

## **Family says military should have acted on training problems before chopper crash**

**6 hours ago**

HALIFAX — The family of a crew member killed in a helicopter crash during a nighttime training exercise two years ago says the Canadian air force should have acted sooner to correct training deficiencies among its pilots.

In a statement released Monday, the family of Cpl. Kirk Noel says they are upset because they think the crash of the search and rescue chopper could have been prevented.

A report released last week said the air force knew its Cormorant helicopter pilots weren't getting enough flight time in 2006, but did little to solve the problem.

"We have serious concerns that the 1st Canadian Air Division headquarters knew about the faltering proficiency of the Cormorant pilots yet they did not make changes soon enough to prevent this tragedy," says the family from Newfoundland.

"The report said that this crash was preventable and survivable."

Brig.-Gen Yvan Blondin, a senior commander at 1 Canadian Air Division headquarters in Winnipeg, conceded last week that staff were aware of the faltering proficiency of its Cormorant pilots.

But he said they were trying to strike a balance between maintaining training while dealing with a tail rotor that needed regular monitoring to check for flight risks because of cracking.

Blondin said flight restrictions have since been increased from three to five hours and that proficiency levels are at "satisfactory levels."

The report by the Directorate of Flight Safety said all seven men aboard the helicopter survived the initial impact of the crash off the coast of Canso, N.S., on July 13, 2006.

But the three men who died - Noel, 31, Cpl. Trevor McDavid, 31, and Sgt. Duane Brazil, 39 - were unable to escape the submerged chopper because of blocked emergency exits, inaccessible emergency breathing equipment and harnesses that were difficult to release.

The Noel family says that finding has been particularly difficult.

"This makes it very hard on the family to know that Kirk survived the crash but couldn't escape from the submerged helicopter because of blocked exits," the statement says.

"We know Kirk fought for his life because he had his harness and helmet completely removed. It is difficult to understand how this could have ever happened."

The report into the crash also says the flying pilot was improperly overriding the autopilot system and the flight crew was misreading its

flight path as the CH149 Cormorant prepared for the nighttime training exercise.

As a result, the search and rescue chopper suddenly nosedived into the Atlantic at 120 kilometres per hour, ripping the aircraft in two.

The report says none of the three pilots was effectively monitoring the helicopter's final flight path as it descended toward the water.

The 69-page report also noted that the flying pilot had unknowingly allowed his credentials to lapse.

The Noel family says the pilots should be disciplined.

"Serious mistakes were made that night by all pilots involved," the family says. "We feel disciplinary action should be taken against the pilots."

A military board of inquiry is still expected to produce a report that looks at the incident, and can recommend disciplinary actions.

The family says it wants all the report's recommendations implemented now.

"Other families should never have to go through this kind of accident again," the family says.

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