

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Washington, D.C. 20594

PASSENGER STATEMENT

The National Transportation Safety Board, a Federal Agency, is charged by an Act of Congress with the investigation of transportation accidents. The Safety Board issues reports and makes recommendations to other federal and local agencies and to the industry to prevent future accidents and to prevent unnecessary injuries caused by such accidents.

We would appreciate very much your assistance in giving us the benefit of your personal observations and comments regarding this accident so that we may better evaluate the facts, conditions and circumstances surrounding this accident. Your observations also could assist us greatly in our evaluation of the cause of injuries as well as the adequacy of equipment and procedures affecting your survival and escape.

In addition to completing the following specific information, please feel free to comment on any aspect, before, during or after the accident, that you believe may have had a bearing on the accident cause or on subsequent events.

STATEMENT

Date of Accident: 3/14/97 Location of Accident: Lena, LA,
Name: Kent L. Kramer JR. Age: Height: Weight:
Address: New Iberia, LA 70560
Occupation: EMS Medical Crew Telephone:
Injuries: Serious

If you sustained injuries and were treated, provide name and address of doctor or treatment facility:

Are you handicapped (through vision, missing limbs, spinal problems, etc., which may affect your movements.) Please specify:

Seat Location: If you do not recall your seat number, please specify your position as on the left or right, aisle or window location, number of rows from the front or back, near a specific door or any other method which will assist in locating your position.

Left Front

A. MY OBSERVATIONS BEFORE THE ACCIDENT

Describe your observations before the accident happened such as the weather conditions; the lighting conditions; whether or not you have a seatbelt fastened; your outside observations, etc.

See Attached

B. MY OBSERVATIONS DURING THE ACCIDENT

Describe the accident circumstances considering such things as any unusual occurrences during the accident; the presence of fire or smoke; the direction in which you were thrown; the severity of the impact; etc.

See Attached

C. MY OBSERVATIONS AFTER THE ACCIDENT

Describe your method of escape and any difficulties encountered with your seat, seatbelt, debris, etc.; the reaction and behavior of other passengers; your observations of any outside rescue attempts; any occurrence which seemed unusual to you; etc.

See Attached

D. OTHER GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

You may use this space to comment on any other aspect of the accident or you may sketch the general accident scene as you observed it, your escape method or the location of fire, etc.

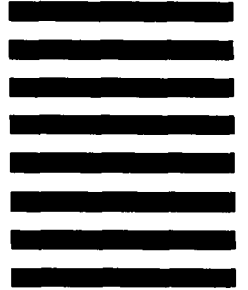
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To Whom it may concern:

Please consider this an official written statement of my recollection of events that took place on March 14, 1997. On March 13, 1997 at approximately 22:00 hours I received a telephone call from the AASI dispatch center in regard to a interhospital transfer from Jennings American Legion Hospital (HJAL) to LSU @ Shreveport Louisiana (HLUS). After having the pilot (Don McLaud) check the weather conditions, he advised me that we could take the trip without any problems. Shortly after departure from Lafayette Airport we encountered ceilings of 700 feet. I asked Don at that time about the potential of the weather to become below our night time minimums. His response was that when we started heading North from Jennings enroute to Shreveport, that the weather forecast was for conditions to rapidly improve. We landed at Jennings Airport without incident and were met there by a AASI ambulance. The ambulance then took us to Jennings Hospital.

Upon picking up the patient, we returned to the airport and departed for Shreveport. I remember Don talking to Fort Polk Control, and obtaining clearance to fly directly over Fort Polk air space due to the fact that there were no military exercises going on that night in the area. I do not remember the exact conversation between Don and Fort Polk Control, but I know we made several deviations to the West during our flight to Shreveport because the weather conditions were not clearing up as forecasted. At one point in time we were over Toledo Bend Reservoir, but I am not exactly sure what city we were in close proximity to when that occurred. The weather conditions did eventually improve to the point of clear skies and unlimited visibility shortly before we reached Shreveport. I made radio contact with Life Air Rescue Control via Unicom frequency 123.05 MHz approximately fifteen minutes prior to landing at LSU Shreveport and gave them a brief medical report. Upon landing at LSU Shreveport, we unloaded the patient and Don left to go and fuel up the helicopter while I delivered the patient to the burn unit.

Upon return of the helicopter we departed for Lafayette. The weather upon departure from Shreveport was clear skies with unlimited visibility. I was flight following on the way back with Life Air Rescue until I was able to make radio contact with AASI dispatch center. Approximately twenty minutes into our return flight we began to encounter ceilings of around 2000 feet. I remember vaguely, Don talking to Fort Polk at that time, and they were reporting weather conditions there were rapidly deteriorating and currently had ceilings of 300 feet and 1 or 2 miles visibility. It was at this time that Don and I had a brief discussion about the possibility of returning to Natchitoches to spend the night if we encountered weather that would not allow us to make it into Alexandria. I also think it was about this time that I alerted AASI dispatch to the possibility of us spending the night in Alexandria due to inclimate weather. I also had a radio conversation with the AASI dispatch center regarding the weather conditions in Lafayette, and Alexandria. I do not remember exactly what the response was in regard to Lafayette, but I do remember hearing that the weather in Alexandria was currently 700 feet and I think 5 to 7 miles visibility. I remember Fort Polk Control speaking to Don and saying that they lost radar contact, although I do not recall exactly where we were, or at what altitude when that occurred. I do remember that shortly after that occurred, Don stated that we were going to get over Interstate 49 and follow it into Alexandria, where we would make the decision as to whether or not we would continue to Lafayette or spend

the night in Alexandria. Upon establishing ourselves over Interstate 49 I gave a quarterly hour position report to the AASI dispatch center and also advised them that we were down to 500 feet altitude. I obtained this altitude reading by asking Don, as well as visually from the altimeter. I remember Don saying at about that time, that he was going to slow down to about 70 or 80 knots in order to keep traffic on the interstate in view, due to the fact that it was so dark in that area. I remember looking at the cars on I-49 and thinking that the visibility was still acceptable due to the fact that I could still see the red tail lights of the vehicles going in the same direction as us. Shortly after that I remember Don screaming "Oh Shit" and feeling a shudder in the aircraft and what I think was a very hard turn to the left. At that point I became totally disoriented. I remember seeing a huge shower of orange sparks overhead, and impacting something shortly thereafter. Immediately upon impact I was being pelted in the top of the head with unknown debris, and then the noise of the engines and rotor became extremely loud. The initial pain on the top of my head was intense and I remember putting my hands up over my head in an attempt to keep debris from continuing to hit me. The one thing that really sticks in my mind is that I remember thinking to myself that "this is it, I am going to die." The whole incident seemed as if it was over almost as quickly as it began. When everything came to rest, there was what seemed to be absolute silence.

My first thoughts immediately following the crash were that I had to get away from the aircraft in fear of a fire. It was pitch dark, but while frantically trying to release my seatbelt I remember seeing a silhouette of Don leaning forward in his seat motionless. I jumped from the aircraft and ran into the darkness. I have no idea how far I ran, but I think it was probably 30 or 40 yards. As I turned to look behind me I realized that it was so dark that I could not see the aircraft anymore. It was at that time I began to call for Don. I must have screamed for Don at least 10 or 12 times, but I never received a response. At this point I began to realize that I was hurt. My back was starting to hurt, my left hand was stinging, and my upper legs felt as if they were on fire. I could also feel blood running down the right side of my face and neck. I got really scared at this point because I knew I was hurt, but I was unsure of the severity of my injuries. It was not until the first car passed by that I realized we were close to the interstate. After the first car passed by I got an idea of what direction to walk back to in order to reach the highway. After reaching the highway, I made an attempt to stop 5 or 6 cars, but it was to no avail. I then crossed through the median in an attempt to stop traffic in the other lane. Finally when cars began to stop, I crossed back to the other side where I could now see the helicopter due to the headlights of the vehicles shining on it. After getting someone to call 911 from a cellular phone I made my way back to the helicopter to check on Don, now that I had some light. I found Don leaning forward in his seat still motionless. He appeared to be extremely cyanotic, and had what seemed to be copious amounts of blood draining from his mouth and nose. I checked him for respirations and a carotid pulse, but he was pulseless and apneic. Although the lighting was still poor, I think I remember seeing lacerations to the back of his head, neck and back. After checking on Don I walked back to where the traffic had stopped and a man assisted me to sit on the floorboard of his van because my back was starting to hurt more, and I was having trouble walking due to the pain. I think it was at this time that I asked him to call AASI dispatch center so I could speak with them. I do not remember exactly what the conversation was, but I do remember telling them that Don was dead and to please send an ambulance quickly because I was hurting.

There was a fire department rescue truck that arrived shortly after that conversation and placed me on a long spine board, and immobilized me with a cervical collar, straps, and a head immobilizer. It seemed like forever before an ambulance arrived. When the ambulance got there, I remember insisting that I be brought to Rapides General Hospital.

Enroute to the hospital, I had the medic call my wife so I could speak to her before anyone else had a chance to call her. I knew that if I spoke to her first, that she would know for sure that I was alive. The ambulance ride also seemed as if it took forever, and my back was really starting to hurt during the trip to the hospital. Upon arrival at Rapides General Hospital, the pain in my back was to the point where I could hardly move. I was met at the emergency room doors by fellow co-workers from Air Med 4, and hospital staff. The treatment and professionalism shown to me by the staff at Rapides General were extraordinary. After multiple X-rays, blood work, and sutures, I was informed by the emergency room physician that I was going to be admitted for several days for observation due to the compression fracture in my spine. It was at that time I requested to be transferred to Columbia Dauterive Hospital in New Iberia at my request.