



## NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Central Region – Arlington, Texas

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### RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Who: Zechariah Smith, Pilot

When: October 4, 2014

CEN15FA005, Wichita Falls, TX

I interviewed Mr. Smith in the ICU at United Regional Hospital. Mr. Smith's friend Grant, and Tony Bonham, Director of Flight Operations for Air Evac Lifeteam, were also present during the interview.

Mr. Smith agreed to talk and was coherent. He suffered a fractured neck and clavicle, in addition to cuts on his hands from the accident. He did not suffer any burns and was expected to make a full recovery.

Mr. Smith stated that he and his Duncan, Oklahoma, based medical crew had just returned from a flight to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, when he received a call from company dispatch to pick-up a patient in Waurika, Oklahoma, and then transport him to United Regional Hospital in Wichita Falls, Texas. The pilot accepted the flight, but told dispatch that they needed 15 minutes on the ground to prepare for the flight since they had just landed.

Mr. Smith said that he, along with the paramedic and flight nurse, re-boarded the helicopter, performed the necessary checklists, called dispatch and filed a flight plan. The flight to Waurika was uneventful. After landing, the pilot stayed in the helicopter for about 20 minutes with the engine running while the patient was prepped and loaded. The pilot and medical crew then departed for Wichita Falls.

Upon arriving in Wichita Falls, Mr. Smith said he performed the pre-landing checklists, and started the approach to the helipad from the northwest at an altitude of 700 feet above ground level (agl). Both the hospital and helipad lighted windsocks were "limp" but were positioned so they were pointing toward the northwest. Mr. Smith, who has landed at this helipad on numerous occasions, said the approach was normal until he got closer to the helipad. He said he felt fast "about 12-15 knots" and a "little high," so he decided to abort

the approach. At this point, with about ¼ to ½ -inch of left anti-torque pedal applied, Mr. Smith said he added power, "tipped the nose over to get airspeed," and "pulled collective." He said that as soon as he brought the collective up, the helicopter entered a rapid right turn. Mr. Smith described the turn as "violent" and that it was the fastest he had ever "spun" in a helicopter. He told the crew to hold on and that he was "going to try and fly out of it." Mr. Smith said he tried hard to get control of the helicopter by applying cyclic and initially "some" left anti-torque pedal "but nothing happened." He said he added more, but not full left anti-torque pedal as the helicopter continued to spin and he was still unable to regain control. Mr. Smith also said the engine had plenty of power and was operating fine. He recalled the helicopter spinning at least five times before impacting the ground. Mr. Smith said the helicopter landed inverted and quickly filled up with smoke. He unbuckled his seatbelt assembly, took off his helmet, punched out the windshield and exited the burning helicopter.

Mr. Smith also said that he did not hear any unusual noises prior to the "tail coming out from underneath them" and did not recall hearing any warning horns or seeing any warning/caution lights. When asked what he thought caused the helicopter to spin to the right so quickly, he replied, "I don't know."

Leah D. Yeager, Senior Air Safety Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board