



NTSB RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Investigator name: Shaun Williams
Mode: Safety Investigator
Region: ANC

Date: 02 January, 2015
Person Contacted: Jeff Boatman, Gregory Barlow
NTSB Accident Number: WPR15FA072

Narrative:

Interview was conducted with Jeff Boatman, Director of Operations and Gregory Barlow, Chief Pilot for Airwest Helicopters, LLC. The interview was conducted at the Airwest Helicopters Hangar located at 6791 N. Glen Harbor Blvd in Glendale, Arizona. During the course of the interview, the following information was relayed to investigators:

- The accident aircraft's location was being automatically uploaded to a web-based flight tracking program every two minutes by use of an installed EMS Aviation Sky Connect system.
- The pilot began his duty sequence on 26 December, 2014 with a scheduled end date of 31 December, 2014.
- No flights were conducted on December 29 or December 30.
- The accident flight was to be the last flight of his duty sequence. Following completion of this flight, the pilot was planning to drive from Sierra Vista, AZ back to Phoenix, AZ.
- The accident flight was to be operated under 14 CFR 91.
- Prior to departure, the pilot told the Chief Pilot the weather was sufficient for the flight in terms of the company's 135 flight release and risk assessment by stating that the weather was "green." This system relies solely on the pilot's determination of the following areas:
 - Weather – in accordance with the pilot's personal weather minimums and FAA minimums
 - Pilot status – based on FAA flight, duty and rest restrictions
 - Aircraft status – to include maintenance and inspection requirements
 - Passenger status
- When the pilot is relaying the information to company management, it is stated as either "green" or "amber." For example, the pilot would state "weather green, pilot green."
- Company management does not verify the information provided by the pilot.



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- This flight release only occurs once daily to cover any and all flights for that day and can be given verbally or in writing.
- For the accident flight, management believed the forecasted weather to be 10 miles visibility along the entire route with Sierra Vista weather to be clear. The only area of reduced visibility was to be around Benson, AZ with approximately 6 miles of visibility.
- The pilot received his instrument rating in May, 2014
- His last FAA 135 competency check was conducted on 15 October, 2014 by FAA authorized check airman, Gregory Barlow. During this check, conducted in a Bell 206, instrument procedures were tested to include unusual attitude recovery, partial panel operations, and an RNAV (GPS) approach utilizing the installed Garmin 420 GPS.

End of Interview



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Date: 05 January, 2015
Person Contacted: Jeff Wilcox
NTSB Accident Number: WPR15FA072

Narrative:

A telephonic interview was conducted with Jeff Wilcox regarding his observations from outside his home at 1056 South Crazy Woman Road, Benson, AZ from December 31, 2014 around 1700 local time. He provided the following information:

- Around 1700 local time, he was outside preparing for the incoming weather system. It was windy with low clouds and visibility.
- It seemed as if, while in his yard, he was “basically in the clouds.”
- The neighbor’s house is approximately 100 yards away and due to the fog, he was unable to see the structure.
- Shortly after 1700, he heard a helicopter very close to his location. He never heard it approach, and the sound ceased shortly after he began hearing it.
- The blade noise sounded strange to him before it ceased.
- Approximately four hours after hearing the aircraft, first responders showed up to the location.

End of Interview



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Investigator name: Shaun Williams
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Date: 02 January, 2015
Person Contacted: Ralph Buchard
NTSB Accident Number: WPR15FA072

Narrative:

Interview was conducted with Ralph Buchard in his home at 2980 West Williams Road, Benson, AZ at 0935 local time. At the time of the accident, 1710 local, the witness was inside his home. He provided the following information:

- A weather front was starting to move into the area. The Rincon Mountains in the distance were no longer visible.
- The ceiling was heavy overcast with low clouds moving into the area.
- In his opinion, the surface visibility was such that the pilot should have been able to see the ground, approximately ¼ mile.
- The predicted rain did not move into the area until after dark, approximately 1 hour later.
- Shortly after 1700 local time, he heard a helicopter approach closer to the house than usual and lower than other helicopters that utilize the area. Most helicopters remain about 2 miles from his residence.
- The helicopter was very loud and sounded like full power.
- The sound approached very quickly and then was gone, 30-45 seconds of noise.
- Although familiar with the sound of rotor blades “popping,” there was a louder pop at the end.
- Emergency vehicles arrived 4 hours later, approximately 2100 local.

End of Interview

The digest was reviewed with him/her during the phone call/interview and he/she agreed with the content.



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Investigator name: Shaun Williams
Mode: Safety Investigator
Region: ANC

Date: 02 January, 2015
Person Contacted: Steve Ball
NTSB Accident Number: WPR15FA072

Narrative:

Interview was conducted with Steve Ball outside his home at 3002 West Williams Road, Benson, AZ at 0950 local time. At the time of the accident, 1710 local, the witness was outside his home. He provided the following information:

- He arrived home from Tuscan around 1600 and was outside securing his property before an impending storm.
- A helicopter approached shortly after 1700 local from the direction of the interstate. (Northwest)
- It sounded lower and normal.
- After it passed his residence, it sounded as if the helicopter circled back towards his house and then turned again towards the accident site.
- The fog and “soup” was thick and he was unable to see the helicopter when looking up for it.

End of Interview

The digest was reviewed with him/her during the phone call/interview and he/she agreed with the content.

Record of Conversation

Tuesday, January 13, 2015
10:31 AM

Interview:	Veronica Steele
Phone:	██████████
Location:	Telephone Conversation

Narrative:

The following is a summary of conversation with Mrs Veronica Steele, who is the accident pilot's wife.

Mrs Steele recalled the 72 hours prior to the accident.

Sunday 28 Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Her husband was in Sierra Vista all day. She doesn't believe he had a flight.• He always texts her before he takes off and after he lands.• He flew back to Glendale in the afternoon, which is a 1.5 hour flight.• 1515 he texted "Heading home"• 1647 "landed Glendale"• She picked him up at the airport. They ate dinner out. They went home.• 2200 - they went to bed. She would go to bed, and he'll go to bed too but stay up watching Netflix or something. This was their typical routine. She does not know when he went to sleep.
Monday 29 Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 0830 - She went to work, and she had their only car (his was at Sierra Vista). He was still in bed when she left for work.• 0930- They texted each other about taking the dog to the vet. He couldn't do it because he didn't have a vehicle.• 1800 they took the dog to the vet.• He grilled steak for dinner.• 2200-2230 They went to bed. Same routine, he watched Netflix.
Tuesday 30 Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 0730 - She went to work and he was still in bed.• 1030 - he rode his motorcycle to have breakfast with the guys.• 1800 - after she got off of work they went out to eat then to Cosco.• 2030 - they were home.• 2200 - They were in bed. Same routine.
Wednesday 31 Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 0730 - He was in the shower when she left for work. He was to fly to Sierra Vista. Somebody for Air West probably picked him up and took him to the airport.• 1020 - She notices it is raining and texts "its raining here now,

keep me posted.' He replied immediately "rained here, first ground run."

- 1343 - She texted him "any idea when you'll be flying?"
- 1547 - She got a text from him "getting ready to go to Sierra Vista" She replied, "ok, be safe, Ill track you."
- She expected to get a text from him around 1730. When she did not, she started sending texts and calling on the phone (about 1811). She never received a reply.

The day before the accident it snowed at 2000, and they talked a bit about the weather. He told her that if it was snowing, he could put on some special equipment on the helicopter for snow conditions.

Mrs Steele said that the plan for after he landed at Sierra Vista, was for him to drive himself and the mechanic back to Glendale, which is a 3 hour drive. He told her that after they land there was some maintenance that needed to be done (on the rotor? - she wasn't sure) that would take about an hour. Therefore it would be at least an hour after they land before they could get on the road back to Glendale. They had no evening plans other than being home for New Years Eve, but he had hoped he'd be home before midnight. They had no plans the following day (New Years Day) other than staying home.

Mrs Steele stated that he was an occasional user of alcohol, hadn't had a drink that she could remember since Thanksgiving, and did not drink at home. The only prescription drug he used was his asthma inhaler. He was not complaining of any physical ailments, nor had taken any over the counter drugs that she was aware of..

He retired from the Glendale Police Department in 2011. Right after that he was hired on by Airwest. He never discussed any concerns about flying for Air West with her, and she thought he enjoyed working there.

Record of Conversation

Wednesday, January 28, 2015
11:45 AM

Interview:	Don Cartier
Phone:	[REDACTED]
Location:	Telephone conversation

Narrative:

The following is a summary of conversation with Mr Don Cartier, who is the son of the mechanic who was onboard the accident helicopter.

- Mr Cartier said that he is not a pilot nor does he have much aviation knowledge/experience.
- His father was a very experienced mechanic and could construct a airplane of any type. Very talented and could plan out everything in his head.
- He started working for Air West in April 2014 and was hired strictly as a mechanic. Before that he was flying helicopters for Red Rock Helicopters in Sedona, AZ. His closest friend owns Red Rock and would be a good resource regarding his father's professional pursuits (Eric Brunner [REDACTED])
- Mr Cartier stated that there was only 1 event that he remembers his father talking about at Air West that had him concerned. That was a hard landing event that occurred while his father worked there. However, he did not recall any other details. His father was always talking about airplanes, so it is hard to recall the details of one comment.
- He does not know what his father's activities were during the 72 hours prior to the accident. He did know that his father ate the same foods all the time; peach ice tea, chicken strips, and salad. He would eat breakfast at McDonalds and have a egg with cheese- no bread.