

Phillip “Pip” Conner

August 19, 1970 – August 3, 2000

Phillip “Pip” Conner was a seasonal crewmember with the Las Vegas Interagency Helitack Crew in his 4th year. A U.S. Navy veteran, he was very involved with youth groups, his church, and the Boy Scouts.

On August 3, 2000, he and other helitack crewmembers had come in from Wells, NV to the Charlie Complex on the Elko District of the Bureau of Land Management, supporting a mission to place radio repeater equipment in proximity of the wildfire near Montello, NV.

A storm hit the area in the afternoon, with winds as high as 45-50 mph. By then the mission had been completed and the crew waited out the storm in the wide, open, desert valley near the cleared landing pad. By around 6:30 PM, the winds had subsided and the helicopter pilot had thought it was safe to return to the Wells Airport as

he had not wanted to overnight in Montello. Conner was asked if wanted to ride in the helicopter back to Wells, which he accepted.

Conner joined the pilot and the assistant manager in the helicopter and they took off at approximately 6:57 PM local time in the Bell 206L-1. A witness to the accident stated that the helicopter had lifted to a two or three-foot hover, then he had looked away. Upon hearing a noise, the witness turned back and saw the helicopter rolling to the right. While rolling, a rotor blade struck the left side of the ship. After a full roll, it returned to upright. The witness stated: *“The pilot emerged from the aircraft with a look of confusion and disbelief on his face. The left front passenger was unconscious for 5-10 minutes and then regained consciousness but was incoherent. The passenger in the left rear seat [Conner] was unconscious and did not respond to CPR.”*

Conner had had been partially ejected from the helicopter and was pulled out by other witnesses. According to the NTSB, Conner was wearing a lap belt. But without a shoulder restraint available, was partially ejected from the helicopter and was struck by the passing main rotor blade and fatally injured.

