

Subject: Bateville Herald Tribune - Indiana Crash

Published August 31, 2008 10:21 pm - A medical helicopter crashed in a cornfield outside the small Decatur County town of Burney shortly after 1 p.m. Sunday.

Update: Helicopter crash in Decatur County kills three

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As the holiday wore on Monday, federal and local crews worked under the hot sun to remove the remnants of a crashed medical helicopter that killed three.

The FAA and National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) in conjunction with the Decatur County Sheriff's Department and Indiana State Police worked the crash site in the middle of a corn field about one mile northwest of Burney from sun up until sundown Labor Day, hoping to piece together the puzzle of how the tragedy occurred. Davis Trucking and Recovery of Rushville was called in to do the job of removing the pieces of the demolished helicopter. After loading flat-bed semis and trucks, the Davis crew carried the tarped remains of the aircraft away from the site of its demise.

Linda Baker, aviation safety inspector for the FAA, confirmed the pieces would be taken to the Greensburg Municipal Airport for storage. She would not comment on what would happen from that point deferring to the NTSB, which had taken over as the lead investigating agency into the crash. Baker would not lend comment on any speculation as to how the tragedy occurred.

"The investigation is too premature with the recovery efforts nearing an end," Baker said. She would not comment if the site had been cleared or how many agencies were working to piece together a cause that led to the crash of the Air Evac Life team helicopter shortly after take off from the Burney Antique Tractor Pull and Hog Roast. The three-member crew was on a public relations mission and the annual fundraiser.

Baker noted the investigation into what exactly caused the crash could take weeks, if not months, to determine.

Calls seeking comment from the FAA and NTSB went unanswered.

Recordings noted the offices were closed due to the holiday.

An official statement from the Decatur County Coroner's office noted the Burney Volunteer Fire Department notified the county of the incident at 1:21 p.m. Sunday. An autopsy on all three bodies was expected to be performed this morning, the release states.

The names of the crew members were confirmed by Air Evac, which has a base in Rushville, through GDN news partner WISH TV 8. The three-member crew included pilot Roger Warren, flight nurse Sandra Pearson, and flight paramedic and Base Manager Wade Weston. A message to Air Evac membership headquarters seeking further information on the deceased went unanswered Monday, but the GDN learned from the Richmond and Cambridge City newspapers Weston was a resident of Cambridge City.

The emergency responder community was still reeling after the incident that took

three of its own. Brad Smith, CEO of Rush Memorial Hospital, said the organization was at a loss over the deaths.

“I can say that we are all deeply saddened and devastated by the tragic loss of Roger, Wade and Sandi,” Smith said in a statement.

“They were young, at the top of their field, highly-trained and dedicated individuals. They were like family to us and will be missed in so many ways by so many people. Our community needs to rally around and support Air Evac and the families of these three individuals during this very difficult time. Our thoughts and prayers go out to their families and friends.”

Smith also said the events that brought Air Evac into their community were rocky at times, and he applauded everyone at the company for dedication and perseverance. The ironic fact that these three lives were lost in a trauma situation was not lost on Smith.

“Numerous lives were saved in Rush County by the people who lost their lives in Sunday’s crash. We sometimes take for granted our local organizations such as Air Evac, EMS, fire and police, yet they are truly the heroes of our community,” Smith said in his statement.