

To: Joshua Cawthra, NTSB

From: Scott Blakeslee

Re: 1/30/18 - Crash Newport Beach - R44 N7530R

Dear Mr. Cawthra,

Per your request, I am submitting the following statement relating to my memory of the events prior to and on January 20, 2018.

Several times over the prior months leading up to the crash on January 30th, Pepe Tena had talked to me in person about how much he enjoyed, and how often he would fly/pilot a helicopter and that we should fly to Catalina one day for lunch.

About one week prior to the incident, Pepe had sent out an email to Kim (Watzman) and I suggesting a date to fly to Catalina for lunch and to see if that would work. We settled on that day via correspondence between the three of us and planned to meet at Pepe's office in Newport just before lunchtime, around 11:30 am.

The morning of the incident I got ready with my family, considering I could stay local and not have to commute up to Downtown Los Angeles that day. At approximately 10:45 am I left our house in Orange County and arrived around 11:15 am to Pepe's Newport Beach office. When I arrived, Kim and Brian (Reichelt) were already there, although I did not know until then that Brian would be joining us on the trip. We all ended up talking with each other and with some of Pepe's employees there while we waited for Pepe, who eventually arrived closer to 12 noon.

Upon Pepe's arrival, he said hello and asked if we were ready. We wrapped up our conversations there and all walked out together to Pepe's car as he said he would drive us all there together.

On the drive over, we all exchanged light conversation about work and generalities.

At one point during the brief ride, Pepe was on the phone with what I assumed was a contact at the helicopter company. As he hung up with frown, I asked if all was OK. He said everything was fine, he just wanted a different helicopter, but not a big deal.

We arrived at the airport and parked near the area where the helicopter was waiting. At that time, we all got out of the car and I, like the others, walked around a bit taking in the immediate area and the actual helicopter.

Pepe met with a gentleman in a flight suit for a couple of minutes during this time, opened the helicopter doors, walked around it, etc. He was going through what seemed to be pre-flight information/checklist items and then continued by getting in and making more comments and notes around what I could only gather as pertaining to flight and helicopter as part of pre-flight preparations. He also at this time removed what looked like a steering extension from the left side of the front passenger seat and said something about this being a pilot training tool for the helicopter.

As Kim, Brian and I were now discussing seating, Brian wanted the back, while Kim and I decided I would sit up front on the way over and that she would probably sit up front on the return flight. Kim and Brian got into the helicopter and I remained outside for a short time as Pepe was still performing what seemed like pre-flight tasks and I wasn't sure how long it might be before actually taking off.

Several minutes later I climbed in and Pepe issued out headsets and went through a few items and spoke to someone from the airport about takeoff, still seeming to be executing part of a detailed flight checklist. Kim, Brian and I were smiling and taking photos on our cell phones.

Not specifically seeing how he did it, Pepe turned on the engine and was now looking to operate the helicopter into flight.

Items I do specifically remember is the concentration on his face and his left hand on a lever between our seats that he was diligently working in concert with another handle in his right.

We began to lift off the ground, seeming to hover momentarily, then gradually continued to climb upward.

During this first minute or so of climbing I was nervously taking it all in while operating my cell phone to try and take footage to show my family. Except for being nervous and somewhat scared as this was my first time in a helicopter and

the movements are far different than a plane, all appeared apparently normal as Pepe seemed in control and focused.

After another 30 seconds or so we seemed to be reaching what I thought was a pretty high altitude and slowly started turning left, continuing away from the airfield. I do remember seeing what looked like a park with small lake straight ahead of us and was thinking of our location and how it sets to Catalina, etc.

We continued on this flight path for another 30 seconds to minute, still slowly and steadily climbing in the process, but certainly more level than before.

Right at this point, we suddenly dropped, nose first, straight down.

I remember looking straight down between my legs through the glass at the ground rushing toward us and saying "God no! God no! No God! No God!" and instinctively preparing for impact.

It is so complicated to explain the feeling at impact because it was so hard, loud and really indescribable if you haven't been through this.

Everything was white for a split second as my mind and body tried to comprehend what happened and that I was still alive. Then I remember the intense pain, the taste of blood, the broken glass and crumpled metal around me as I was basically halfway in and out of the helicopter, almost on the ground.

I immediately started to yell for anyone to call 911 and for help, over and over again, while also trying to see or hear any of the others, only managing to feel and see some of Pepe who was basically laying on me.

Pepe was not responding to any of my attempts to talk or move him and my angle was exceptionally strained to move. This is when I felt I was all alone now.

Still yelling for help and finally getting some people to yell back, I managed to get to my seat belt control and unlatch, which basically let me fall/roll/fight my way out, crawling and then walking to the first open space I could find and collapsing on my back.

Some people were now starting to surround me while I laid on the ground telling them about the others in the helicopter, my name, to call my wife. They tried to

comfort me while I continued to repeat myself for what seemed like several minutes or more.

During this time, I recall hearing different voices a short distance away and was really trying to listen to the words, plus I heard the sound of running liquid. Unfortunately, I could not make out the specifics of what they were saying.

A policeman arrived and started to ask me questions, which I answered as best as I could, still telling people to help the others, call my wife, find my phone, call my wife, etc.

The paramedics arrived, and I remember talking about how the pain was inside, not the cuts they can see, because I truly felt I was bleeding to death internally – not sure how I knew.

They started to cut my clothing off as I continued to answer questions and repeat myself in between with the requests to call my wife, find my phone, tell me about the others.

They loaded me into the ambulance and the same routine of conversations continued until I finally went dark, waking up in the ICU at Global Trauma Center.

If you have any more questions, please feel free to contact me.

Scott Blakeslee