

Survival Factual Report – Attachment 11
Interview Summary- Eric Adams

SURVIVAL FACTORS

ERA18MA099

Interviewee: Mr. Eric Adams
Date / Time: April 12, 2018 (1500 EST)
Location: Via telephone
Present: Emily Gibson, NTSB
Representative: Declined

Mr. Adams stated he had flown with FlyNYON three times total – once about 3-4 years ago, another time a year ago, and most recently, on the day of the accident. Each flight was a 30-minute flight, either sunset or after sunset, from the Kearny location. He recalled all were in the winter or more cooler months.

He knew FlyNYON had their own helicopters and that they sometimes contracted with Liberty Helicopters to conduct these flights. He did not know if he had flown on a Liberty helicopter or a FlyNYON helicopter on prior trips. He stated his first flight originated at a different location. He stated FlyNYON had moved locations, and they originally had their own hangar, right by the waterfront in Kearny. He said they had since, in the last year, moved their location further inland into an office park, where a new terminal was located. He stated this was different than the previous two times he had flown with them. The previous two times there was no terminal or reception area. In the past it was just a hangar with a conference room. He stated his first two flights were operated by FlyNYON helicopters and not Liberty Helicopters. He believed the contracts with Liberty Helicopters transpired because of their quick expansion in the last year or two. He said the FlyNYON helicopters were very heavily branded whereas the Liberty helicopters were co-branded with Liberty and Blade.

On the day of the accident, Mr. Adams stated that the helicopter was supposed to take off at 1845 and he was told to arrive by 1730. He pulled into the parking lot about 1725. It was a crisp, early spring day. He did not remember what the air temperature was, but he thought it was in the high 40's or low 50's. Many passengers were in spring clothing. He said he noticed the temperature because he was talking to one of the passengers on the accident flight and he noticed he was dressed very lightly. He spoke to him outside in the parking lot before he entered the FlyNYON building while he retrieved his camera gear out of his car. The other passenger was asking him questions about the flight. He told him what to expect and asked him if he had warmer clothes because it was going to be really cold up in the air.

When he walked inside the FlyNYON building he realized they had a new front desk area with a different process than he had experienced before. The check-in process used an iPad where passengers were supposed to read all the documents and then provide a signature. He did not remember everything that it said. While he was signing in, another male passenger on the accident flight was also signing in and stood right next to him. He smelled a “very pronounced whiff of alcohol on his breath.” He said it was very noticeable to him. He did not think it was a problem for the flight, he just thought it was weird. He did not know if there were regulations regarding letting passengers onboard with alcohol or who had been drinking. He stated, “everyone in the room knew [about the odor].” He said he could tell by watching the staff interaction with him that they knew it as well. The passenger did not seem to be inebriated but he did seem to be having a good time and had a very exuberant personality.

After they were checked-in, which took about 10 minutes, there was some milling around. They had mockups and monitors to view. He checked it all out while he was getting his stuff together. There were three flights going up at the same time, within a few minutes staff members called everyone for those flight into a conference room to go over a safety briefing. He stated there were two people that were in charge. He could not remember their names or their roles, but they worked together to get everyone situated, conducted a safety briefing, and eventually got them into their harnesses. He stated the conversation was high energy and it was fun and exciting. He mentioned one of the employee's daughters was in the room. He said that the passengers with an odor of alcohol was joking around and interacting with her. They watched a video of a safety briefing. The video was about five minutes long and it showed the seating arrangements. He recalled that some passengers were permitted to sit on the floor because of the harness and tether system. The video also showed the tether being cut which seemed very easy to him. He stated that the video demonstrated that "you simply turn around and cut it."

One of the staff members asked if anyone in the groups wanted to be upgraded to a 30-minute flight from a 15-minute flight. The passenger with the odor of alcohol, the passenger he had spoken with in the parking lot, and a female passenger all opted to upgrade. That left only one other couple on the 15-minute flight. He made a point to ask if he would need to wear his parka. He said he knew he would because of how cold it was, but he was concerned for the two male passengers who he felt was not dressed appropriately. He hoped that, by asking, that one of the FlyNYON staff would say something to them. But instead, he said the female staffer who was in charge leaned over and whispered to him, "yes, bring that." It was almost like she did not want the others to hear and it struck him as very weird that she would not say "oh yes, its cold up there if anyone has a coat in your car go get it."

They left the conference room and went around a corner to where the harnesses were. Harnessing everyone took a good amount of time because there were 12-13 people in the group. They had to take everything out of their pockets, get their harnesses on, and tether their cameras and smart phones. They were weighed at the end of the process. The male with the odor of alcohol was slowing down the process by fooling around. he was anxious to get going as he was worried they could miss the sunset because of his behavior.

The passengers put all their loose belongings in a bin and locker. They split up into two separate vans and drove over to the helicopters. It appeared to be a different place than what FlyNYON had used a couple years ago and might have been a Liberty Helicopters facility. Three helicopters were lined up. FlyNYON staff had asked before they left the terminal what seats people wanted to be in and he asked to sit in the front seat. He preferred that seat because he felt there was less vibration from the wind and it was easier to get good quality shots. He remembered there was some confusion as they exited the buses as to who was going where. He said there was one passenger who thought he was going to one helicopter then he got sent over to his. Eventually they got it worked out. It seemed to him that almost all the passengers on his flight seemed to be much more advanced in photography and had professional cameras whereas the passengers on the accident helicopter only had smart phones.

Someone came over and put a personal floatation device on them but there was no explanation on how it worked or how to use it or what it did. He did not know if it was water activated or automatic, or if he needed to do anything for it to come out. He took a photograph of the accident helicopter which was to the right of him and the passengers walking toward the accident helicopter.

After they got into their seats, someone hooked him into his tether. He did not see the tether or the carabiner attach to the back of his harness. He said no one pointed out the cutter. He said he had no idea how it worked or how to get it out of the sheath it was in. He said he probably could have looked down and found it if he needed it, unless he was under water.

While everyone was getting in and seated the pilot explained what the rear passengers had to do to get down to the floor. He stated the pilot did not do any additional safety briefing beyond that. No explanation was provided on what to do during an emergency. There was no conversation or drill that elaborated on the tethers, harness or cutter.

The pilot boarded and he was given a headset without microphone. He thought that was really strange because every flight he had ever been on there was a microphone and he could be in communication with the pilot. He mentioned it to the pilot who just replied, "yes I know." He put the headset on and started practicing turning to the side, so he could get the pictures he wanted. He said he practiced his range of motion. He also said he had a black lapbelt on at its very loosest setting so that he could have the flexibility to shoot the pictures. He said it was "way beyond looser than what it needed to be" for him to get in the position he needed to be in and he kept it on the entire flight. Once everyone had their seatbelts on the pilot started the helicopter. He believes all three helicopters started around the same time. He guessed it was about 1850 and sunset was about 1900.

A helicopter on a 15-minute flight took off first and he never saw that helicopter again. The accident helicopter took off about a minute later. His helicopter took off last. They headed to the Statue of Liberty and he saw the accident helicopter there. They were both flying circles around the statue and he got several shots of the helicopter. After those laps, he stated he believed the pilot was communicating with the "brand ambassador" in the back seat. The pilot accommodated his request with an additional circle around the statue. They flew toward the Brooklyn Bridge trying to get a second sunset picture. They lingered at that spot while the other helicopter continued up the East River. He took some photos around Freedom Tower and they slowly made way up East River. They went to Midtown to get the Empire State Building and they were going to cut over to Central Park. At some point, the pilot headed back to the river. The passenger just thought he was giving them other views of the city and did not think anything of it. They continued to Central Park, the Upper East Side, and over to the Hudson River through Midtown again. Finally, they returned to Kearny.

After they landed, everyone stayed in helicopter until the rotor stopped spinning. When they took off their headsets the pilot told them they had to deviate from their flight path for a little while because one of the helicopters went down in the river. That was the first the passengers had heard of it and the pilot was laughing nervously about it. He believed the pilot told them everyone was ok or that he thought everyone was ok. He asked if it was a FlyNYON helicopter that went down

or was it another helicopter and they told him it was of the three helicopters that took off with them. He knew it was the other 30-minute helicopter because the 15-minute flight was already back and had landed.

They were taken back to the van. All the personnel were very professional. They got back to the terminal, took off and hung up their harnesses, and retrieved their items out of the locker.

FlyNYON closed the command center and he went out to his car. Mr. Adams had an aviation journalism background and started looking at Twitter and social media to see what reports were coming in about the accident. He also transferred photos to his phone and looked to see if he had photos of the helicopter, which he did. He had decided to post them to Twitter. As soon as he uploaded them an avalanche of media interest began coming in. He said he sat in his car for almost 2 hours looking at photos and posting to social media, sending emails, and making telephone calls.

In retrospect, he was “freaked out” and angry that there was “no way to get out of the helicopter on your own, especially if there was no one there to help you.” When asked about the safety briefing, he stated that FlyNYON staff did not reiterate anything in the video after it was over and did not ask anyone if they had any questions. He recalled that the harnesses were yellow and that they never went over any of the equipment on the harness with him.

When asked if he felt FlyNYON rushed or hurried for the sunset flight, he stated they were being as efficient as they could. He did not feel like they rushed things to the point that they were skipping over safety information. When asked about his seatbelt, he stated it was loose and not routed normally. He stated they did not use the shoulder harness- only the lapbelt portion. When asked about to clarify if there was anyone who helped him into the helicopter, he stated the pilot was there, but he did not remember his name. He said a female put the life vest on him and there was another male company person who helped. He climbed up and sat down in his seat, but he had no idea who actually tethered him in. They did not go over anything on the harness again, but he thought they might have checked it. There were no instructions on emergency egress and no instructions on how to use the cutter or its location.

When asked to compare the safety briefings prior to this flight compared to the other two he had taken, he stated that the other two were much more thorough. He recalled it was a smaller operation then and they met with the pilot each time, he had a map, and talked a lot more before going up. it was not a short video presentation. It was an actual talk and walkthrough briefing. This time they did not meet the pilot until he climbed into the helicopter.

When asked if he had he ever witnessed anything interfering with the floor mounted controls he stated that he had not but also stated he would not have been paying attention to that area.

When asked if there was anything else he would like to share he stated he did not, but he had a lot of questions for FlyNYON. and he was very anxious to read the report to find out how this happened.