

Sundance Helicopters, Inc.
Grand Canyon West, Arizona
September 20, 2003
LAX03MA292

National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, DC

Attachment 2

Passenger Interview Statements Not Returned to the NTSB

7 Pages

Occupation: Account Manager for Internet Company

Age: 34 years old

Weight: 220 pounds

This statement represents a summary of the telephone interview conducted by the National Transportation Safety Board Survival Factors Specialists on February 24, 2004:

He said that Air Vegas scheduled their flight into the Grand Canyon and their riverboat ride in the canyon. He and his wife, who weighed about 200 pounds, took the tour at about 11:30 a.m. on September 20, 2004. He and his wife sat in the rear of the helicopter and two other English women sat in the front of the helicopter next to the pilot. He said that their pilot was an Asian male. He thought that the English women each weighed between 200 to 220 pounds. He did not remember anyone from Sundance Helicopter Company giving a safety briefing prior to their flight.

The lift off seemed very fast. The pilot flew to the edge of the canyon and over the cliff and descended very quickly into the canyon. The descent into the canyon scared him; it seemed like they were in a "roller coaster." He grabbed his camera and was able to take several photos. He said that it seemed like the pilot was purposely trying to scar the passengers, by giving them a thrilling ride into the canyon. He remembers the descent rate into the canyon was very fast, and the helicopter rolled left to right during the flight.

He said that his father owned a helicopter business when he was a child and he had flown on many helicopters when he was younger. He said that the ride into the Grand Canyon was more dramatic and wild, and was unlike any other helicopter ride he had ever flown. His wife was seated to his right during the flight into the canyon and there was an uncomfortable silence between them because they were both so scared during the flight.

When their helicopter landed at the base of the canyon the pilot slowed the helicopter down and maneuvered it to level flight just before they landed on the floor of the canyon. They got out of the helicopter and took a boat ride through the canyon. When they returned from the boat ride they waited for over an hour before they were told that their helicopter had crashed and they would have to wait for another helicopter to take them back to the top of the canyon. A Papillon Helicopter Company helicopter arrived

and flew his wife, one of the English women, a Sundance employee, and himself out of the Canyon. He thought that the Sundance employee looked very anguished and when they arrived at the Sundance base there were other employees standing around who were very upset.

He said that he did not hear or witness the crash.

Occupation: Vice President of Finance
Age 44

This statement represents a summary of the telephone interview conducted by the National Transportation Safety Board Survival Factors Specialists on October 8, 2003:

A couple from England, his wife and himself flew on a tour trip into the Grand Canyon on the morning of September 20, 2003, scheduled through the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas. He had no piloting experience, and this was his first helicopter flight. The helicopter ride included a flight to the floor of the Grand Canyon and a return trip back to the top of the canyon.

He and his wife arrived at the tour shack where a lady took their height, weight, and then grouped them together and introduced them to their female pilot. He signed a waiver for the flight and was given a short safety briefing about fire extinguishers. He did not remember who gave the briefing. He was seated in the front of the helicopter next to a female pilot. He fastened his seatbelt prior to lift off. The lift off was so smooth that he did not realize they had taken off.

They were flying about two hundred yards off the ground for about three to four hundred yards and when they entered the ravine they were suddenly about 3,000 feet above the ground. The pilot did a hard bank to the left and turned into the canyon, like a "thrill ride". The helicopter was dropping and turning at the same time following curves in and out like "a snake." He grabbed the handrail and did not take any pictures. The helicopter appeared to be very close to canyon walls while snaking in and out of the canyon. On the way out of the ravine someone handed the pilot a camera and she took a picture while flying the helicopter.

When they first broke into the canyon they stayed close to canyon on the left side then they made a hard right turn to the helipad next to the river. Some of the ride seemed closer to the wall then they needed to be.

Their ride out of the canyon was with the same female pilot. It was a beautiful ride, similar to the ride down but they passed the descent ravine and went up another ravine further down the canyon. When they broke over the top of the canyon they appeared to be very close (about ten feet) above

the ground; it felt like they would touch the ground. There was another group waiting for the helicopter when they got back to the Sundance heliport. He thought that each helicopter ride was spaced about 15 to 20 minutes apart. The next flight departed the heliport about 15 minutes after they had landed, and as they were driving away from the Sundance they saw police cars go flying past their vehicle toward the canyon.

He said he had seen the other male pilot take off and he did not see anything unusual nor did he hear any unusual sounds or a lapse in the engine from the other Sundance helicopter.

Occupation: Retired
Age 67

They got off the buss, and went straight to the helicopter. He did not recall that Sundance gave them any pre-flight instructions. Their pilot was a blonde female and there were four passengers seated across the back seat and one Middle Eastern man seated next to the pilot. He sat in the right outboard rear seat of the helicopter. The flight occurred on Saturday, September 20, 2003, before lunch hour. He said that their flight into the canyon was a bit scary, particularly during the decent.

They did not receive any specific safety instructions before their flight, but Sundance employees helped them fasten their seat belts. The helicopter took off and flew across a plato and then quickly dropped over the edge of the canyon and descended very quickly straight down into the canyon. The swift decent shocked him; it was very “fast” and very “scary.”

He thought that it took about 15 seconds for them to reach the bottom of the canyon. Although it was a thrilling ride, the ride also shocked him. It seemed like the nose of the helicopter was pointed straight downward during the descent into the canyon. During the flight he noticed their pilot taking photos while flying the helicopter into the canyon. He thought it was very odd that she was taking photos while flying the helicopter.

When they flew back out of the canyon they had the same female pilot. The flight out of the canyon was a lot more comfortable and gradual. They flew a nice angle and they had a good view of the canyon. He said that during the climb, he thought the helicopter got a bit close to the canyon wall. When they got to the top they leveled off then crossed a chasm and then landed at the Sundance heliport.

The other passengers on their flight included a married couple from England, and a single male Middle Eastern passenger. His friend sat next to him and the English couple sat next to his friend. He heard about the accident when his friend and he got home to Australia on the September 23, 2003.

Occupation: Retired
Age 59

She had ridden on one helicopter flight over Victory Falls in Australia during September 2002 prior to the flight into the Grand Canyon on Saturday, September 20, 2003. When her friend and her boarded the bus in Las Vegas, Nevada, their bus driver (who worked for Sundance helicopter tours) took their weight. When their bus arrived at the canyon they were running late so Sundance employees took them straight from the bus to the helicopter.

She sat in the middle in the back of the helicopter and two men sat on the outside and another lady sat next to her in the middle. A Middle Eastern man sat in the front next to the female pilot. The Sundance employees that shepherd them into the helicopter made sure their seatbelts were secure.

Another helicopter landed when they took off, and she thought that the pilot of the other helicopter was a male. Their flight took off, and flew directly down into the canyon. She thought the pilot told them that they traveled 1 mile in 15 seconds. The helicopter descended into the canyon very fast and it felt like her stomach was still at the top of the canyon. It was “quite scary, I’ve never known anything to go so quickly.” She thought that maybe their pilot was in a hurry to keep up with the boat tours at the bottom of the canyon.

She said that the only thing that really worried her, “other than being scared stiff” during the flight into the canyon, was that their pilot had a digital camera and was taking photos while flying the helicopter. She thought the pilot should have concentrated on her flying, instead of taking photos, but she also thought that it revealed how confident the pilot was about flying the helicopter. She thought that the camera was the pilot’s, because the pilot stuffed it into the side pocket of the helicopter after she finished taking pictures. She said that although she did not feel in any danger during the flight, she did not think it was right for the pilot to take photos while flying passengers in the helicopter.

She said that the return flight was “fine” back up out of the canyon; they rocked from side to side a little bit. They got up to the top and she was happy to find the land underneath the helicopter again. The helicopter flew over a ravine, flew around in a little circle, and then landed at the Sundance

heliport. She thought it was about 12:00 noon when they landed at the top of the canyon.

After she returned home to Australia, she considered calling Sundance Company to report that their pilot took photos while flying passengers into the canyon.