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Office of Aviation Safety, Eastern Region

Date: March 6, 2024

Subject: ERA24FA003

Contacts: Sean Newcomb (Check Pilot, JBI Helicopters)
Kurt West (President, Dir. Operations (DO) JBI Helicopters)

The individuals noted above provided the following information during a telephone interview. The below contents are a summary of what was reported:

- Mr. Newcomb has worked for JBI Helicopters for about 15 years. He started his career with the company, sweeping floors and mowing grass.
- He holds helicopter and fixed wing certificates, in addition to a mechanic certificate. He has about 5,000 hours of flight experience. He is also a qualified check airman for JBI Helicopters
- He completed a Part 135.293/ 297 proficiency check with the accident pilot in March 2023. Mr. Newcomb was asked several questions about the check.
- Mr. Newcomb explained that the evaluation of the white out and brown out conditions was a verbal discussion, given it is far too dangerous to seek out those conditions. He said the accident pilot explained a description of what he would do satisfactorily.
- Mr. Newcomb reported that unusual attitude recoveries were evaluated. He placed the helicopter in an unusual attitude and transferred controls back to the accident pilot. The accident pilot recovered satisfactorily. He did not use the HELI SAS system and the recovery was made in visual meteorological conditions without any vision reducing equipment (i.e., the accident pilot was not wearing a view limiting device, nor was he required to be)
- Mr. Newcomb explained that for proficiency checks, all equipment on-board must be airworthy, but it is up to the pilot on what equipment they actually want to use during the flight (e.g., auto-pilot, HELI SAS equipment, etc.).

- Mr. Newcomb was asked to explain his knowledge and experience with the HELI SAS, given his vast experience.
- He explained that there are two ways to engage the HELI SAS, either on the cyclic via button, or on the auto pilot mode control panel.
- He explained that when you engage the system, it will level the helicopter from an unusual attitude. He explained that it works similar to an airplane wings leveler button. He explained that based upon his experience, he has used the SAS feature and he knows other pilots that have used it.
- He did not observe the accident pilot utilizing the HELI SAS feature, however, he noted that the initial checkride the accident pilot completed in 2016 on the Bell 407, has remarks he was training on the use of the autopilot.
- Mr. Newcomb explained that the off-airport site the accident flight departed is known to pilots as a safe place to land for a variety of reasons. He did not believe it was a confined area, and whether you can depart from the off-site area at night would be based upon a pilot's proficiency and comfort levels. He further explained that it is subjective and relative as to what defines a confined takeoff area.
- Mr. West was asked about why the accident flight departed at night. He explained that the weather was VFR, and it was a Part 91 flight, thus, there was no stipulation on exactly when the flight would commence.
- This investigator shared that based upon review of the 12 months of flight activity for the accident pilot at JBI Helicopters, all of his flight time was flown likely during daylight hours.
- Mr. West explained that the accident pilot primarily completed lift operations for JBI Helicopters, which occurs during the day, however; he believes the accident pilot had completed night flights following a lift.
- Mr. West explained that JBI Helicopters was not tracking night hours or currency prior to the accident, but that has changed since the accident.

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