



Aviation Investigation Final Report

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|--------------------------------|---|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Location: | Franklin, North Carolina | Accident Number: | ERA23LA147 |
| Date & Time: | March 9, 2023, 18:57 Local | Registration: | N558MT |
| Aircraft: | EUROCOPTER DEUTSCHLAND GMBH EC 135 P2+ | Aircraft Damage: | Substantial |
| Defining Event: | Controlled flight into terr/obj (CFIT) | Injuries: | 3 Minor, 1 None |
| Flight Conducted Under: | Part 135: Air taxi & commuter - Non-scheduled - Air Medical (Medical emergency) | | |

Analysis

According to the pilot, prior to the flight, he determined the highest obstacle enroute was 6,100 ft with several 5,000 to 5,500 ft peaks along the route. In addition, he noted that during the flight, the end of evening nautical twilight would occur. After departure, he dialed 5,500 ft into the autopilot and leveled off. He went to don the night vision goggles and noted that they were on the copilot seat on top of an aircraft logbook. He went to move the logbook to the pilot door compartment, where it was typically stowed for flight, and decided to check the flight times against the times that maintenance was due. At that point, he noticed the cloud ceiling was lowering and dialed in 5,000 ft into the autopilot, then “went back heads down” to continue his review of the logbook. Then, the flight nurse asked for an updated estimated time enroute, and when the pilot looked up, he saw the helicopter was approaching a tree covered peak. He applied aft cyclic in order to climb; however the tail boom struck several trees, resulting in the vertical stabilizer separating from the tail boom. The pilot subsequently performed a forced landing to a road, which resulted in substantial damage to the fuselage and tail boom. The pilot reported no preimpact mechanical malfunctions or failures with the helicopter that would have precluded normal operation.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

The pilot's improper decision to review an aircraft logbook while enroute, which resulted in controlled flight into terrain.

Findings

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| Personnel issues | Aircraft control - Pilot |
| Environmental issues | Mountainous/hilly terrain - Decision related to condition |
| Personnel issues | Task allocation - Pilot |
| Personnel issues | Decision making/judgment - Pilot |
| Personnel issues | Task monitoring/vigilance - Pilot |

Factual Information

History of Flight

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|-----------------------|---|
| Enroute-cruise | Controlled flight into terr/obj (CFIT) (Defining event) |
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Pilot Information

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|----------------------------------|--|--|----------------|
| Certificate: | Commercial | Age: | 51, Male |
| Airplane Rating(s): | Single-engine land | Seat Occupied: | Right |
| Other Aircraft Rating(s): | Helicopter | Restraint Used: | 4-point |
| Instrument Rating(s): | Airplane; Helicopter | Second Pilot Present: | No |
| Instructor Rating(s): | None | Toxicology Performed: | |
| Medical Certification: | Class 2 Without waivers/limitations | Last FAA Medical Exam: | March 14, 2022 |
| Occupational Pilot: | Yes | Last Flight Review or Equivalent: | March 1, 2023 |
| Flight Time: | 4723 hours (Total, all aircraft), 1867 hours (Total, this make and model), 3992 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft) | | |

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

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|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Aircraft Make: | EUROCOPTER DEUTSCHLAND GMBH | Registration: | N558MT |
| Model/Series: | EC 135 P2+ | Aircraft Category: | Helicopter |
| Year of Manufacture: | 2012 | Amateur Built: | |
| Airworthiness Certificate: | Normal | Serial Number: | 1073 |
| Landing Gear Type: | Skid | Seats: | 7 |
| Date/Type of Last Inspection: | February 23, 2023 AAIP | Certified Max Gross Wt.: | 2950 lbs |
| Time Since Last Inspection: | | Engines: | 2 Turbo shaft |
| Airframe Total Time: | 6067.7 Hrs as of last inspection | Engine Manufacturer: | Pratt & Whitney |
| ELT: | C126 installed, not activated | Engine Model/Series: | PW206B2 |
| Registered Owner: | MED-TRANS CORPORATION | Rated Power: | 431 Horsepower |
| Operator: | MED-TRANS CORPORATION | Operating Certificate(s) Held: | On-demand air taxi (135) |
| Operator Does Business As: | LifeForce | Operator Designator Code: | M3XA |

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

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| Conditions at Accident Site: | Visual (VMC) | Condition of Light: | Night |
| Observation Facility, Elevation: | K1A5,2020 ft msl | Distance from Accident Site: | 4 Nautical Miles |
| Observation Time: | 19:15 Local | Direction from Accident Site: | 85° |
| Lowest Cloud Condition: | | Visibility | 10 miles |
| Lowest Ceiling: | Overcast / 5000 ft AGL | Visibility (RVR): | |
| Wind Speed/Gusts: | / | Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual: | / |
| Wind Direction: | | Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual: | / |
| Altimeter Setting: | 30.16 inches Hg | Temperature/Dew Point: | 12°C / 0°C |
| Precipitation and Obscuration: | No Obscuration; No Precipitation | | |
| Departure Point: | Murphey, NC (5NC4) | Type of Flight Plan Filed: | Company VFR |
| Destination: | Asheville, NC (NC95) | Type of Clearance: | None |
| Departure Time: | 18:44 Local | Type of Airspace: | Class G |

Wreckage and Impact Information

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|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Crew Injuries: | 1 None | Aircraft Damage: | Substantial |
| Passenger Injuries: | 3 Minor | Aircraft Fire: | None |
| Ground Injuries: | N/A | Aircraft Explosion: | None |
| Total Injuries: | 3 Minor, 1 None | Latitude, Longitude: | 35.218056,-83.492778 |

Administrative Information

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| Investigator In Charge (IIC): | Kemner, Heidi |
| Additional Participating Persons: | Mike Moran; FAA/FSDO; Charlotte, NC Seth Buttner; Airbus Helicopters; Grand Prairie, TX Axel Rokohl; German Federal Bureau of Aircraft Accident Investigation; Braunschweig, OF Helen Tsai; Transportation Safety Board of Canada; Gatineau, OF |
| Original Publish Date: | June 6, 2023 |
| Last Revision Date: | |
| Investigation Class: | Class 4 |
| Note: | The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident. |
| Investigation Docket: | https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=106859 |

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable causes of the accidents and events we investigate, and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for each accident or event we investigate. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for an accident or incident; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “accident/incident investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties ... and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person” (Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* section 831.4). Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by investigating accidents and incidents and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report (Title 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b)). A factual report that may be admissible under 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b) is available [here](#).