

STATEMENT

Gregory L. Zills

Cherokee, Alabama 35616

Mr. Zill stated he is a member of the Barton Fire Rescue Squad, Barton, Alabama. He was monitoring the fire net at 0130 CST on December 30, 2007, when he heard Highway 247 Fire Rescue, Unit 360 request assistance in looking for a missing hunter.

Mr. Zill stated he responded to the microwave towers located in the vicinity of Mount Mills Road in Cherokee, Alabama. Mr. Zill stated he arrived on scene at 0200 CST and contacted the 911 emergency operators. He and Copt. Moore of the Tuscumbia Fire Department delegated search teams and a search area, and dispatched the search teams into the Freedom Hills Wildlife Management Area.

Capt. Moore stated it was very dark, no ambient light with a thick overcast. Mr. Zills stated they heard a gunshot and voices. They observed the helicopter about 40 to 50 yards away heading towards the north with the searchlight on. They continued in the direction of the gunshot and heard a change in engine rpm from low to high rpm. He looked up and observed the helicopter spinning to the right with the searchlight on. He also saw a fireball in the vicinity of the engine exhaust. The nose of the helicopter pitched down, and he heard it collide with the trees followed by an explosion after it collided with the ground.

Read the statement back to Mr. Zills and he agreed with the statement.



Carrol A. (Corky) Smith
Senior ASI
December 30, 2007

STATEMENT

Matthew E. Moore

Tuscumbia, Alabama 35674

Mr. Moore stated he received a 911 message at 0058 CST for a missing hunter located Freedom Hills Wildlife Management Area located in the vicinity of Cherokee, Alabama. Mr. Moore stated he went to a command post located adjacent to Mount Mills Road and arrived between 0100 to 0200.

Mr. Moore stated the EMS helicopter had been requested to assist in the search through the 911 emergency operators and the helicopter arrived on scene at about 0205. Mr. Moore stated he was in contact with the paramedic on the EMS helicopter. Rob Martin a fireman with Highway 247 Fire Department stated the medic on the EMS helicopter called at about 0230 and stated they could not locate the hunter and that they would be returning to their base.

Mr. Moore stated he and Mr. Martin heard a gun shot and headed towards the gunshot. They arrived at a logging road and observed the missing hunters vehicle parked on the road. Mr. Moore stated they observed the EMS helicopter flying north towards them at about 200 feet above the trees with the searchlight on. It was very dark with very little ambient light and the clouds were about 100 feet above the helicopter. They called the helicopter Air Evac 16 on the radio and Mr. Martin informed the paramedic, "I am dead in front of you. The hunter is here in this area. Circle and see if you can spot him with your search light." The medic replied, "10-4."

The helicopter was observed to start a left turn at about 30 knots. The medic called back on the radio and stated, "got him spotted to our left and to your right. Mr. Moore stated they started down the hill towards the hunter. The medic called back and stated they would keep the searchlight on the hunter until the search party could reach him. The helicopter was observed to continue hovering to the left at a slow airspeed about 100 to 150 feet above the tree line. Mr. Moore stated they continued towards the hunter and heard a decrease in engine power. Mr. Moore looked up and observed the helicopter spinning to the right and descending. Mr. Moore stated it sounded as if the engine had shut down while it was spinning. Then he heard an increase in engine power. He then observed a fireball in the vicinity of the engine exhaust. The nose of the helicopter was observed to pitch down and the helicopter collided with trees, ground, and exploded. One of the fire chiefs called the 911 emergency operators and reported the accident. They continued to the crash site. Upon arrival the helicopter was engulfed in fire.

Read the statement back to Mr. Moore and he agreed with the statement.

Handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "CARROL A. SMITH". The signature is written in a cursive style with some capital letters.

Carrol A. (Corky) Smith
Senior ASI
December 30, 2007

STATEMENT

Thomas Riner (Junior)

Tuscumbia, Alabama 35674

Mr. Rinerl stated he was at home when he received a page from the 911 Emergency Operators requesting assistance in looking for a missing hunter.

Mr. Riner stated he responded to the microwave towers located in the vicinity of Mount Mills Road in Cherokee, Alabama. Mr. Riner stated upon arrival he met with Capt Moore. Mr. Riner stated he requested assistance from the Highway Patrol for a helicopter. The EMS helicopter was already on site assisting in the search.

Mr. Riner stated while they were waiting on the State Police helicopter a call came in over the radio stating they heard a gunshot. The assistant fire chief contacted the EMS helicopter and requested them to proceed to the area where the gunshot was heard., and then he proceeded to the same area.

Mr. Riner stated he observed the helicopter hovering above the area at a slow airspeed with the searchlight on about 100 to 150 feet above the trees. It was very dark with overcast skies and no ambient light. He looked up and observed the helicopter spinning to the right. He observed a fireball in the vicinity of the engine exhaust and then observed the nose of the helicopter pitch down. The helicopter collided with trees and the ground followed by an explosion.

Read the statement back to Mr. Zills and he agreed with the statement.



Carrol A. (Corky) Smith
Senior ASI
December 30, 2007

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW

Person Interviewed: Dave Hardin
Safety Program Manager
Air Evac EMS Inc.
West Plains, MO

Date of Interview: December 30, 2007, about 1530 CST.

Mr. Hardin was interviewed over the telephone. The following is a summary of information he provided:

The flight was in response to a notification of a missing hunter, who may have been injured or suffering from exposure. The flight was a voluntary mission, as the operator would not receive payment for the flight unless the hunter had been injured and required air transport to a hospital. Mr. Hardin added that the three occupants were all employees of Air Evac, and as such, the flight was conducted under CFR Part 91. Although no flight plan was filed with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Air Evac maintains its own computerized flight-tracking program.

Mr. Hardin further stated that the company maintains an operations manual in accordance with its CFR Part 135 certificate and operations specifications issued by the FAA. The operations manual restricts night searches as the aircraft must maintain 500 feet agl and a speed within the height velocity curve. A Part 91 flight is not technically required to adhere to the operations manual, whereas a Part 135 flight is. In addition, the searchlight is relatively ineffective above 300 feet agl.

Robert J. Gretz
Senior Air Safety Investigator