



National Transportation Safety Board

Memorandum

Record of Conversation

Date: February 7, 2008

RE: DFW08FA062 – N911VA at South Padre Island TX on February 5, 2008

On February 7, 2008, I interviewed Mr. Doug Johnson and Ms. Sherry Johnson at city hall in South Padre Island, Texas. Other persons present during the interview included Aaron Sauer NTSB, David Keenan FAA, Matt Rigsby FAA, Faye Makarsky FAA, Carlos Balderas FAA, Lindsay Cunningham Eurocopter USA, Joan Gregoire Turbomeca USA, and Paul Morrow Metro Aviation.

Mr. and Ms. Johnson said they lived in St Charles, Michigan but were retired and they were wintering in South Texas. They said on evening of the crash they were sitting outside their recreational vehicle in the Andy Bowie County Park and they were about 500 feet directly to the east of the South Padre Island Convention Center.

Regarding the helicopter crash at South Padre Island, Texas Ms. Johnson said:

- I heard a helicopter coming and I sat down in my lawn chair to watch it. There were the flashing lights of the fire trucks, ambulances, and police cars in the parking lot of the convention center. I had watched the helicopter land there several times before and I knew their routine
- The weather was misty with clouds and it was quite windy
- I saw the helicopter coming from the west and I could see the lights of the helicopter
- It didn't descend and land like it normally does, instead it kept higher and made a left turn like it was leaving
- When it turned away there was no sound
- There were no noises before it quit and the engine sounded like it completely stopped, no sound at all
- A couple of seconds after it turned away I saw a red light spiraling down
- I was then pretty sure it had crashed, but I saw no fire

Mr. Johnson had been listening to all of this and agreed with all of his wife's statements. He thought the time of the crash was at about 8:50 pm or 8:55 pm. They both expressed sadness for the families of the three persons that died.

Thomas J. Latson, Jr.
Air Safety Investigator



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RE: DFW08FA062 – N911VA at South Padre Island TX on February 5, 2008

On February 7, 2008, I interviewed Mr. Sufian Hashhash at city hall in South Padre Island, Texas. Other persons present during the interview included Aaron Sauer NTSB, David Keenan FAA, Matt Rigsby FAA, Faye Makarsky FAA, Carlos Balderas FAA, Lindsay Cunningham Eurocopter USA, Joan Gregoire Turbomeca USA, and Paul Morrow Metro Aviation.

On the evening of February 5, 2008 Mr. Hashhash said he was standing outside his store in the 5300 block of Padre Boulevard, which is about a mile directly south of the South Padre Island Convention Center.

Regarding the helicopter crash at South Padre Island, Texas Mr. Hashhash said:

- I was taking a break and standing in the rear parking lot behind my store and I was talking on my cell phone
- The weather was chilly and windy, but not that windy
- The visibility was good, but there were clouds overhead and I don't remember seeing the moon or any stars
- Because I heard the helicopter I was watching it
- It didn't land like it usually does, but made a turn back to the west and it appeared to be leaving
- I then saw the white light on the helicopter going straight down
- After I saw it go down I heard the sudden stoppage of the engine sound
- It sounded like a boat engine when you shut it off

Thomas J. Latson, Jr.
Air Safety Investigator



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Date: February 8, 2008

RE: DFW08FA062 – N911VA at South Padre Island TX on February 5, 2008

On February 8, 2008, I interviewed Captain Gary Wilburn, and Firefighters Michael Calandra and Danny Martinez on the beach by the South Padre Island Convention Center in South Padre Island, Texas. All three of those persons are firefighters with the South Padre Island Fire Department. Other persons present during the interview included Aaron Sauer NTSB, David Keenan FAA, Matt Rigsby FAA, Scott Tyrrell FAA, Lindsay Cunningham Eurocopter USA, Joan Gregoire Turbomeca USA, Paul Morrow Metro Aviation, and Sam Sprute Metro Aviation.

Regarding the helicopter crash at South Padre Island, Texas on the evening of February 5, 2008 they said:

- In the past this helicopter had routinely used the convention center parking lot as an LZ for patient pickups on the north end of the island. For pickups on the south end they used the Coast Guard station
- They never had any formal training in how to set up the landing zone
- That night when they first arrived the landing site in the parking lot they set up the “bean bag” lights to mark the temporary landing zone
- They were in their fire department vehicles standing by in the paved and lighted parking lot on the east side of the convention center and they were waiting for the helicopter to land
- On that evening and on previous helicopter events none of the fire fighters ever had any radio contact with the helicopter when it landed there at the convention center
- They didn’t know if the helicopter ever had any radio contact with anyone else on the ground there at the convention center parking lot
- The weather was good, we could clearly see lights on the other side of the bay
- We saw the helicopter flying in from the west and it was headed directly toward us at the convention center
- We could hear the sounds of the helicopter and we could see the white headlights of the helicopter as it was heading toward us and it appeared to be flying below the clouds
- Everything looked and sounded normal
- The helicopter then flew about a mile or two west of us and then departed back to the west
- The ambulance took off after the helicopter left, but no one told us why



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- We picked up our LZ equipment and returned to the station
- About 30 minutes later the police department came by the station and told us they were looking for the helicopter
- We returned to the parking lot and got on our boards and started paddling out to the accident scene
- Once out there we could smell fuel and oil, but the Coast Guard then came by and found the wreckage
- We then stood by to assist

Captain Gary Wilburn added:

- The weather that night was pretty good with the visibility at least two to three miles
- I could also see the lights across the bay
- I would guess that the bottom of the clouds was about 2,000 feet and the helicopter appeared to be below the clouds
- After I later found out about the crash I remembered that I had noticed a red light going down
- I also remembered hearing the sound of a water slap like a boat hitting the waves, but I thought the sound was a boat and did not associate that with the helicopter

Thomas J. Latson, Jr.
Air Safety Investigator