



National Transportation Safety Board

Memorandum

Record of Conversation

Date: February 10, 2008

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

On February 10 and February 11, 2008, I interviewed Lieutenant Michael Copps who said he is the Assistant Administrative Officer and a pilot in the HU-25 Falcon Jet at the Coast Guard Air Station in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Regarding the helicopter crash at South Padre Island, Texas and his duties as a pilot in the Coast Guard HU-25 following is a summary of those phone conversations and LT Coops e-mail message:

- We had been patrolling in that general area.
- The ceiling offshore was around 2,000 feet.
- We had climbed up to around 7,500 ft to do some training. When our training was complete, we flew down to the Mexican border, so we could fly along the coast on our way back up to Corpus Christi.
- Around the time that we were offshore from South Padre Island, we overheard a call that our Sector was making concerning a missing helo. The position they gave was approximately one mile to the west of where we were.
- We were flying at 1,500 ft and were in VFR conditions.
- We immediately turned towards the position and noticed a large number of emergency response vehicles responding on the ground. After talking with our small boat station at SPI, we discovered that a helo had gone down.
- We started flying a 2 mile radius circle around the position we had received from the Sector. We had both observers and our FLIR operator searching the area.
- A short time later, a Customs and Border Patrol helo arrived on scene. They stayed at an altitude of a couple of hundred feet. We were both searching for any sign of a crash.
- After a short time on scene, one of our observers spotted an oil sheen in the water. Our FLIR operator was then able to follow that sheen to debris in the water. We were then able to vector the CBP helo in, which allowed our water assets to arrive on scene.
- Our Coast Guard helo arrived very shortly after we had discovered the debris in the water.
- The weather was nice on scene, with the exception of a strong northerly wind. We were showing winds speeds up to 50 kts on our flight computer at 1,500 ft.



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- I would say the ceiling was around 1,000 ft or so above us, but that is just a rough estimate. The visibility was around 7 or 8 NM.
- The temp/dew point spread was low, which was why we were seeing a lot of sea fog, but the area where the helo went down wasn't really experiencing any fog like we had seen further offshore. That was the main reason we had decided to follow the shoreline back home, due to the fact that it was clear.
- In my opinion, I can't see how weather would have been a factor in this crash, considering they were flying at 1,800 ft.
- If there had been a ceiling that low, there is no way it would have cleared out by the time we were there.
- We were practically on-scene right after the crash happened.
- Winds would be the only thing weather-related that could have posed a problem.
- They were really blowing that night, and I know we were getting knocked around pretty good by them in our jet. We had to depart after being on scene for more than an hour. We went to Brownsville to refuel and then returned to Corpus Christi.

NOTES: Records of the event from Coast Guard Station South Padre Island SAR Aircraft Emergency case number 391572 show:

- USCG HU-25 Falcon Jet was launched at 060335Z (2235 CST), arrived on scene at 060345Z (2245 CST), and located the target at 060345Z (2245 CST)
- USCG surface vessel enroute to the scene reported visibility less than 1 nautical mile at 060342Z (2242 CST) and reported winds as 20 knots at 060357 (2257 CST)

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