



AVIATION



HIGHWAY



MARINE



RAILROAD



PIPELINE

Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Hartford, Illinois	Accident Number:	CEN25LA163
Date & Time:	April 24, 2025, 20:51 Local	Registration:	N880SL
Aircraft:	MESSERSCHMITT-BOLKOW-BLOHM BK 117	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:	Collision during takeoff/land	Injuries:	3 Serious
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 135: Air taxi & commuter - Non-scheduled - Air Medical (Unspecified)		

Analysis

The purpose of the public relations flight with the air medical helicopter was to perform landing zone training with a fire department. Prior to the flight, the pilot discussed the confined area landing zone characteristics with another company pilot, and he studied satellite imagery of the confined area landing zone. The flight manifest and the flight risk assessment tool were completed and submitted to the operational control center, which then issued a flight release after approval. Prior to initiating the approach, the pilot performed a high reconnaissance to identify the confined area landing zone and the obstacles which consisted of a tree and power lines. The pilot then performed a low reconnaissance while simultaneously performing a steep approach. The helicopter landed in the vacant lot, consisting of a flat grass field, across the street from the fire department.

Several hours later after the training was completed, the pilot performed a ground reconnaissance, noting the tree and the power lines. Ground personnel illuminated the power lines near the confined area landing zone for the night takeoff. The pilot, who was utilizing night vision goggles with the helicopter's searchlight activated, brought the helicopter to an in ground effect hover, and he balanced the torque indications for the two turboshaft engines. The pilot decided to use the power lines in front of the helicopter as a visual reference for the initial climb. During the initial climb, the helicopter inadvertently drifted rearward, and the tail rotor system impacted the tree. The helicopter rotated to the right, descended, and it came to rest partially upright. Shortly after impacting the ground, a postimpact fire initiated, and partially consumed the helicopter.

The front right seat pilot and the rear left seat (aft facing) flight nurse were able to egress on their own from the helicopter. The front left seat flight nurse required assistance from ground

personnel to egress from the helicopter. The fire department was able to immediately perform fire suppression efforts on the helicopter. The helicopter sustained substantial damage to the fuselage, the main rotor system, the empennage, and the tail rotor system. The helicopter was not equipped with a crash resistant fuel system, nor was it required by regulation.

Probable Cause and Findings

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

The pilot’s failure to maintain directional control during the initial climb at night from a confined area landing zone, that resulted in an impact with a tree, a loss of control, and a subsequent impact with terrain.

Findings	
Personnel issues	Incorrect action sequence - Pilot
Personnel issues	Aircraft control - Pilot
Personnel issues	Task monitoring/vigilance - Pilot
Aircraft	Directional control - Not attained/maintained

Factual Information

History of Flight

Initial climb	Collision during takeoff/land (Defining event)
Post-impact	Evacuation
Post-impact	Fire/smoke (post-impact)

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Airline transport	Age:	47,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	Seat Occupied:	Right
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	Restraint Used:	3-point
Instrument Rating(s):	Helicopter	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	
Medical Certification:	Class 2 With waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	September 9, 2024
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	July 8, 2024
Flight Time:	7404 hours (Total, all aircraft), 1277 hours (Total, this make and model), 7338 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 49 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 12 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 1 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	MESSerschmitt-Bolkow-Blohm	Registration:	N880SL
Model/Series:	BK 117 B-2	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:	1988	Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	7130
Landing Gear Type:	None; Skid	Seats:	7
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	April 22, 2025 AAIP	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	7385 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	4 Hrs	Engines:	2 Turbo shaft
Airframe Total Time:	17354.5 Hrs at time of accident	Engine Manufacturer:	Lycoming
ELT:	C126 installed, not activated	Engine Model/Series:	LTS-101B1
Registered Owner:	AIR METHODS LLC	Rated Power:	593 Horsepower
Operator:	AIR METHODS LLC	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	Rotorcraft external load (133), On-demand air taxi (135)
Operator Does Business As:	AIR METHODS LLC	Operator Designator Code:	QMLA

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Night
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KALN, 543 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	3 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	20:50 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	38°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Scattered / 4800 ft AGL	Visibility	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:		Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	4 knots / None	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	None / None
Wind Direction:	140°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	N/A / N/A
Altimeter Setting:	30.01 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	22°C / 16°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Hartford, IL (None)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	Company VFR
Destination:	Granite City, IL (None)	Type of Clearance:	VFR
Departure Time:	20:51 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	3 Serious	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Fire:	On-ground
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	3 Serious	Latitude, Longitude:	38.837712,-90.09583(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Hodges, Michael
Additional Participating Persons:	Dennis Mueller; FAA St. Louis FSDO; St. Ann, MO
Original Publish Date:	June 20, 2025
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=200063

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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](#).