

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
Northwest Regional Office
Seattle, WA

November 26, 2007

Witness Factual Report

A. ACCIDENT

Location: Phoenix, AZ

Date: July 27, 2007

Aircraft: N13TV (CH 3), American Eurocopter AS 350 B2
N215TV (CH 15), American Eurocopter AS 350 B2

Operator: N13TV, Mac American Communications
N215TV, US Helicopters, Inc.

NTSB Number: LAX07MA231A/B

B. SUMMARY

On July 27, 2007, about 1246 mountain standard time, Channel 3 (CH3) and Channel 15 (CH15) News helicopters, N613TV and N215TV, respectively, collided in mid air while maneuvering in Phoenix, Arizona. Each helicopter was an American Eurocopter AS 350 B2. Mac America Communications and US Helicopters, Inc., were operating the helicopters under the provisions of 14 CFR Part 91. The commercial pilots of both helicopters and one photojournalist in each helicopter sustained fatal injuries. CH15 departed Scottsdale, Arizona, at 1222, and CH3 departed Scottsdale at 1232, as local corporate flights. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and no flight plans had been filed.

C. DETAILS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The electronic news gathering (ENG) helicopters were covering a police pursuit on local streets. The suspect's vehicle had been moving, but he stopped, abandoned it, and acquired another vehicle. The collision occurred during this transition. Both main wreckages came to rest approximately 75 feet apart in a city park.

Witness information was gathered from several sources. The Phoenix Police Department supplied the majority of witness contact information. In addition, multiple calls were made to the NTSB Communications Center and the local Federal Aviation Administration Flight Standards District Office.

A news pilot flying with the group indicated that there were five news helicopters and one police helicopter in the air at the time of the accident. He indicated that the accident helicopters were positioned a reasonable distance apart when he first noticed them. The police helicopter then broadcast that there was going to be a car jacking. He glanced away for a moment, and looked back to the accident helicopters while flying toward them. He noted that they had moved closer together. Shortly thereafter, they impacted. He could not say for sure the relative position of each helicopter, but noted that after the collision, CH3 broke into many pieces. CH15 remained in the air for a second, and then dove nose-first into the ground.

In summary, statements indicated that the accident helicopters were flying close together above the police helicopter during a car chase. Many witnesses could not discern which helicopter was CH3 (white with orange markings) and which helicopter was CH15 (dark in color). Some witnesses reported that the tail sections of each helicopter came together prior to the collision. Multiple witness reports indicated that CH3 was higher than CH15, several witnesses could not discern the helicopters' altitudes relative to each other, and some witnesses reported that the helicopters were at the same altitude when the impact occurred. Numerous reports indicated that CH3 was hovering, and CH15 was repositioning when it impacted CH3 on its left side and from below. Other witnesses reported that both helicopters were moving around at the time of the collision. Another witness indicated that CH15 was relatively stationary when CH3 entered the area and banked right in what appeared to be an evasive maneuver, prior to impacting CH15 on its right side. When the helicopters collided, some witnesses reported that their main rotor blades came together; others reported that the main rotor blades of CH15 impacted the skids of CH3. Several witnesses saw one helicopter come in front of the other helicopter. No witnesses reported any abrupt maneuvers, unusual sounds, or smoke and/or fire, prior to the collision. Multiple witnesses indicated that CH15 remained relatively intact, excluding the main rotor blades and that CH3 separated into many pieces, prior to descending to the ground.

D. EXHIBITS

As noted previously, several information-gathering sources were used to obtain witness information. Summaries of the statements follow.

Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator
Northwest Regional Office



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

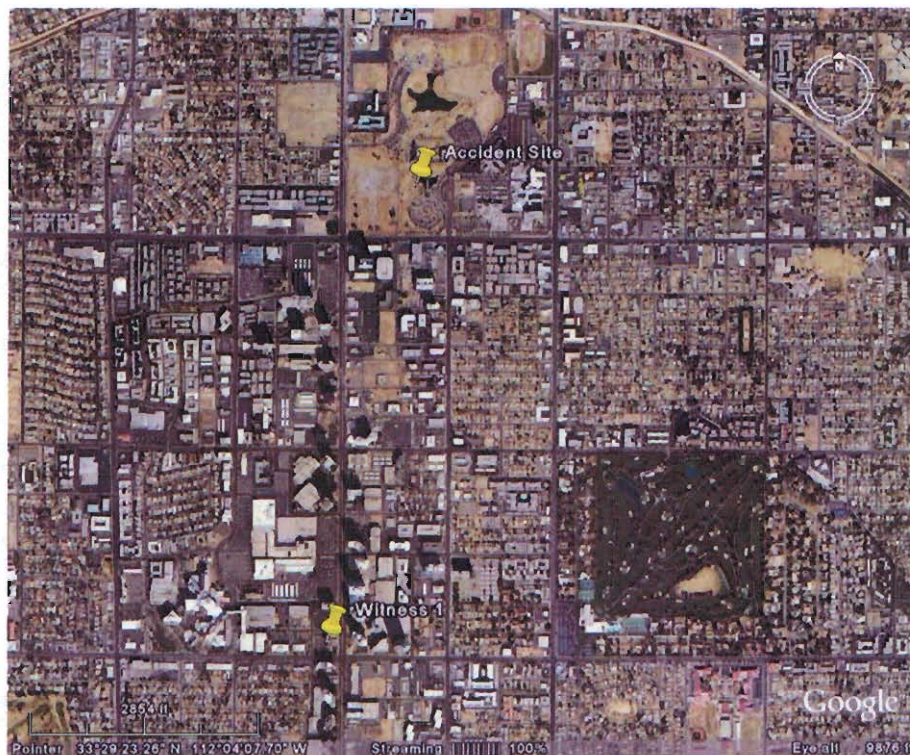
Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator

Date: July 28, 2007

Person Contacted: Neil Alden, Witness 1

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness stated that he was at 2901 Building on Central and Thomas. He saw many helicopters in the area, approximately 2 to 3 helicopter lengths apart. One helicopter was relatively stationary and the other helicopter came from the left and appeared to T-bone the other helicopter. He could not recall any identifying markings on either helicopter. The hovering helicopter got the worst hit. Prior to the impact there were no unusual sounds, and no smoke. The witness did not see any falling parts prior to the collision and neither helicopter performed any erratic maneuvers.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator

Date: July 28, 2007

Person Contacted: Rich Gotchie, Witness 2

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness indicated that he was the first person on scene. He was working in a building approximately 100 yards from the accident site and noticed one stationary, white helicopter with orange/red, that was facing east. There was also a blue helicopter that was turning to go east to south. The blue helicopter appeared to enter the same flight path as the stationary helicopter. The blue helicopter main rotor hit the back and bottom of the white helicopter. After impact, the blue helicopter descended nose-first into the ground.

The white helicopter was stationary to the east and the blue came from the south, turned west, and then turned east. The blue helicopter was a little bit lower than the white one. Upon impact, the entire back of the white helicopter was destroyed. The blue helicopter descended nose down into the ground and the white helicopter descended back end first and began turning.

The witness did not notice any unusual sounds or smoke coming from the helicopters prior to impact.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

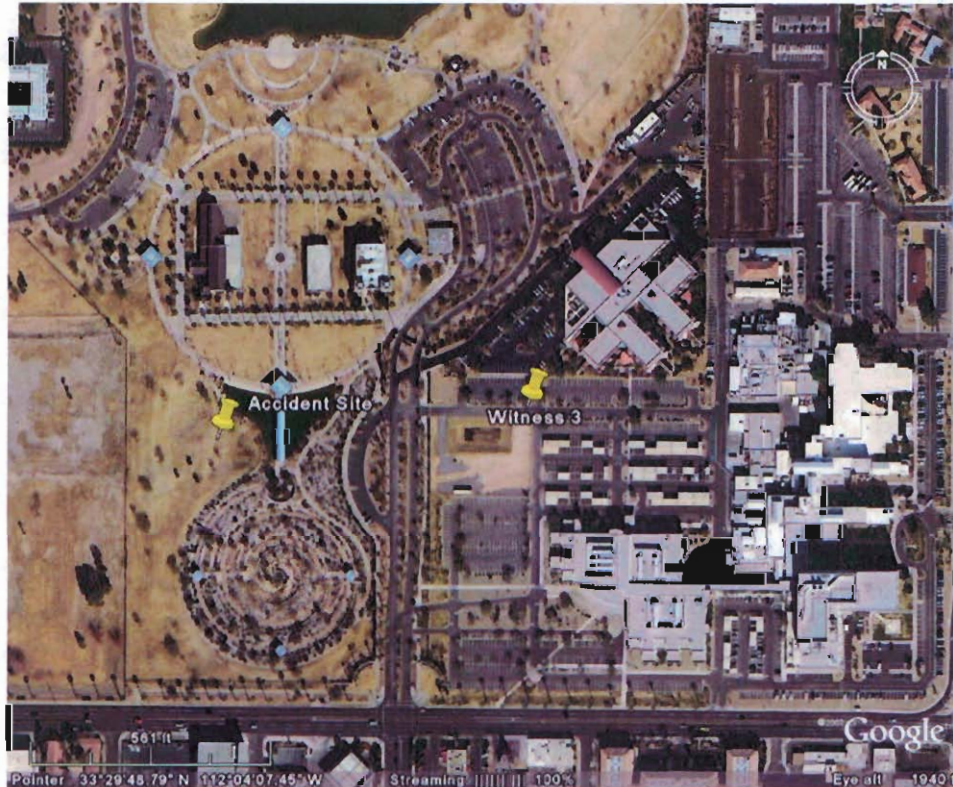
Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator

Date: July 28, 2007

Person Contacted: Donna Lee Patterson, Witness 3

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness seated in her car in the parking lot of the veteran's administration building. She saw the helicopters hovering and it appeared to the witness that they backed into each other. The helicopter on the right appeared slightly above the other one and it appeared their tail sections came together and formed a V. The witness could not recall any further information.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator

Date: August 2, 2007

Person Contacted: Rebecca Tremonti, Witness 4

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness stated that she and her husband were driving west down Indian School Road. She noticed the police helicopter involved in a car chase.

The witness stated that they were in their car about 1 block away. She heard a noise, "Like when a helicopter banks hard," and Channel 15 positioned below and on the left side of Channel 3. Channel 3 started to back up and Channel 15 climbed into Channel 3. It appeared to the witness that the initial strike was from the main rotor blades of Channel 15 to the left skid of Channel 3. Channel 15 appeared intact, except for the main rotor blades. Channel 3 stayed airborne momentarily, and was separated in half near the passenger area. It then descended to the ground. There was no smoke, no fire, and no explosion prior to the collision.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator

Date: August 2, 2007

Person Contacted: Steven Tremonti, Witness 5

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness stated that he and his wife were driving west down Indian School Road. He noticed the police helicopter involved in a car chase. Channel 15 appeared to come in late and hasty. It appeared to the witness that the pilot was in a rush and trying to get into position.

Channel 15 came in from the north-northwest flying southeast. Channel 15 stayed to the north side of Channel 3 (to its left) and below. Channel 3 was above and Channel 15 was on the bottom. Channel 3 was hovering, staying general stationary but moving slightly west. Just prior to the collision, the witnesses heard a sound change. When they described the sound to helicopter pilots they indicated that the collective was being moved up and heard a, "...thump, thump, thump..." sound. The witness did not see the impact.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator

Date: July 28, 2007

Person Contacted: Kristian Wheeler, Witness 6

Subject: LAX07MA231AB

The witness was on 7th Street and Highland at a car dealership. The witness noticed the helicopters; they appeared to be moving around, trying to find a good position. There were three in his immediate area. One of the helicopters was stationary and the other helicopter came around from behind and lower. He could not recall the color of either helicopter. Approximately 5 seconds later, the witness heard a click and he saw parts flying off the top of the helicopter. The nose of the stationary helicopter was pointed in a southeast direction and the other came from the south and went around the back of the stationary helicopter until impacting its right side.

Normally the helicopters operate about ¼-mile apart and all of the helicopters appeared closer than normal. The witness indicated that this was possibly due to the hospital that may have been blocking the view of some of the cameraman. There was no change in sound of the helicopters prior to their impact and there did not appear to be any erratic movements of the helicopters until after impact. The witness noted a light breeze out of the southwest.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator

Date: August 20, 2007

Person Contacted: Paul Sarver, Witness 7

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness indicated that he was driving westbound on Indian School Road, just approaching the turn into the park. He was driving with his son-in-law who also saw the accident.

The witness noticed that the helicopters were close together and he noted to his son-in-law that they "...shouldn't be so close." The witness took his eyes off of the helicopters and his son-in-law screamed. The witness looked up and saw the main rotor blades from each helicopter colliding with each other. Prior to the collision, he indicated that the white helicopter (Channel 3) was stationary and that the dark colored helicopter appeared to come from below and to the right of Channel 3. Both of the helicopter noses were positioned to the south. After the collision, the white helicopter descended immediately and the dark colored helicopter stayed aloft momentarily.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator

Date: July 29, 2007

Person Contacted: Don Hooper, Pilot and Witness 8

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The pilot stated that he was positioned north-northeast of the two accident helicopters initially about 1 mile northeast, at about 2,100 feet mean sea level (900 feet above ground level) and moving toward them. He saw Channel 3 and Channel 15 pointed to the east, with Channel 15 on the left and Channel 3 on the right, both at 2,100 feet msl. The police helicopter stated, "Looks like we are going to have a car jacking." The pilot glanced down to his monitor and looked up and saw Channel 3 pointed in a south-southwest direction and Channel 15 pointed in an east-southeast direction. As he began to position his helicopter closer to the chase, he noted that both helicopters had moved closer to each other. Initially, each helicopter was positioned on the side of a tall building; when he looked again, Channel 15 was closer to the building and he had a difficult time finding Channel 3 because it was in front of the building. It appeared to the witness that Channel 3 was slightly lower and Channel 15 was slightly higher at the time of impact. The witness was unable to discern how the helicopters impacted, but said that it was sudden. He could not say that one helicopter flew into the other, as it appeared to him that they both impacted each other due to his relative movement. As Channel 15 descended, a vapor appeared.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

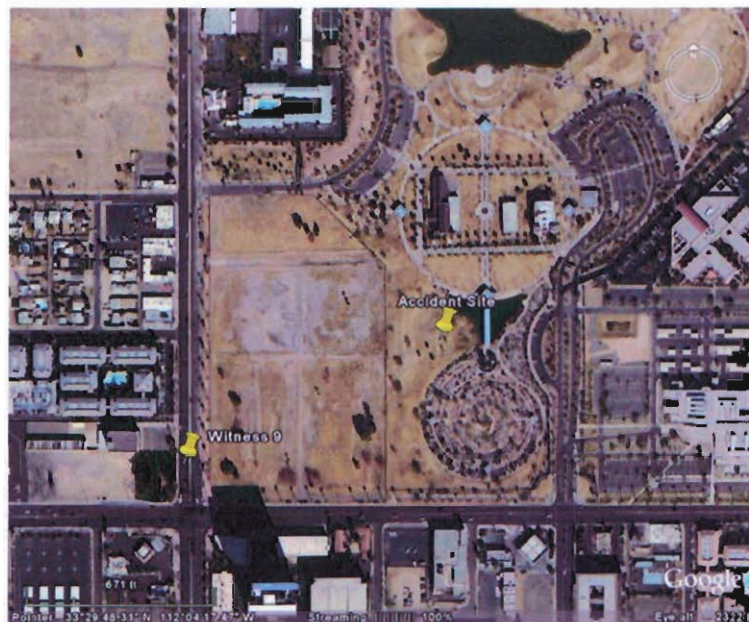
NTSB Communications Center

Date: July 31, 2007

Person Contacted: Diane Sullivan, Witness 9

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness contacted the NTSB Communications Center. She was traveling south on Central Avenue at Highland and Indian School Road when the accident occurred. The witness saw three helicopters. CH15 maneuvered from south to north behind CH3. CH15 then went north and turned east. CH15 began tipping back and forth behind CH3. CH15 then proceeded south to go in front of CH3. The witness was unclear whether or not CH15 was above or below CH3 at the time of the collision. CH15 impacted CH3 and dropped nose down immediately. CH3 attempted to climb, then descended to the ground tail first.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

NTSB Communications Center

Date: July 31, 2007

Person Contacted: Therese Maye, Witness 10

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness contacted the NTSB Communications Center. She was located at the northeast corner of the Security Title Plaza Building at 3636 N Central Avenue facing north approximately two blocks south of the Steel/Indian School Park.

She saw two helicopters close to each other. One of the helicopters was angling sideways and struck another stationary helicopter from underneath. She saw debris after the collision and did not recall any unusual sounds prior to the collision. The helicopters both descended and disappeared out of her line of site due to a parking structure. She then heard a boom and thick black smoke.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

NTSB Communications Center

Date: July 31, 2007

Person Contacted: William Wright, Witness 11

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness contacted the NTSB Communications Center. He was located approximately 150 yards from the collision.

The witness and eight co-workers were conducting electrical work at Central High School. He saw the Channel 3 helicopter hovering when the Channel 15 helicopter came in from behind and underneath. The main rotors contacted and it "sounded like a machine gun firing." One helicopter exploded before they descended to the ground.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

NTSB Communications Center

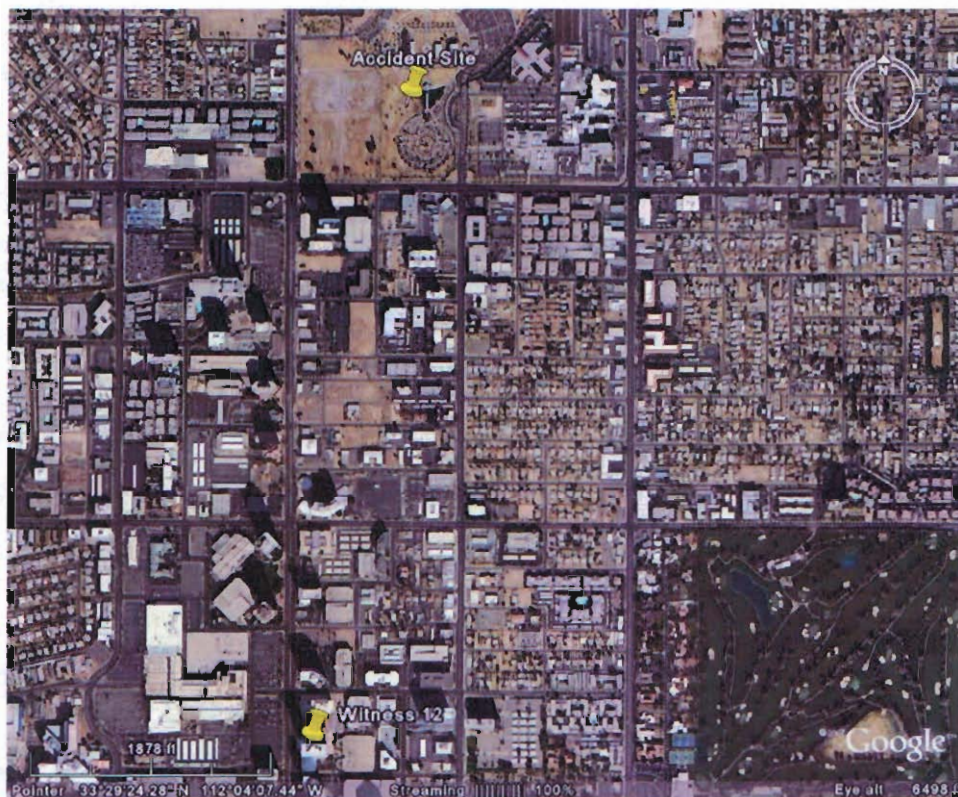
Date: July 31, 2007

Person Contacted: Jakob Romro, Witness 12

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness contacted the NTSB Communications Center. He was located at 3003 N Central Ave on the 19th floor of the office building.

The witness saw the Channel 3 helicopter hovering with the Channel 15 helicopter circling around it. The Channel 15 helicopter was higher than Channel 3 and when Channel 3 moved forward its tail lifted up, striking Channel 15 and resulting in a spark of fire. Channel 15 then went into a nosedive toward the ground.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

NTSB Communications Center

Date: July 31, 2007

Person Contacted: Lindsay Lawter, Witness 13

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness contacted the NTSB Communications Center. She was located on the 10th floor of the Advocates building on the corner of Third Street and Earl Street.

The witness saw the Channel 3 stationary. The Channel 15 helicopter came up and struck Channel 3 with its rotor blades. The witness did not see the helicopters impact the ground but heard the ground impact and saw the smoke plume.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

NTSB Communications Center

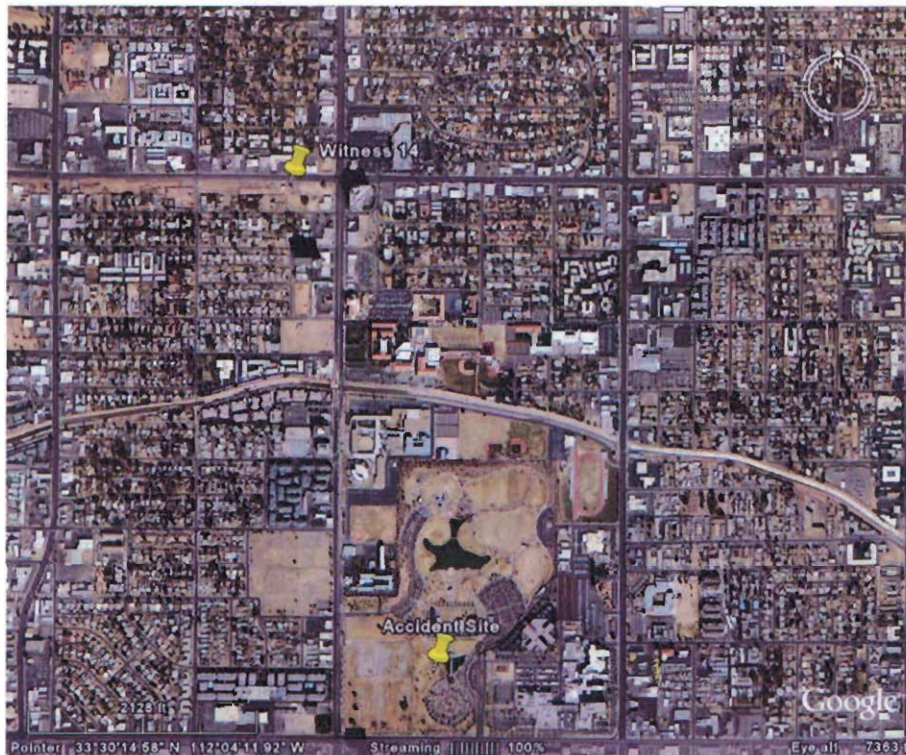
Date: July 31, 2007

Person Contacted: Jill Kennedy, Witness 14

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness contacted the NTSB Communications Center. She was located on First and Camelback Road.

The witness saw the orange helicopter hovering back and forth over the park. A darker helicopter gradually approached the orange helicopter and they collided.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

NTSB Communications Center

Date: July 31, 2007

Person Contacted: Clyde Richardson, Witness 15

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness contacted the NTSB Communications Center. He was located on 10th Street and Clarendon approximately ½-mile south of the accident site.

The witness saw a helicopter that was hovering make a turn from right to left. Then, the other helicopter that was below appeared to nose down in attempts to avoid a collision resulting in the main rotor blades to strike the helicopter above. The helicopter above was split in half and both helicopters descended to the ground.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

NTSB Communications Center

Date: July 31, 2007

Person Contacted: James Boeye, Witness 16

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness contacted the NTSB Communications Center. He was standing at the bus stop in front of Longview Elementary School on 12th Street and Indian School Road, facing west.

The witness saw three helicopters and one circling. The white helicopter flew in at a high rate of speed from the north to the northeast. Another helicopter, that was blue/black transitioning west to avoid contact with the white helicopter. The white helicopter then made a U-turn heading west. The blue/black helicopter flew south while climbing and held stationary around Thomas Road and 16th Street. The white and blue/black helicopters continued to circle. The white helicopter did not appear stationary prior to the collision. The witness looked away from the helicopters prior to actual impact.





RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator

Date: October 31, 2007

Person Contacted: AJ Alexander, Witness 17

Subject: LAX07MA231A/B

The witness reported that he was riding as a passenger in a vehicle traveling northbound on 3rd Street, just approaching Thomas Avenue. The witness was a professional photographer and had his camera with him at the time.

The witness first noticed the police helicopter orbiting and he focused his camera on it. As the chase progressed, he changed his view to the Channel 15 helicopter. The witness could not discern whether or not the helicopter was over Indian School Road or the buildings due to his location. The helicopter was facing in a northeast direction. The police helicopter continued to orbit under the Channel 15 helicopter. Then, the Channel 3 helicopter came from the southwest traveling northeast. It appeared to be at the same altitude as the Channel 15 helicopter. As the Channel 3 helicopter neared the Channel 15 helicopter, the witness saw Channel 3 bank to the right but it was too late and their main rotor blades collided and Channel 3 impacted the right and aft side of the Channel 15 helicopter. Then, the Channel 3 helicopter's tail lifted up in the air and was cut from the remaining structure. The helicopters then descended quickly to the ground. During the collision, the witness attempted to take a picture as they collided but his camera would not focus. He was able to take a picture as the helicopters descended to the ground.





James W Beutel/AWP/FAA
AWP-SDL-FSDO-07,
Scottsdale, AZ

07/27/2007 04:11 PM

To
cc
bcc
Subject Fw: Air Craft Crash

I requested this statement for an individual who called in....

James W beutel
AWP-SDL-WP07
480 419-0330 x286
fax 480 419-0800

----- Forwarded by James W Beutel/AWP/FAA on 07/27/2007 04:11 PM -----



"Timothy Weaver"
[REDACTED]

07/27/2007 04:00 PM

To James W Beutel/AWP/FAA@FAA
cc
Subject Air Craft Crash

On July 27, 2007, I was watching 5 helicopters flying in the area of 3rd Street and Osborne. One blue Police helicopter and what appeared to be four media helicopters. I could not see the markings on those aircraft. I learned, as I was watching the aircraft, that they were following a Police pursuit that was taking place in the area of Central Avenue to 3rd Street on Osborne Road.

The Police helicopter was circling and moving west and appeared as though it was going to cross Central, then started making it's way back east, the four media aircraft were hovering at a higher altitude than the Police helicopter and they were northwest, northeast, southwest and southeast of the area where the Police helicopter was circling. At this point the two helicopters that were in the northeast and northwest began to converge on the area of the pursuit and the Police helicopter began to hover in the area of 3rd street and Osborne.

The helicopter that was in the northeast flew west, as if to try and avoid getting in the way of the Police aircraft. this is when the two aircraft collided, they were west and north of the Police aircraft. I immediately looked at my watch and it was 12:43 p.m.

When the aircraft collided it appeared that the aircraft that was east and traveling west was slightly lower and rising. When they crashed the collision was so violent that both aircraft flew into pieces, there was a large section of the fuselage of one of the helicopters, it looked black. Neither aircraft had their main rotor in tact. At this point both aircraft fell straight to the ground. I did not see the impact on the ground, only the large plume of black smoke that immediately followed.

If you need any other information please contact me.

Timothy S. Weaver
[REDACTED]

Pointer 33°29'23.30" N 112°04'08.69" W

Streaming

100%

Eye alt 6860 ft

Accident Site

Weaver Witness- FAA



Google



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