



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
Office of Aviation Safety

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

A. Accident ERA21FA195

Location: Eden, NC
Date: April 28, 2021
Time: 1324 Eastern Daylight Time (EDT)
Aircraft: Bell 429
Registration: N53DE
NTSB IIC Peter Wentz
FAA IIC George A. Kembro

B. Witness Interview:

Mr. Brian Soyars (TEC Industrial employee)

Mr. Soyars stated he had just arrived at the entrance gate to Duke energy powerplant and checked in (1:20pm). He had parked his truck and was talking with Mike Shultz when he heard the helicopter to the east above a wooded area. He stated the helicopter appeared to be coming straight at him, then he stated “it shuttered, then turned and I could see the bottom of the skids” (he motioned with his hand the flight path of the helicopter turning left). He stated hearing a “pop” and then the helicopter slid at an angle downward and disappeared into the woods. He stated that Mr. Shultz ran into a mobile office to call Duke control center while he yelled to the gate guard to call 911. He then repositioned to the gate and directed EMS to the accident location. Mr. Soyars was asked about bird activity in the area at the time of the accident, he stated that he did not recall seeing any birds that day.

C. Witness Interview:

Mr. Mike Shultz (Duke Energy employee)

Mr. Shultz stated he had just arrived at the entrance gate to Duke energy powerplant and checked in (1:20pm). He had parked his truck and was talking with Brian Soyars when he heard the helicopter in the vicinity. He looked toward the east along the transmission wire and saw the helicopter over the trees, he stated it shuttered, then turned left and slid nose down toward the ground. He stated hearing a “pop” at some point during the event. He then ran into a mobile

office to call Duke control center and proceeded to the accident site. When he arrived, he recalled two men laying on the ground on the hillside above the burning helicopter. He stated the helicopter was fully engulfed in fire. Mr. Shultz was asked about bird activity in the area at the time of the accident, he stated that he did not recall seeing any birds the entire day.

D. Witness Interview:

Mr. Travis Dezarn (Duke Energy employee - Lineman)

On Wednesday April 28th I arrived at Burlington Airport at approx. 0730 - 0800. Shane was completing the pre-flight of the helicopter when I arrived which is standard. I sat in the truck for about 15 minutes obtaining maps for the route for day 3 of the patrol and verifying the patrol admin had the proper flight location for the daily note she sends out. The plan for the day was to fly approx. 5.2 hours in the North Greensboro, Dan River Steam, Belews Creek, Walnut Cove, Glen Raven Area. After submitting the flight route and obtaining maps I went in to meet with the flight crew, Shane and Jericho. Shane went over the safety briefing very thoroughly as always, we discussed our patrol location for the day, fuel stops and Shane told us the helicopter was good to go. Before taking off while me and Jericho were getting in Shane went around the helicopter again. We started the patrol about 3 miles north of the airport patrolling north towards Eden/Danville. After about 2.5 - 3 hours of patrol we flew to Danville airport where we went for fuel and lunch. After re-fuel we got a courtesy car and ate lunch at a local Italian place near the airport. When back at the airport we discussed the afternoon route plan and Shane did a walk around prior to taking off. We had a pretty long deadhead back to where we had left off on the 44 kv line that had took us over to Danville. We started back patrolling south of the Motley Tie/Dan River Plant. When at Motley we patrolled the 44 kv lines east first, reversed course to back towards Motley to the corridor north, flew the 44 kv line out to draper & hanes brand Eden. This put us near the VA line where we deadheaded approx. 5.5 miles west to the end of the Ridgeway 138 kv line patrolling south towards motley. A few structures from the turn into the motley corridor Shane asked where we wanted to go from there and I told him we would reverse course back toward miller. There was a large sign there and we had previously discussed it during the patrol. When we made a banking turn to the right to reverse course, I remember hearing a very loud noise, almost cannon like, very deep. Shane said "shit" and I believe Jericho said "What was that noise? Are we going to crash?" Those two statements happened very quickly and within a second or two we were heading into the trees. Once the helicopter came to rest I remember seeing Shane unconscious, I yelled for Jericho, and he responded that he was alive but hurt. I was still belted in and Shane was lower than me. I attempted to shake Shane and continued calling his name. I smelt jet fuel and at this time remember seeing smoke. I saw Shane's shirt filling up with blood in the abdominal area profusely bleeding. I remember feeling heat and knew that I had to get out. I undid my harness kind of falling down on the center console, I believe I self extricated out of the front left windshield or front left door window when I stood up the fire was near the ground and I heard hissing noises but no motor spinning. I remember feeling like I was about 15 foot off the ground and trying to get Jericho to help me down but he couldn't. I jumped to the ground where I met Jericho near the edge of the woods. Jericho was laying on the ground and the fire was rapidly growing. I remember an old man telling us that we needed to get back in case it blew up and I proceeded to help and drag Jericho to the top of the hill. Duke plant personnel were pulling up when we got to the top of the hill.

E. Witness Interview:

Mr. Bobby Ritchie – Local Resident

Mr. Ritchie stated he was outside working and witnessed the helicopter flying low, the helicopter had passed by one time and came back. He stated that he witnessed the helicopter “go down” and saw two men outside of the helicopter. He told his wife to call 911 before heading to the accident site.

F. Witness Interview:

Mr. Curtis Bolick (EMS)

Mr. Bolick stated that he was driving East on East Stadium Drive in Eden and he saw the helicopter bank hard right, straight up on its side with the nose of the helicopter at a four o'clock position when it crashed. Mr. Bolick stated that he then went to the scene of the accident.

On 5/1/2021 Mr. Bolick was accompanied to the location where he witnessed the helicopter cross E Stadium road with the NTSB IIC, FAA Inspector and 1 group member from the operator. He stated the helicopter was flying north to south low over the wires, he recalled seeing the helicopter nearing the end to the tree line and made a nose up righthand turn, followed by the nose falling to a 4 o'clock position and disappear into the trees.