36
37 KELIHER: And where are the winds coming from?
38
39 MR. COULTAS: The winds were about like -- that. Something like that.
40
41 KELIHER: Perfect. Um, our survival factors person wanted me to ask you a whole
42 bunch of questions about evacuation of the helicopter. But I think this might be
43 pretty easy--
44
45 MR. COULTAS: Okay.
46

1 KELIHER: Because it sounds like you didn't remember much. Do you remember any
2 obstacles to the evacuation?
3

4 MR. COULTAS: I don't know how I got out of the helicopter. I don't remember
5 anything inside the helicopter. I don't remember the crash.
6

7 KELIHER: When you uh, tighten your seatbelts, how do you normally do it?
8

9 MR. COULTAS: Flying in the right seat, um, I did not have my shoulder harness on.
10 Uh, and the reason for that is, is because to get out that window and to clear the
11 aircraft, you can't. It prevents you from getting out there. So, I did not have my
12 shoulder harnesses on. Some guys do um, but you can't -- you can't really clear
13 the helicopter. So, I did not have my shoulder harnesses on. My lap belt, um, I
14 had it on but it's not extremely tight 'cause I gotta be able to get up on my right
15 hip. Um, but uh -- it's not, you know, dangly loose either. It's kind of that kind
16 of happy medium. When I go onto my right hip, I can feel the seatbelt kind of
17 tighten down on my left hip. Um, that's about how tight I put mine.
18

19 KELIHER: Did you see any marks after the accident which would indicate that the
20 seatbelt was -- like a bruise or --
21

22 MR. COULTAS: Bruising -- um, I don't recall --
23

24 MRS. COULTAS: Well, actually she mentions that there was, on this side, a bruise --
25

26 KELIHER: Round --
27

28 MRS. COULTAS: But we didn't know why.
29

30 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, I don't -- I don't remember any of this.
31

32 MRS. COULTAS: The bruise was healed by the time he was awake.
33

34 KELIHER: Can you show me where --
35

36 MRS. COULTAS: It was -- it was right there.
37

38 KELIHER: And it was a round circle --
39

40 MR. COULTAS: Was it on my right side or my left side?
41

42 MRS. COULTAS: It was on your right side.
43

44 MR. COULTAS: Over in here?
45

46 MRS. COULTAS: Uh-mm.

1
2 MR. COULTAS: Mmm.
3
4 KELIHER: Do you remember if the seat stayed in place?
5
6 MR. COULTAS: I don't remember.
7
8 KELIHER: And you don't remember anything about passengers or hearing anything.
9
10 MALE VOICE [OFF MIKE]: It's one --
11
12 MALE VOICE [OFF MIKE]: One, okay, we're good to go.
13
14 KELIHER: Um --
15
16 MR. COULTAS: I wish I did, I mean I really do.
17
18 KELIHER: Who is normally responsible for the preflight safety briefing?
19
20 MR. COULTAS: Pilot in command. Pilot in command is responsible to insure that the
21 briefing is completed.
22
23 KELIHER: Okay but the helitac members do it--
24
25 MR. COULTAS: Uh, he can designate that to a represent of flight crew or a
26 representative or designated -- and in this case here, we were -- before we ever
27 took the mission, before we ever parted the helibase, we had the twelve
28 individuals and Roark had briefed all of them and uh, gave them a safety briefing
29 and then um, it was designated then who was gonna be briefing them up on top of
30 the hill. I don't recall who that was. Um, and then -- then Roark gave them the
31 authority to brief those individuals up on -- at helispot 44.
32
33 KELIHER: How do you feel about that process?
34
35 MR. COULTAS: Um, as long as they're a competent crew member, um, you know, I
36 don't -- I don't have a problem with that. Um, you know, obviously you want
37 'em to uh, to cover everything. Um, you know, not forgetting anything. I do
38 think that um, when that happens that they should -- there should be a checklist.
39 That individual should -- if he's going to give a designation, because he doesn't
40 do it all the time, it should be done by a checklist. And whether or not that was
41 done up there on top of the hill or not, I don't know. I do know that the forest
42 service has a crew uh, passenger briefing checklist. I carry one with me. Uh, or I
43 did. Now it's burnt up but um, you know, I'm aware of that and I know that those
44 individuals carry those little spiral um -- they're kind of like a -- almost like a
45 cheat sheet type of a deal. And um, so I would suspect that they briefed it off of
46 that. 'Cause I know it exists and, you know, shoot, I've used it.

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KELIHER: Is there a fire extinguisher on board?

MR. COULTAS: There's two, one behind the copilots seat and one in the back of the helicopter.

KELIHER: So, would you have been able to reach it?

MR. COULTAS: Um, yeah, I mean I can -- from the seat I can reach right around and it's right there.

KELIHER: Okay --

MR. COULTAS: And just pop that -- the release on it and grab it. But -- I don't recall ever doing that.

KELIHER: Do you think anything could have been done differently in the takeoff?

MR. COULTAS: I -- no, I mean they were all the same. The third -- the third takeoff, the incident takeoff was no different than the first takeoff, which was no different than the second takeoff. They were all the same.

KELIHER: Is it common in helispots not to have an out if you loose an engine or if anything happens?

MR. COULTAS: Um, it's [unintelligible] dictated. You know they try -- well, you know they try to uh, make 'em, you know as safe as they can. Uh, I can't say that we didn't have an out. Because we kind of -- the way the terrain kind of sloped away and the trees, I think we did have an out, it's just that, I think whatever happened, happened at the worst time it could happen for us. Because there's a chart in the flight manual and it's called the height velocity chart. And within that, it talks about air speeds and altitudes. Well -- and there's a void zone within that chart. Um, you're in it every time you fly, take off and landing. No matter what you do, you're in it, every single time you go fly. I think what happened to us, happened at the worst time it could happen. And it happened while we had no air speed and while we were, you know, a little over a 100 feet above the ground, which is the avoid zone of that chart.

KELIHER: I know we're -- now getting in a time crunch. Where did you do most of your flight training?

MR. COULTAS: Army, military training. I had just gotten out of the army, a year ago, July of uh, 07' is that right?

MRS. COULTAS: I can't remember.

1 MR. COULTAS: July of 07'.
2
3 MALE VOICE: Did you retire?
4
5 MR. COULTAS: No, I didn't retire. I just didn't want to deploy again. [LAUGH]
6
7 MRS. COULTAS: Which, his unit is there now, again.
8
9 KELIHER: How much time do you have in?
10
11 MR. COULTAS: 15 years and four months.
12
13 MALE VOICE: Wow.
14
15 MALE VOICE: Wow.
16
17 KELIHER: Uh, how much time just approximately, do you have in helicopters?
18
19 MR. COULTAS: Um, just under 3,000 hours.
20
21 KELIHER: Versus fixed wing?
22
23 MR. COULTAS: I have no fixed wing time, 20 hours or something, 25 hours.
24
25 KELIHER: In a Mooney like that? [LAUGH]
26
27 MR. COULTAS: No.
28
29 KELIHER: Uh, what's most of your time on?
30
31 MR. COULTAS: Um, it breaks it up 61 Black Hawks, I've got some Huey time. I've
32 got some 206 time. Um --
33
34 MRS. COULTAS: 58 --
35
36 MR. COULTAS: 58 is a 206. Uh, see what else do I have? I have some A109 time.
37 Um, not very much. I've got uh -- I've flown a Heath 500, you know just kind of
38 playing around type of thing. I've flown an A-Star, taken a check ride in an A-
39 Star, didn't even know how to start it. Guy had to help me out. Um, you know,
40 stuff like that. So I mean I've kind of played around on a bunch of little
41 helicopters and -- but uh --
42
43 KELIHER: About how many on the 61?
44
45 MR. COULTAS: Uh, what do I have on the 61? 1,000 -- 1,200 somewhere in there.
46

1 KELIHER: Do you like flying the 61?
2
3 MR. COULTAS: Oh, it's a great machine. I can't wait to fly it again, you know, and I
4 will fly it again, when this is all over with and you know, hopefully I can get my
5 left hand back and you know, I'll be able -- it's a great machine. Um --
6
7 KELIHER: Did you fly it before coming to Carson?
8
9 MR. COULTAS: No, no I had never flown a 61 before till I came to Carson and -- and
10 uh, it's real reliable. I kind of relate it back to a Huey. You know, it's simple.
11 It's not complicated. It's a -- it's very loyal. You know, it always performs and
12 uh, it's just a good machine. It really is a good machine.
13
14 KELIHER: Your -- uh, all of that was military before going to Carson?
15
16 MR. COULTAS: Yeah.
17
18 KELIHER: What kind of stuff were you doing?
19
20 MR. COULTAS: I was uh -- let's see, I've -- I was a scout pilot in 101st. Uh, single
21 pilot stuff. Uh, in apache battalion. Uh, I was just -- I flew Black Hawk at the
22 101st, just you know, flying just ash and trash.
23
24 KELIHER: Yeah, what kind of conditions?
25
26 MR. COULTAS: Um, all conditions, night time, goggles, weather, uh, I-Far -- uh, and
27 then uh, and then when I was in Oregon Guard I was a Medivac pilot, flying
28 Black Hawks.
29
30 MRS. COULTAS: Didn't you do people repelling and --
31
32 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, but I mean that's -- that's all part of that hash and trash deal.
33 I've done repel, I've done lots of hoist and you know, stuff like that.
34
35 KELIHER: Why did you decide you wanted to work for Carson?
36
37 MR. COULTAS: Just wanted to --
38
39 MRS. COULTAS: Close to home.
40
41 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, um, I don't know. You know, my wife and I we own a -- we
42 own a Radio Shack store and little video store. We bought that in uh, 95', I got
43 out of the service in 95'. I had blown a leg out, had a knee reconstruction, I really
44 never thought I'd fly again. So, we did the store and then, you know, I don't
45 know, I just started getting the inkling again to go fly. And -- and uh, I knew a
46 guy that was flying for Carson and he made some phone calls and got an

1 interview. I don't know, it's just -- one of those things. Um, I fly -- I fly because
2 I like to fly. Not -- I mean -- you know, not because we need the money or any of
3 that kind of thing. It's what I truly love to do. Um, it's where I get my most
4 personal satisfaction. You know, that whole thing at the end of the day, you
5 know, you look back on it and you feel good about yourself or do you not feel
6 good about yourself? When I fly all day and I look back, I -- that's when I feel
7 the best about myself.

8

9 KELIHER: What was the hiring process like? You said you went through an interview
10 --

11

12 MR. COULTAS: Oh, yeah, I went through an interview. Uh, um, you know, standard,
13 standard interview --

14

15 MRS. COULTAS: Give up your first born --

16

17 MR. COULTAS: And then uh -- and then Carson put me through a week -- a week uh,
18 training course where went through -- it was a classroom environment. And uh,
19 went through all the systems, all the emergency procedures. Uh, director of
20 maintenance was involved in the class. And then at the end of the class I got to
21 fly the helicopter and you know, and then, um, then they determined then if they
22 were gonna hire me or not. And uh, so at the end of the class they offered to hire
23 me. And then my first uh, my first good solid week was with the chief pilot. Uh,
24 we went out to Pennsylvania and picked up a helicopter and just flew across
25 country all the way back across the country. And uh, you know, then he quizzed
26 me and oralled me and you know, I think the interview piece was still going on.
27 But uh, you know, I mean it was -- I thought it was good.

28

29 KELIHER: What was your start date, do you remember?

30

31 MR. COULTAS: Oh, man, um, my actual first work day was Father's Day of 2002.
32 Right?

33

34 MRS. COULTAS: Beats me [LAUGH].

35

36 MR. COULTAS: Remember I left on Father's Day.

37

38 MRS. COULTAS: You're always gone on every holiday, so I don't even --

39

40 MR. COULTAS: No, but Father's Day, I just remember Father's Day because when we
41 got out to Pennsylvania, Steve's dad showed up at the hanger and it was Father's
42 Day. So --

43

44 KELIHER: Are you seasonal or full time?

45

46 MR. COULTAS: I'm full time.

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KELIHER: Do you have any other employment, I mean the video store, but --

MR. COULTAS: No --

MRS. COULTAS: No, we don't allow him in there.

MR. COULTAS: Yeah, they don't let me go to the store.

KELIHER: Do you do any other flying?

MR. COULTAS: No.

KELIHER: And how often do you have training at Carson?

MR. COULTAS: Uh, we do annual training. Where they uh, bring us in for a week and they go through -- oh, you know, company procedures, uh, they go through things that happened in the previous year, goods and bads. Uh, any paperwork changes and then we go through systems. Uh, air space, do some aerodynamics. Uh, emergency procedures and then the end of the uh -- at the end you take a check ride. Where he goes out, takes you, pulls engines back on you, shuts off hydraulic systems on ya. Uh, sticks collective, sticks a pedal and you might have, out of all those maneuvers -- he might give you three, so, you know, three different approaches. And three different landings, max performance, all that kind of stuff.

KELIHER: How are you training for the forest service operations?

MR. COULTAS: Um, well as far as like dropping water and things like that? It's changed now. But for me, um, it wasn't really a training program in place. Um, so whenever I would fly the snorkel or fly the tank, um, it would -- a lot of times it would be on the companies dime until I was able to build up the time and the experience or the training to where I could take a forest service check ride. And I took a forest service check ride by Jim Ramich uh, back in -- I wanna think it was 05' is when Jim gave me my check ride. And uh, and it was actually on a fire and it was initial attack type of thing. And uh -- so then that's what allowed me -- I'd already been type rided in the helicopter, Carson had typed me like the year before. And then -- and then I would just get some tank time whenever I possibly could to get the experience and uh, you know, the procedures and then the forest service came and gave me a check ride. Which then allowed me to fly the uh, the tank on a fire, you know, as situation dictated. Obviously I didn't want to go out there under the most extreme circumstances. And I always flew with a command pilot. Never flew with a copilot. And uh, it was a very monitored program. Um, and I preferred it that way to be honest with you. 'Cause I didn't want to go out there and you know, get turned loose in this thing. I'd only been flying the tank for you know, 15 hours or something, you know. And uh, go get turned loose on

1 some big structure fire that high stress. I mean the company wouldn't do that to
2 us. And uh --
3
4 KELIHER: You said you were sleeping at the hotel that was close by --
5
6 MR. COULTAS: True, yeah, um --
7
8 KELIHER: How were the accom --
9
10 MR. COULTAS: It was in Lewiston. It was fine, I mean it's -- you know, a little small
11 backwoods hotel, but it was clean.
12
13 KELIHER: About how many hours of sleep did you get for the last 72 hours --
14
15 MR. COULTAS: Oh, I'm getting full nights sleep. I'm going back in the room -- we're
16 back down the hill by -- I was calling you what, about 9:15, 9:30? In the
17 evenings, I figured I'd come back -- we had to go stand in a specific spot to get
18 cell phone service. So, I would call back to -- and if you moved you'd lose it.
19 So we couldn't talk for very long. So I'd just call and say, "Hey, we're down the
20 hill, everything's fine" --
21
22 MRS. COULTAS: 'Cause see -- he can't sit still --
23
24 MR. COULTAS: And uh, then I'd go back in my room. Uh, take a shower and then uh,
25 shoot I figure I was in bed by ten. You know, laying down, flipping through the
26 news and then, you know, up at six. So I mean I was getting a good solid, eight
27 hours of sleep a day.
28
29 KELIHER: And you had breakfast, lunch and dinner?
30
31 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, I was eating all the meals. And uh, you know, lots of water.
32 'Cause it was pretty hot up there. And I mean they -- they bring us cases and
33 cases of water and what -- we had all the ice and everything. So --
34
35 KELIHER: How's your health?
36
37 MR. COULTAS: I'm good except for now.
38
39 KELIHER: Were you taking any medication?
40
41 MR. COULTAS: No.
42
43 KELIHER: Do you use drug or alcohol?
44

1 MR. COULTAS: Uh, no drugs. Um, I'm a -- you know, moderate -- well, I wouldn't
2 say moderate. Um, I drink only beer. I don't drink any liquor or anything like
3 that.
4

5 MRS. COULTAS: Working around the house or something.
6

7 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, you know and -- and uh, I mean we might do -- drink a beer or
8 something at the end of the day. But even on this tour here, I mean I think I could
9 probably count all the beers that I drank on one hand. I mean --
10

11 KELIHER: Have you ever had a history of drug or alcohol abuse?
12

13 MR. COULTAS: No.
14

15 KELIHER: Have you ever had any arrests for drug or alcohol?
16

17 MR. COULTAS: No.
18

19 KELIHER: Any arrests period for anything?
20

21 MR. COULTAS: No.
22

23 KELIHER: Um, traffic tickets?
24

25 MR. COULTAS: I had --
26

27 KELIHER: Recently?
28

29 MR. COULTAS: No, not recently.
30

31 KELIHER: Okay, I don't need to know the full history --
32

33 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, I had speeding like -- back in like 2000. and then I -- the only
34 other ticket I had in my life was I bought a brand new truck, drove it off the lot
35 and the cop pulled me over and I was 18-years-old and gave me a ticket for
36 improper left turn. So I -- I've only had two tickets in my life. Yeah --
37

38 KELIHER: All the luck. What kind of flying were you doing the two days prior to the
39 accident?
40

41 MR. COULTAS: I don't think we flew at all.
42

43 KELIHER: Yeah. Was that a little boring?
44

45 MR. COULTAS: Uh, it gets that way. But you know, you -- you hanging out with a
46 bunch of guys and everybody telling jokes and -- you know we got radio going

1 and reading the newspaper and -- I mean studying the flight manuals. You just
2 get used to it. Kind of get into a routine.
3
4 KELIHER: And you touched on this before and we don't need a whole classification,
5 but 766 you were flying for how long before?
6
7 MR. COULTAS: Um, I was assigned to this machine all summer and I think I had done
8 two full tours. And then this partial tour, does that sound about right?
9
10 MALE VOICE: Twelve days?
11
12 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, twelve days and then twelve days off, does that sound about
13 right Sean?
14
15 MORETZ: Yeah --
16
17 MR. COULTAS: Do you recall?
18
19 KELIHER: And how was it flying?
20
21 MR. COULTAS: Flid great. In fact uh, we commented that she was actually one of the
22 smoothest machines in the fleet. Very, very smooth, very balanced. Um, just -- I
23 mean -- you know, some machines -- it's kind of like a car or remember when you
24 were a little kid and a bicycle. You know you could ride your bike but if you got
25 off your bike and got on your friends bike it just road different, felt different.
26 Well it's the same in -- you know, some helicopters just kind of fly different or
27 whatever. But this one here, 766, boy, I mean she's just real smooth, nice --
28
29 KELIHER: Any quirks about it?
30
31 MR. COULTAS: Say again?
32
33 KELIHER: Any quirks?
34
35 MR. COULTAS: No, nope, none that I noticed.
36
37 KELIHER: Do you know the last two days, do you know if Roark pretty much had the
38 same schedule as far as sleep and food and --
39
40 MR. COULTAS: Yeah -- yeah, we stayed together. Um, in fact we were just a couple
41 of doors down at the hotel. So uh, yeah, I would say his schedule was pretty
42 much the same as mine. And food, we ate all the meals together.
43
44 KELIHER: Um, alright. Anything you can comment on about Roark, not to obviously
45 brutalize or condemn him or anything, but do you think he was pretty quick as far
46 as reactionary, pilot wise --

1
2 MR. COULTAS: I think -- I think once it dipped and uh -- and then Roark -- he said
3 something and I don't remember, I can't really recall, you know. But uh, he knew
4 then that something that we were settling in and I called out -- or I called out the
5 100 -- uh, we started tapping the tree. And then uh, um, Roark knew at that time
6 that we were -- we were gonna crash just like I did. Uh, there was no good
7 options. Um, Roark didn't stop flying the helicopter. Roark continued to fly the
8 helicopter to the very end. Now I don't remember the -- the impact of the ground,
9 I cannot recall. The noise, how hard we hit. Uh, but I do know that we didn't flip
10 over on our head. Which -- and I do know that it was pretty freaken steep in
11 there. And uh, and I accredit the four of us that made it to the technique that
12 Roark used to the very end. Uh, maybe sacrificing himself for us. You know, I'll
13 never know that. But uh, uh, Roark didn't quit. He continued to fly that
14 helicopter and he -- and he continued to be smooth clear to the very need. Um,
15 the aircraft never got real violently out of control, you know. When we were
16 tapping the tree, she did a little bit of fore and aft, but the aircraft never got
17 violently out of control. It was -- she was flown clear to the very end. And uh --

18
19 KELIHER: Any safety suggestions that you could think as a result of the accident?
20

21 MR. COULTAS: You know I -- I've been -- kind of been toying around with that in my
22 mind. And that -- you know, there's gotta be something positive that comes out
23 of this. There has to be. I'm not a pessimistic guy. Uh, you know and I'm
24 hoping through all of this, more than anybody I think right now, uh, and searching
25 for that. But right now, I mean I still have -- I have a big blank, you know a big
26 void that -- of time that I can't account for. Uh, mainly from the impact. You
27 know there's that little bit of time there -- I don't know right now. I just don't
28 know. I'm hoping that at some point I can find and figure out what that is. But I
29 don't know right now.
30

31 KELIHER: Jim?
32

33 STRUHSAKER: Yes.
34

35 KELIHER: You're up.
36

37 STRUHSAKER: I covered most of 'em. Um, you mentioned that you're rotations were
38 12 day cycle?
39

40 MR. COULTAS: Yes.
41

42 STRUHSAKER: Uh, and how many days had you been on station in this cycle?
43

44 MR. COULTAS: I think I was only on for four or five days.
45

46 MRS. COULTAS: I think four --

1
2 MR. COULTAS: Four days I think Jim.
3
4 STRUHSAKER: Okay, thank you and I missed that -- did you say the two prior days
5 that you actually did not fly?
6
7 MR. COULTAS: I don't believe we did. I think we were down both days.
8
9 STRUHSAKER: Okay, and then um, were you dedicated to this shift?
10
11 MR. COULTAS: Yes.
12
13 STRUHSAKER: So even though you would um, go home for 12 days and come back,
14 you'd have the same shift?
15
16 MR. COULTAS: Correct, I knew I -- when I left at the end of that 12 days, I knew when
17 I came back in 12 days later that I would be uh, coming back to this aircraft.
18
19 STRUHSAKER: And were mechanics, crew member, uh, including the fuel truck are
20 those dedicated to the shift?
21
22 MR. COULTAS: Yes, however the fuel truck driver was a uh -- he was a temporary fill
23 in.
24
25 STRUHSAKER: But the truck itself was dedicated?
26
27 MR. COULTAS: The truck itself was dedicated to this machine, yes.
28
29 STRUHSAKER: So it would follow you wherever you went?
30
31 MR. COULTAS: Correct.
32
33 STRUHSAKER: Would it refuel other shifts or just yours?
34
35 MR. COULTAS: It would if it was a sister ship -- or you know, another company ship
36 needed fuel. But that -- you know, wasn't really the general practice.
37
38 STRUHSAKER: Alright.
39
40 MR. COULTAS: It's not uncommon but I don't remember our -- this truck here fueling
41 anybody else --
42
43 STRUHSAKER: Okay --
44
45 MR. COULTAS: Um, if that's what you're asking --
46

1 STRUHSAKER: Now, there was uh, a statement by one of the mechanics that during
2 your refueling that he noted what he thought was an usual amount of ash either on
3 the wind stream on the intake uh, caulings and on the blade roots, does that ring a
4 bell?
5

6 MR. COULTAS: No, it doesn't Jim. I don't -- I didn't think that the uh -- the ash was --
7 was uh, that bad up there. You know, there -- I mean there was fire down the hill.
8 And when we head down to -- uh, from 44 down to 36, we had to uh, kind of --
9 we couldn't go direct line from 44 to 36 or we'd flown right over the top of the
10 fire. So we had to uh, skirt the edges of it, going down -- down the hill and back
11 up the hill. But I -- I wouldn't say it was any -- was abnormal. You know, it was
12 --
13

14 STRUHSAKER: So you don't recall a mechanic uh, or one of your personnel getting up
15 to wipe the blades down or anything of that nature?
16

17 MR. COULTAS: No, no, Jim, I don't recall any of that.
18

19 STRUHSAKER: Okay, and um, did I understand you to say that you actually started
20 with Carson in 2002?
21

22 MR. COULTAS: Yes sir.
23

24 STRUHSAKER: So then you'd flown each fire season?
25

26 MR. COULTAS: Uh, all but one. I was uh, recalled back for the war in uh, 2003. So I
27 was actually uh -- I left for 15 months.
28

29 STRUHSAKER: Alright. So you are a seasonal or do -- are you 12 months?
30

31 MR. COULTAS: I'm a 12 month employee.
32

33 STRUHSAKER: Okay. Uh, were you -- when you first started on the 61 did you fly the
34 Korsi blades?
35

36 MR. COULTAS: Yes, the old metal blades.
37

38 STRUHSAKER: And -- and at what point did you transition to the uh, Carson blades?
39

40 MR. COULTAS: Uh, when I returned back from my deployment in 2004. Let's see. I
41 believe in 04' we were still flying the metal blade and then in 05' we started
42 flying the Carson composite blades.
43

44 STRUHSAKER: And -- and your sense as an experienced pilot and aviator what do you
45 -- what's the difference?
46

1 MR. COULTAS: Oh, it's bolt on horsepower, Jim. It's uh -- it's made all the difference
2 in the world. Um, in that -- at the exact same power setting, if you were sitting
3 there um, and it was taking you uh, you know, it -- if you -- if you were sitting
4 there hovering at 85 or 90 percent and you're holding a load, uh, with the metal
5 blades, you could uh -- you could at that exact same power setting with the
6 composite blades, you can lift 2,000 pounds more. And they're not kidding. It's
7 a for real deal.

8

9 STRUHSAKER: Interesting --

10

11 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, so, uh, what it did for us, I mean it just gave me a big smile
12 because you know, we didn't change -- or they didn't change the limitations or
13 the payload capability of the helicopter at all. They left them all the same. So
14 really what it did was, your engines weren't working as hard. And there was less
15 uh, forces on the control, you know on all the flight controls. Um, it -- which --
16 you know, from a pilots point of view, uh, if you're not working your engines as
17 hard, you know, you're gonna get longer --

18

19 STRUHSAKER: Right, it's in your favor --

20

21 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, I mean it's -- just -- it was just a -- I love 'em and then the --
22 these blades --

23

24 STRUHSAKER: When you did experience droop, um, do you -- have any recollection
25 uh, of any increased or different deterioration in lift?

26

27 MR. COULTAS: Um, yeah, you do actually. The blades were actually designed at 103
28 percent RPM. Um, that's what the engineers designed 'em at. Uh, the rotor
29 system we run it at 106. Uh, so, you know we get a significant amount of lift.
30 You can hear it when the rotor droops. Um, but as she starts to droop below that
31 103, uh, she really starts to -- it's really becomes apparent --

32

33 STRUHSAKER: Yeah, it falls off quicker?

34

35 MR. COULTAS: It falls off quicker, yeah.

36

37 STRUHSAKER: Alright, um, that's interesting. That was certainly one of the questions
38 that we're looking at and uh -- 'cause we've heard how spiffy the blades are. But
39 I know aerodynamically when you gain something you loose something and the --
40 do you think there are any other things that you might loose with these -- these
41 really nice blades?

42

43 MR. COULTAS: Um, I don't -- I'm not sure I understand the question. Um --

44

45 STRUHSAKER: Well, like you said your -- your fall off of your lift is a little bit more
46 dramatic. Uh, you know there's a --

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MR. COULTAS: Well it appears to me that it was. I mean, I don't know. You know, it -- it all happened so quick. Um, they uh -- well you're -- and you're right, you know. When ever you gain something, obviously you gotta look -- you're gonna loose something some place else. Our fear has been that, okay, where's the next crack gonna be. You know, if I'm getting such good performance out of these blades and everything is great, there's gotta be somewhere within that fuselage or where that tail boom connects to the fuselage, you know, something. Uh, where's the next crack gonna be. And that's kind of what I've always asked myself and I -

STRUHSAKER: Well, if your harmonics are down and your power is less that should certainly help you in that regard.

MR. COULTAS: Sure, you bet.

STRUHSAKER: Alright, uh, I wanna thank you. Uh, the only comment that I've got -- a couple of comments, real quick -- short -- is that, if you'd be so kind as -- maybe with your wife Chris or something if -- if you'd be willing to maybe sort of keep something like a diary or your thoughts over a period of time and -- because you're going to go through quite a healing process not just physically, but psychologically. And I think, one the diary might help you personally but -- but in the diary process -- and you can do this different ways. You know, you could even do it in a tape recorder, whatever. But uh, some details might come up and if you would, you can contact, you know Sean or Zoë or myself or -- you know, whom ever and share 'em. But, I know from my training and experience that hopefully it'll um, you know, by looking right at it over time, uh, it actually facilitates the process of your healing emotionally, so -- I just support you on that and Chris I want to certainly thank you and -- I mean -- I know he's your husband but it's still quite a trial and task. And I'm just giving you accolades for your -- what you've done.

MRS. COULTAS: Thank you.

KELIHER: Chuck, do you have any questions?

TAYLOR: Just, you know I've gotta ask one last time. Bill, when you're sitting up there and you're rotating, you're leaving the hover and you're transitioning to forward flying and if you shut your eyes and you're thinking back or you're leaning out the door there, I mean your leaning out the bubble, and you feel that nose deep the second time, no swerve, you didn't hear anything --

MR. COULTAS: No --

TAYLOR: And I'm not talking something huge, just a little bit? No engine noise, difference, no nothing --

1
2 MR. COULTAS: I didn't notice anything Chuck. I -- I uh --
3
4 TAYLOR: Okay --
5
6 MR. COULTAS: I don't remember a big yaw --
7
8 TAYLOR: No, no --
9
10 MR. COULTAS: You know anything like that. Uh I don't remember a big loud noise.
11 Anything like that. Uh, I just -- you know how you can just -- if you fly a long
12 time, especially if you fly in a specific machine, you just kind of know. You kind
13 of develop, you know, you kind of know what it's gonna do or what -- what it's
14 suppose to feel like and that -- to me, there's anything through this whole process,
15 that is the only thing that I can really point my finger at and say, if there was
16 something that's abnormal that was it. Through this whole process. Because she
17 shouldn't of dipped. She shouldn't of -- not like that. And -- 'cause she dipped
18 pretty good and then -- and I know Roark reacted to it and he pulled the nose right
19 back up and then that's when we started drooping and uh -- so you know, uh, but I
20 don't remember anything else. I don't remember a big yaw or a noise or nothing.
21
22 TAYLOR: Okay.
23
24 KELIHER: Were you pretty stressed out about uh, dark coming, pumpkin time coming?
25 And you had three more loads?
26
27 MR. COULTAS: No, no we knew we were gonna be okay. We -- I mean we weren't
28 stressed about it. We knew that we had to meet that time. Um, and it wasn't like
29 a -- oh, my God, a sense of urgency like, oh, my God we gotta make this. It
30 wasn't like that. Um, we knew we had time to do it and -- but it was gonna be,
31 you know, probably within five or ten minutes. And uh --
32
33 MRS. COULTAS: No lollygagging.
34
35 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, but we knew we couldn't be dinking around either. We had to
36 get it done, you know, go to work. Get it done and uh -- you know, be smart
37 about it.
38
39 KELIHER: Sean any questions?
40
41 MORETZ: No, I'm fine.
42
43 KELIHER: We really appreciate it. I know you've gotta get going. Um, Jim.
44
45 STRUHSAKER: I'm signing off and thank you.
46

1 KELIHER: Um, Jim can I show him any of the pictures or um, talk about anything else
2 --
3
4 STRUHSAKER: Yeah, and I think the other thing I'd comment is that I'm comfortable
5 if the group is comfortable that uh, Bill and his wife get back to normal as far as
6 with their friends or contacts and I -- and we support that in your healing process,
7 you know getting back into your community. But you know, for -- you still might
8 wanna limit, just for your own sake, uh, how much conversation is direct on this
9 and slowly integrate it into your process.
10
11 KELIHER: Do you want to talk to him about any of our findings so far?
12
13 STRUHSAKER: Um, I know we've got a dateline right now and I'm -- at some point
14 when you get squared away back home here in the next week you're welcome to
15 give me a call and uh, if you wanna give him my number or contact, I'll be happy
16 to do that.
17
18 MR. COULTAS: Okay.
19
20 KELIHER: What time is it?
21
22 MALE VOICE: [Unintelligible] time to go.
23
24 STRUHSAKER: It's pumpkin time.
25
26 MR. COULTAS: Is it 1:30?
27
28 MALE VOICE: Yeah --
29
30 STRUHSAKER: Alright, thank you and Jim's signing off. I want to thank --
31
32 KELIHER: Thanks Jim.
33
34 STRUHSAKER: Yeah, thanks Sean and uh --
35
36 MALE VOICE: Take care Jim. Don't eat too many pineapples.
37
38 MALE VOICE: Thirty more minutes is all we needed.
39
40 KELIHER: I know.
41
42 MR. COULTAS: Well Chuck it was good meeting ya. I'm sorry in it was in these
43 circumstances.
44
45 MRS. COULTAS: That's [unintelligible] at.
46

1 MALE VOICE: Oh, I gotcha, plus the --
2
3 MRS. COULTAS: Right --
4
5 MALE VOICE: Are you in therapy now are you --
6
7 MRS. COULTAS: Well, we're hoping next week but right now we haven't been able to
8 get anybody -- even with a prescription because it's a workman's comp claim
9 state-to-state. So they're requiring an actual referral which I will get today. I've
10 already --
11
12 MR. COULTAS: But we've been kind of -- really pushing on my hands. My left hand
13 is the worst. I'm feeling it clear back up to here --
14
15 MALE VOICE: Were you saying your elbow is open?
16
17 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, it's an open wound right here like that and then I've got a big
18 one, open wound down in here.
19
20 MRS. COULTAS: Well this -- this whole arm was open to the bone.
21
22 MALE VOICE: [Unintelligible] know how you're feeling.
23
24 MR. COULTAS: Yeah, and then uh -- you know this pretty much from my fingers up to
25 here -- so basically just --
26
27
28 END
29
30
31