Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Franklin, North Carolina	**Accident Number:**	ERA23LA147
Date & Time:	March 9, 2023, 18:57 Local	**Registration:**	N558MT
Aircraft:	EUROCOPTER DEUTSCHLAND GMBH EC 135 P2+	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Defining Event:	Controlled flight into terr/obj (CFIT)	**Injuries:**	3 Minor, 1 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 135: Air taxi & commuter - Non-scheduled - Air Medical (Medical emergency)		

Analysis

According to the pilot, prior to the flight, he determined the highest obstacle enroute was 6,100 ft with several 5,000 to 5,500 ft peaks along the route. In addition, he noted that during the flight, the end of evening nautical twilight would occur. After departure, he dialed 5,500 ft into the autopilot and leveled off. He went to don the night vision goggles and noted that they were on the copilot seat on top of an aircraft logbook. He went to move the logbook to the pilot door compartment, where it was typically stowed for flight, and decided to check the flight times against the times that maintenance was due. At that point, he noticed the cloud ceiling was lowering and dialed in 5,000 ft into the autopilot, then “went back heads down” to continue his review of the logbook. Then, the flight nurse asked for an updated estimated time enroute, and when the pilot looked up, he saw the helicopter was approaching a tree covered peak. He applied aft cyclic in order to climb; however the tail boom struck several trees, resulting in the vertical stabilizer separating from the tail boom. The pilot subsequently performed a forced landing to a road, which resulted in substantial damage to the fuselage and tail boom. The pilot reported no preimpact mechanical malfunctions or failures with the helicopter that would have precluded normal operation.

Probable Cause and Findings

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

The pilot’s improper decision to review an aircraft logbook while enroute, which resulted in controlled flight into terrain.

Findings

Personnel issues	Aircraft control - Pilot
Environmental issues	Mountainous/hilly terrain - Decision related to condition
Personnel issues	Task allocation - Pilot
Personnel issues	Decision making/judgment - Pilot
Personnel issues	Task monitoring/vigilance - Pilot

Factual Information

History of Flight

Enroute-cruise	Controlled flight into terr/obj (CFIT) (Defining event)

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	**Age:**	51,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land	**Seat Occupied:**	Right
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Restraint Used:**	4-point
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane; Helicopter	**Second Pilot Present:**	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	**Toxicology Performed:**	
Medical Certification:	Class 2 Without waivers/limitations	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	March 14, 2022
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	March 1, 2023
Flight Time:	4723 hours (Total, all aircraft), 1867 hours (Total, this make and model), 3992 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	EUROCOPTER DEUTSCHLAND GMBH	**Registration:**	N558MT
Model/Series:	EC 135 P2+	**Aircraft Category:**	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:	2012	**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	1073
Landing Gear Type:	Skid	**Seats:**	7
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	February 23, 2023 AAIP	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	2950 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		**Engines:**	2 Turbo shaft
Airframe Total Time:	6067.7 Hrs as of last inspection	**Engine Manufacturer:**	Pratt & Whitney
ELT:	C126 installed, not activated	**Engine Model/Series:**	PW206B2
Registered Owner:	MED-TRANS CORPORATION	**Rated Power:**	431 Horsepower
Operator:	MED-TRANS CORPORATION	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	On-demand air taxi (135)
Operator Does Business As:	LifeForce	**Operator Designator Code:**	M3XA

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	**Condition of Light:**	Night
Observation Facility, Elevation:	K1A5,2020 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	4 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	19:15 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	85°
Lowest Cloud Condition:		**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Overcast / 5000 ft AGL	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	/
Wind Direction:		**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.16 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	12°C / 0°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Murphey, NC (5NC4)	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	Company VFR
Destination:	Asheville, NC (NC95)	**Type of Clearance:**	None
Departure Time:	18:44 Local	**Type of Airspace:**	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 None	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	3 Minor	**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	3 Minor, 1 None	**Latitude, Longitude:**	35.218056,-83.492778

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Kemner, Heidi
Additional Participating Persons:	Mike Moran; FAA/FSDO; Charlotte, NC Seth Buttner; Airbus Helicopters; Grand Prairie, TX Axel Rokohl; German Federal Bureau of Aircraft Accident Investigation; Braunschweig, OF Helen Tsai; Transportation Safety Board of Canada; Gatineau, OF
Original Publish Date:	June 6, 2023
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 4
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=106859