



FOR PUBLIC RELEASE: Coroner Judgement of Inquiry and Inquest Inquisition and Recommendations

Department of Justice, Legal Services
Yukon Coroners Service
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Yukon Coroners Service: Judgement of Inquiry into the death of: Paul Francis Rosset

Coroner Investigative File No.: 4520201221

Name: Paul Francis Rosset Date of Birth: 1956/01/22 Date of Death: 2012/07/10
YYYY/MM/DD YYYY/MM/DD

Address: 1502-4503 52nd Avenue, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
Street Address Province/Territory Postal Code

Ethnic Origin: Caucasian Location of Death: 5 Nautical Miles East of Carcross, Yukon

Cause of Death

Blunt Force and Asphyxial Injuries due to an Aviation Accident

Manner of Death

Accidental

Autopsy Findings

An autopsy was performed on July 13, 2012 at Vancouver General Hospital by Dr. Carol Lee, Forensic Pathologist. The principal pathological findings included blunt force injuries of head, chest, and lumbar spine. There was right-sided subdural and subarachnoid hemorrhages, multiple rib fractures (primarily right-sided) and right hemothorax (200mL).

There was a 3x2cm irregularly-shaped laceration on the right forehead. Multiple 1-2.5cm red abrasions on the forehead (predominately on the left side) and left chin. A 1.8 x 1cm purple contusion on the medial left lower eyelid. A 6.5 x 1cm red abrasion was on the left cheek. There was a transverse fracture (mildly displaced) of the L2 vertebral body and the posterior spinous process at that level.

Combining circumstantial evidence and autopsy findings, the cause of death was blunt force and asphyxial injuries. Asphyxia (impaired oxygen intake/utilization) is often not associated with specific postmortem anatomic findings, the diagnosis of which often depends substantially on circumstantial evidence.

Toxicological Findings

Postmortem toxicological analysis was conducted at the Provincial Toxicology Centre. Toxicological analysis showed no alcohol, prescribed medications, or illicit drugs, and a non-toxic concentration of carboxyhemoglobin.

Circumstances of Death

At 0853hrs on July 10, 2012, Horizon Helicopters Ltd. RR44 II helicopter departed Whitehorse, Yukon on a wildlife survey. The helicopter was piloted by Mr. Rosset and had two Yukon Government surveyors on board. The purpose of the flight was to transport the surveyors to bear-bait sites in the Carcross, Yukon area.

The final site inspected prior to the crash was east of Carcross. Mr. Rosset approached the site from the west. Mr. Rosset overflew the site from the south and proceeded to turn 180 degrees to the right. The helicopter slowed to a hover, and began descending. A gust of wind came from the west, causing the helicopter to drift towards the eastern slope. The helicopter then began an uncontrolled vertical descent. The helicopter impacted the eastern side of the slope on the right hand skid then rebounded down the slope before coming to a rest nearly inverted on its left-side roof.

Lee winds (down drafts) frequently exist on the lee side of mountain peaks and ridges. The weather conditions at the time of the accident were suitable for visual flight rules operations. There was surface wind from the south at 23 knots gusting up to 31 knots. The low-level winds were forecasted to be from the southwest at 30 knots.

Significant Factors/Conclusions

Mr. Rosset was certified and qualified for the flight in accordance with existing regulations. Mr. Rosset had completed a mountain flying course in June 2009. Contrary to industry standards, Mr. Rosset did not conduct a reconnaissance flight. As a result, he would have been unaware of the intensity of the down drafts in the intended landing area. If a down-draft occurs, it can be severe and can contribute to an increase power demand on a helicopter on approach. A flight helmet may prevent pilots from becoming incapacitated or unconscious in the event of an accident. An individual who is unconscious cannot self-rescue from a postural position which prevents or impedes breathing. If the position of the body restricts individuals' normal breathing mechanism, death can occur very rapidly. In the fall of 2009, Transport Safety Board issue a safety advisory regarding the issue of helicopter pilots wearing helmets. In 2011, the Helicopter Association of Canada passed a resolution strongly recommending to its operator-members that they should promote the use of helmets for helicopter flight crew members under all operational circumstances which permit their use. The choice to wear a helmet is up to the practice and policy of individual operators and pilots. Following this tragic accident, Horizon Helicopters Ltd. implemented a safety policy requiring that all pilots wear flight helmets during flight operations.

Recommendations

No recommendations


Signature, Chief Coroner

Whitehorse, Yukon

Province/Territory

September 13/13

Date

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