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GCI Communications Corp.

Survival Factors Group Chairman's Factual Report

Attachment 4

Statement from Sam Egli

7 pages

GCI OTTER CRASH RESCUE STATEMENT

By Sam Egli
19 August 2010

At approx 1945 I received a phone call from our company pilot Heather Mase advising me she had just heard about the Otter plane crash near Dillingham, and that someone was looking for a helicopter right away. I was not at Egli Air Haul, but in Naknek at the time.

At approx 1957 I received a phone call from our company pilot Bob Egli who was on a flying contract in Dillingham at the time. He told me he had just gotten a call from Norman Heyano needing a rescue helicopter right away. Bob was unable to respond and was handing it off to our King Salmon base. He gave me Norman's phone number with the message to call him.

At approx 2000 I called Norman Heyano.

At approx 2003 Norman Heyano gave me the order to launch.

At approx 2005 I departed Naknek for EAH.

At 2007 I called our helicopter mechanic Josh Flint for assistance with the scramble-launch.

At approx 2009 I called Norman Heyano to reassure him I was on the way to King Salmon. I told him our mechanic Josh Flint is an EMT and would be assisting me with the launch. I asked Norman if he would like Josh to come along as an EMT.

Norman told me if Josh wanted to come along, that would be great. That would mean 1 less guy he would have to send from Dillingham. He told me Josh would not need to bring any medic stuff with him, as they had everything already in Dillingham.

At 2017 I called Josh Flint back to invite him to fly with me as EMT if he wanted to. Josh accepted.

At approx 2019 I called Norman Heyano back to tell him Josh Flint would be coming along as EMT.

At approx 2022 I arrived at EAH. Josh and I completed the necessary preparations, pushed out the helicopter, and fueled it up.

Josh and I launched N13AT at 2041 from PAKN.

I air-filed a VFR flight plan with Kenai FSS on 122.2 through King Salmon Radio, destination PADL.

Approaching PADL airspace, I made my initial radio call to Dillingham FSS. At this time, the FSS controller gave me coordinates which he had for the crash site, which were N59 19.971' W158 22.696'.

Josh and I landed at **2118** at PADL on the Alaska Cargo Service ramp. Norman Heyano and 2 Dillingham EMT's were there to meet us.

At approx 2119 Josh began loading the 2 Dillingham EMT's and medic equipment into N13AT.

At approx **2122**, while Josh was loading the EMT's and medic equipment, Norman Heyano gave me coordinates N59 19.971' W158 22.696'. He told me this location was a few hundred feet below the crash site. He said Tom Tucker was out there with his helicopter (an R-44). After my conversation with Norman Heyano, I compared his coordinates with those I received from Flight Service. I noticed that they were the same coordinates I had received from the FSS controller.

At **2129** Josh and I, plus the 2 Dillingham EMT's took off from PADL.

I closed my VFR flight plan from PAKN to PADL and air-filed a new one from PADL out to the crash site area, with an ETA back at PADL of "midnight".

The FSS controller advised me that there was another helicopter and possibly other aircraft at or over the scene or in the area. He also advised me that a C-130 and a Blackhawk helicopter were also enroute to the area.

I asked the controller if he knew of a rescue coordination radio frequency being used by those already involved. He told me that 123.6 and 122.3 were being used for rescue communications and coordination. I set both my com radios up to monitor these two frequencies simultaneously.

We arrived at Muklung Hills area at approx. **2135**.

Weather was 600 overcast with 3 miles visibility.

I hovered upslope through fog in failing twilight, beginning at the base of the cloud ceiling, maintaining visual contact with the ground until I reached the Norman Heyano coordinates. On arrival at this location, I saw a black R-44 helicopter parked there with nobody around.

At **2140** I landed at N59 19.988' W158 22.620' with my altimeter reading 1160 feet elevation. I completed aircraft shut-down and everybody unloaded from the helicopter.

Josh Flint had his Bristol Bay Borough EMT-issued handheld radio with him. He had a channel in it for the Alaska State Troopers frequency 155.250 MHz. I tuned my aircraft's Tactical FM radio to this frequency. The Dillingham EMT's had their own radio, and did

not know its frequencies, so I could not program my radio to theirs. Thus, I had radio contact with Josh Flint only, and not the 2 Dillingham EMT's.

Josh and I agreed that we would maintain a 15-min interval for radio check-in with each other.

At approx 2150 Josh Flint and 2 Dillingham EMT's departed N13AT's location with the medic equipment and hiked away uphill into the fog searching for the crash site.

At 2200 I powered up the aircraft radio on schedule and talked with Josh Flint.

Josh and the 2 Dillingham EMT's were about 400 feet further up the mountain from me at N13AT's location at that time.

At approx 2201 I powered down to wait for the next scheduled radio interval.

At 2215 I powered up the aircraft radio on schedule and talked with Josh Flint.

Josh and the 2 Dillingham EMT's were further up the mountain from my location than before. They had not found any sign of, and no voice contact with the crash site.

Josh told me the 2 Dillingham EMT's had gotten word over their radio that the crash site was below where we had landed, not above. At word of this, the 2 Dillingham EMT's had turned back downhill. Josh, not sure what was fact, decided to continue to search further uphill.

At approx 2216 I powered down to wait for the next scheduled radio interval for the 2 Dillingham EMT's to show up back at my location.

At approx 2217 I called Norman Heyano on my cell phone and confirmed that we were thought to be actually above the crash site.

At approx 2230 the 2 Dillingham EMT's showed back up near my location. I met the 2 Dillingham EMT's and told them I had talked with Norman.

I told them to remain at the R-44 while I flew solo, performing hover-search for the crash site. I would give them "body language" with my helicopter, flashing lights, etc. if and when I found the crash site, so they could begin their hike on foot down the mountain to the crash site. I also advised them that I would call Josh on the radio to have him return back downhill to rejoin them.

I started N13AT and took off at 2236 by myself on hover-search. I worked my way downhill until I was out of the fog below the cloud deck without finding the crash site. I broke out below the ceiling at about 400 feet AGL with 1 mile visibility. It was noticeably darker at this time, too.

At 2236 I talked with Josh Flint on the radio. I advised him that Norman had confirmed they should move downhill in the search. Josh told me he had already turned around and was almost back to my location. I told Josh that I would be flying hover-search to assist the 2 Dillingham EMT's in the ground search effort while he descended back to their location. I told Josh the EMT's would be waiting at the R-44 for my return, and he should join back up with them there until I got back.

I hovered back up the mountain slope in the fog on another trajectory until I reached the 1200-foot level MSL without finding the crash site.

At approx 2240 Josh Flint called me on the radio to advise me that he had arrived at the R-44 and had rejoined the 2 Dillingham EMT's. I told Josh I was not finding the crash site. I would continue to hover-search, and call him on the radio when I located it.

Josh called me at approx 2245 telling me that he was in radio contact with the crash site, and I was close to them. They gave Josh a direction for me to fly to find them, which Josh relayed to me. I flew the direction I understood them to mean and found nothing.

I continued downhill in my search. At approx 2248 Josh called me that they said I had just gone over them. I told Josh I had seen nothing. I turned back uphill.

At approx 2251 Josh told me he had just told them at the crash site to "make themselves more visible", and just then I saw a flashlight waving at me from up-slope.

I hovered to the light, saw the wreckage, and saw a person standing outside the left rear cabin door between the fuselage and the broken-off-and-backward-swept left wing. As I hovered overhead, the person was waving both hands at me.

I marked the location in my GPS, and then navigated my way back to the R-44 for Josh and the 2 Dillingham EMT's.

On my way back to the R-44, I passed over a terrace which looked good enough to land on, so I marked that location in my GPS. I also noticed a backpack or something was laying there.

At 2257 I landed back near the R-44 at coordinates N59 19.988' W158 22.620'.

Josh Flint loaded medic equipment in my helicopter and climbed aboard. He told me the 2 Dillingham EMT's did not want to fly in the foggy mountainous darkness (I don't blame them!) Their intention was to hike in the direction I hovered with Josh and get to the site on foot.

At 2300 I took off with only Josh Flint aboard. I navigated at a hover back to the terrace I had marked for landing near the crash site and showed him the backpack which was there. Then I hovered from there to the crash site to show Josh that location and let him see the route he would have to hike to get there.

Passing over the crash site, I saw a couple of people at the left rear cabin door of the Otter.

I hovered back up the mountain slope to the terrace with the backpack, landing at **2305** at coordinates N59 19.80' W158 22.71', at an altimeter reading of 1120 feet elevation. (I did not get the altimeter reading at this location until 2 days later during the crash investigation.) Josh exited N13AT taking the medic equipment with him.

I took off solo at **2307** and picked my way at a hover back down the mountain, passing again over the crash site. I again saw a couple of people standing near the left rear cabin door of the downed plane. I had great difficulty maintaining visual reference with the ground as I continued my hover down-slope. I broke out below the overcast at 300 feet AGL, finding a scant ½ to ¾ mile visibility beneath. The twilight was spent, and it was completely dark at this point.

Trying to take up a position where I could help further, I picked my way using my search light, looking for someplace I could land near the crash site, at the base of the mountain below the site. I told Josh I was looking for someplace near the site at the base of the mountain to land. I asked him if he knew anything about the situation of the crash victims. He told me there were "4 survivors". I asked him if any of them could walk. He responded that none of them were able.

During this phase of flight, I contacted Dillingham FSS to advise that I was off the mountain, and that my EMT's were stuck on the mountain for the night. Following my radio conversation with FSS, a rescue C-130 aircraft struck up a radio conversation with me on 122.3 or 123.6 MHz (I don't remember which; I was monitoring both freqs as I flew.) His call sign was "Air Force Rescue 2104". He explained to me that they were enroute at 10,000 feet, and planned to remain overhead at high altitude during the rescue operation. He asked me if I would be returning to the crash site.

I gave Rescue 2104 my pilot report on the weather at the surface and stated that I would be unable to return to the site until morning. I told him I was underneath the bad weather, picking my way to Dillingham for the night.

I told Rescue 2104 there were responders at the scene, and 2 more EMT's who I had left on the mountain to make their way downhill to the site. Rescue 2104 wanted to know the disposition of the crash victims. I passed on to him the info I had received from Josh Flint who was at the scene that there were "4 survivors". I offered Rescue 2104 the GPS coordinate info I had marked for the crash site. He wanted it.

In order to facilitate my looking up the coordinate information while flying single-pilot nap-of-the-earth in low IFR conditions in the dark by search light, I landed at **2313** at coordinates N59 18.989' W158 24.193' with my altimeter reading 160 feet elevation.

At 2315 I called Josh on the radio to tell him I was below the cloud deck and on the ground. I told him I had about lost all visual reference twice as I had picked my way down through the fog and darkness, and unless the weather cleared, I would be unable to return before daylight. Josh responded that he had arrived at the crash site and would be good for the night.

I had at this point forgotten that I had actually captured a plot of the crash site. I did not have it written down on my flight log card. I did have the coordinates of the terrace where I had dropped Josh Flint, so I passed that info on to Rescue 2104. I explained that coordinates N59 19.80' W158 22.71' (altimeter reading of 1120 feet elevation) was the LZ which I had used to drop 1 EMT off. I told him the crash site was located southwest of the LZ about 400 yards on a steep slope, and I estimated the crash site to be 100 to 200 feet lower than these LZ coordinates.

Rescue 2104 relayed this coordinate info to the Blackhawk helicopter. Then Rescue 2104 relayed back to me that the Blackhawk was proceeding enroute to the site at that time. The rescue helicopter would be making his way through the mountains from the east to the coordinates I gave him.

I knew the only realistic way to approach the site in the low weather conditions would be to approach Muklung Hills from the southwest side of the mountain. Not knowing whether the rescue helicopter was scud-running under bad weather as was I, or would be making an NVG instrument approach or whatever to get underneath the weather, I offered to remain landed on the tundra where I was, well clear of the terrain. I would keep my strobe lights running, to give the approaching rescue helicopter a "beacon light" to visually home in on, thus placing him in the corridor he should approach the crash site from. Rescue 2104 liked that idea, so I remained on the ground, engine running strobe and navigation lights ON, awaiting the Blackhawk's arrival overhead.

At approx 2340 while I waited on the ground, I saw aircraft strobe lights to my northwest, flying at low level in a south-southeasterly direction (probably following the Wood River downstream). Although this was from the opposite direction I expected, I thought it might be the rescue Blackhawk so I turned on my search light and pulse landing lights to enhance my conspicuity for that aircraft. I don't know if that aircraft saw me or not. They did not deviate from their flight path toward me at all.

The weather got lower and lower, until finally it was all the way to the ground. At that point I decided to pull out and return to PADL. I took off at 2352, notified Rescue 2104 my plan, and resumed picking my way back to Dillingham.

At approx 2400, I notified Dillingham Flight Service that I was north of the airport inbound. I extended my flight plan with them, received a Special VFR clearance, and continued to pick my way to the airport. I landed at the Alaska Cargo Service ramp at PADL at 2412.

After completing my aircraft shutdown, I secured the helicopter for the night. Norman Heyano offered me a ride into town to find a bunk. He had to wait for the Blackhawk rescue helicopter which was at this point planning an IFR approach to PADL for fuel prior to proceeding on to the Muklung Hills area. I remained with Norman and waited for the Blackhawk.

When the Blackhawk arrived, I acted as a fueler for Alaska Cargo Service by pumping approx 320 gallons of Jet-A fuel into the rescue helicopter's fuel tank. During the course of this fuel delivery, I heard the rescue crew mention that the weather was too low for them to continue with rescue efforts at that dark hour. They would wait to continue until first light.

I put the Alaska Cargo Service truck away, and rode with Norman to the Alaska DOT shop at PADL airport. Walking inside the shop, I saw the 2 Dillingham EMT's which I had left on the mountain. One of them told me that Tom Tucker had hiked from the crash site back to his R-44. She told me that the weather had briefly cleared enough for the R-44 to fly, and they had ridden back from the mountain with Tom in the R-44.

I suspect that the low-flying aircraft I saw flying by me in the vicinity of the Wood River while I was waiting on the ground for the Blackhawk was actually the R-44 returning to PADL.

A woman at the state shop (Norman Heyano's wife, I think) drove me to the USFW bunkhouse and dropped me off, where I spent the remainder of the night.