

## Witness statement

Helicopter accident, KLNA, December 29, 2014, ~10:30 am EST

I was instructing from the right seat in a C172, with a client (high-time fixed-wing private pilot) in the left seat, taxiing on Taxiway Bravo to the run-up area for Runway 15. About half-way down Bravo, I heard the accident helicopter on right base (and saw it on right base) announce the intent to land on Bravo (I believe it was the instructor on the radio, based that belief is based only on the accent I heard). Helicopter instructors at KLNA frequently will conduct their practice maneuvers to the taxiway adjacent to the runway to keep the runway clear for simultaneous fixed-wing traffic in the left-hand pattern. I offered to hold short at my present position to give the helicopter room to conduct an autorotation maneuver to the west end of Bravo. I believe it was the instructor that thanked me. Because we were stationary and facing directly toward the approach end of the runway and taxiway, I used the opportunity to narrate the autorotation maneuver to my client. He had asked previously about the autorotation maneuver. I saw the helicopter on final and it began the rapid descent typical of the maneuver. Just as I was explaining the need to keep a high descent rate to keep the rotor blades from stalling, the helicopter's descent was abruptly arrested with a leveling off from its descent. The height at which this happened was difficult for me to estimate, but based on the helicopter's altitude at the beginning of the maneuver (800-1000 ft?), my guess was about 500 feet. My recollection is that the helicopter was about one-third to one-half of the way down in the descent when it leveled off. I began to tell my client that it was unusual to see such a leveling off, and before I could finish that sentence, the helicopter abruptly pitched nose-down and descended rapidly until impact. The time between leveling off and the final descent was very short, perhaps two to three seconds. During the final descent of the helicopter, I heard a panicked radio transmission that was mostly unintelligible, but I could pick out screamed words to the effect of "we are going to crash". Again, it sounded like the instructor's voice, but I cannot be sure. There were several calls made by other pilots on the Unicom frequency that a helicopter had just crashed, and to call for help. After the helicopter's impact, we taxied to the run-up pad to see if we could render assistance. I disembarked while the client was securing the airplane, but the crash site was across (west) of an airport perimeter fence and canal, and was not accessible from our location. While we were taxiing, another helicopter passed overhead at very low altitude toward the accident site, and landed nearby. I observed one person from that helicopter running toward the crash site, and then saw several other witnesses approach the accident site from the ground on the other side. We could see that one person was pulled from the wreckage and was lying face-up, and could not see the other occupant. When it was clear that numerous emergency calls had been made already, and that we could see the first responding law enforcement vehicle arrive, we went back to our plane.

Nicholas G. Aumen

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