



SURVIVOR STATEMENTS TO PRESS

Jason Aguilera
Air Safety Investigator
Central Region

Initially, the survivor of the accident was unable to provide a statement to support the investigation. Towards the conclusion of the investigation an attempt was made to obtain a statement but has been unsuccessful at this time. Of the media interviews that he contributed to, the following statements were made:

"The helicopter started acting weird," Peterson said. "That's when we started falling like a rock out of the sky.

[Sole Survivor Of Mulberry Mountain Helicopter Crash Speaks Out | 5newsonline.com](#)

The group was flying over a peak about 500 yards from the landing site. "That's when the helicopter started chugging like your car does when it runs out of fuel," Petersen said.

"The engine cut and we started dropping. We fell approximately 1,000 to 1,200 feet."

[Survivor of helicopter crash outside Arkansas music festival grateful for second chance \(arkansasonline.com\)](#)

Sole Survivor Of Mulberry Mountain Helicopter Crash Speaks Out

OZARK, Ark. (KFSM) — Three people were killed and another severely injured when a sightseeing helicopter crashed in June 2019 at Mulberry Mountain's Backw...

Sole Survivor Helicopter Crash

Author: Jo Ellison

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OZARK, Ark. (KFSM) — Three people were killed and another severely injured when a sightseeing helicopter [crashed in June 2019 at Mulberry Mountain's Backwoods Music Festival](#).

Pilot Chuck Dickson, of Tulsa, Oklahoma and two passengers — Sarah Hill of Austin, Texas, and Marco Orneals of Mexico — died after crashing not far from the landing site.

A third passenger, Zacharia Peterson of Omaha, Nebraska was taken to a Tulsa hospital and is still recovering today.

"Honestly, it's probably the most fun festival I have been to yet," Peterson said. "I picked up one friend in Tulsa, Oklahoma and met two more friends out there."

Peterson said he didn't plan to ride on a sightseeing helicopter, but by chance, he ended up getting on.

"My friends and I made a bet about an artist and I won twenty bucks. I said, 'You know what? I can spend another \$20 and go on this flight,'" Peterson said.

Peterson said the sight from the helicopter overlooking the music festival was both beautiful and exciting.

But it wasn't long until tragedy struck.

"The helicopter started acting weird," Peterson said. "That's when we started falling like a rock out of the sky. Once we hit it was just black. I remember looking out of the helicopter and seeing a phone laying over there. The only thing going through my head was getting to that phone."

He was able to call for help, but with nothing but a wooded area around him and in and out of consciousness, all he could do was wait for help to arrive.

"I called seven times to get through to them and to keep a signal long enough where they could ping our location," Peterson said.

Peterson said he was rushed to the hospital and says there is not a day that goes by that he doesn't think of the three other passengers that didn't make it out alive.

"The world lost three beautiful souls, but Heaven gained three great angels," Peterson said.

Peterson said he still has a long road of recovery ahead of him, but he will get to leave a rehabilitation facility soon to return home.

He said one day he hopes to make his way back to Arkansas to thank the first responders who didn't give up until they were able to get him out of the woods and alive.

"I want to be able to shake the hands of the men and women who saved my life," Peterson said.

"I would like to tell them thank you. They don't have to do what they do but they choose to. Everything they did for me that night was amazing. Thank you and I love you guys so much."

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Survivor of helicopter crash outside Arkansas music festival grateful for second chance

by TAMMY REAL-McKEIGHAN Fremont (Neb.) Tribune | September 23, 2019 at 7:02 a.m.

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Courtesy Photo/ANASTASIA MARIE GRAHAM A wrecked Tulsa County Helicopter sits June 6 on a flatbed trailer on Arkansas 23 in Franklin County. Three people were killed June 2 and one was injured in the helicopter crash near Mulberry Mountain north of Ozark, according to officials.

FREMONT, Neb. -- Scenes from Zachariah Petersen's life played in his mind as the helicopter plunged to the ground.

His wedding day, the births of his children, the first wrestling match he won.

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"I wished I could have kissed my kids, hugged them again. Wished I could tell them I love them, one last time," he recalled.

The ground was rapidly getting closer.

Then everything went black.

Three months later, he was sitting in the kitchen at his mom and stepdad's home in Fremont, Neb. Petersen, 24, is in a wheelchair, but he anticipates being able to walk again.

He has another goal. He wants to become a public speaker, sharing what he knows is a miracle and a second chance from God.

"God made me remember it for a reason, I believe," he said of the crash, noting some others who've had wrecks have no memory of them.

He remembers.

Petersen and a friend went to the Backwoods Music Festival at Mulberry Mountain near Ozark on June 2. He signed up for an early evening, 10-minute helicopter sightseeing tour of the scenic area.

He climbed aboard with two other passengers -- festival workers Sarah Hill of Austin, Texas, and Marco Ornelas of Mexico -- and longtime pilot Chuck Dixon, who Petersen says was renowned for his flying skills

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the National Transportation Safety Board.

The final report will be available in 12 to 24 months, Peter Knudson, a Transportation Safety Board spokesman, said Friday. Reports involving fatalities take longer to complete, he said.

The group was flying over a peak about 500 yards from the landing site.

"That's when the helicopter started chugging like your car does when it runs out of fuel," Petersen said. "The engine cut and we started dropping. We fell approximately 1,000 to 1,200 feet."

The helicopter hit trees and came to rest in rugged, heavily wooded terrain near Cass, according to the board report. The report didn't address the cause of the crash.

Petersen awoke amid the wreckage and saw a cellphone.

"If I don't get that phone, I'm going to die," he recalled thinking.

"I pulled myself out of the wreckage and crawled about 7 or 8 feet. It took so much energy that I passed out with the phone in my hand, and a short time later I started feeling raindrops hitting my face."

Rain fell harder, and Petersen knew he had to protect the phone. He called 911, but the calls dropped.

"I laid there just waiting to die," he said.

Then the phone, which was Hill's, started ringing. One of her friends was calling.

"Help! Help! Please for the love of God help us," Petersen said. "We crashed. Please help us!"

The call dropped.

The call gave Petersen hope. He made seven calls to 911. The final one lasted long enough for rescuers to ping his approximate location.

He was the sole survivor.

Petersen went in and out of consciousness. He heard someone call his name.

"I started screaming as loud as I could," he said. "I remember watching these two guys coming over this little bit of a berm and the look of terror on their faces."

They put a tourniquet on his right leg and started an IV. Petersen thought he could walk, but when he lifted his leg his foot dangled like a wet noodle.

A first-responder gave him pain medicine. He began to hallucinate.

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A smartphone displaying the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette app interface. The screen shows the newspaper's masthead, a date indicator for 'SATURDAY', and several news headlines. One headline reads 'Governor vetoes bill'. The phone is set against a dark blue background that also contains the text 'UNLIMITED DIGITAL ACCESS' and 'ARKANSAS' BEST NEWS SOURCE · ONLY \$34/mo'.

He remembers the Mennonite volunteers.

"They dove on top of me to protect me from the falling branches," he said. "I could feel the branches hitting them -- to be that selfless."

Petersen was placed in a basket, accompanied by a paramedic.

"When they lift you out like that, you don't go in the helicopter. You stay underneath," he said. "It is terrifying."

They set him down in a field where he was transferred to a medical helicopter and sedated.

"I was just freaking out, because I had just been in one of these and it almost killed me," he said.

His condition was critical.

"Somewhere outside the hospital, they lost me," he said. "When I got to the hospital, I had no pulse and my blood pressure was 40 over zero."

He stayed in a Tulsa hospital until June 26, then went for rehabilitation in Omaha, Neb.

His tibia and fibula in his right lower leg were broken. Petersen said his right hip was shattered and his pelvis snapped in half. His lungs collapsed, three ribs were broken, his spleen ruptured, and he had pneumonia. Shrapnel had gone through his right armpit and pierced his chest cavity.

He underwent more procedures at Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha.

Petersen said he'll be able to walk short distances around the house in a year. He said he is amazed by all the miracles.

One volunteer knew the area because he deer-hunted in it. Another worked with a Black Hawk unit for the Arkansas National Guard and called them. If there hadn't been flooding in the area, the Blackhawk wouldn't have been on standby.

"So many things fell in place that you can't chalk it up to luck or just a coincidence," he said. "There's no other way to describe it, besides an act of God."

State Desk on 09/22/2019

Print Headline: Survivor of helicopter crash outside Arkansas music festival grateful for second chance

Topics

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