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TV Helicopter Crashes on Brooklyn Rooftop

By SABRINA TAVERNISE and ANDY NEWMAN; Michael Brick, Thomas J. Lueck and Jess Wisloski contributed reporting for this article
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A television news helicopter covering a triple shooting in Brooklyn spun out of control and crashed onto the roof of a Flatbush apartment building last night, snapping in two but sparing the three people on board any serious injuries.

The WNBC-TV helicopter, Chopper 4, hit the roof of a four-story brick apartment building at 2502 Cortelyou Road about 6:30 p.m., and then plunged onto the roof of a two-story building, the authorities said.

The helicopter landed in two pieces on the roof of the smaller building, 2514 Cortelyou Road near East 25th Street.

"I cannot believe that three people walked away from that," a neighbor, Dwayne Simpkins, said.

The people on board, a reporter, Andrew Torres, and two pilots, Russ Mowry and Hassan Taan-Marin, were taken to area hospitals. None of their injuries were life-threatening, the police said.

"We've spoken to all three men and they seem to be O.K.," said Liz Fischer, a spokeswoman for WNBC. "We're just thankful that they're safe."

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Residents stood and watched in horror.

"Witnesses said the helicopter was dipping up and down and the pilot seemed to be trying to regain control of it," Assistant Fire Chief Thomas Galvin said at the scene. "Then it dipped out of sight when it hit the building."

Mr. Simpkins said he saw it fall while he sat on his porch. As it got closer, the helicopter began spinning in very tight circles.

"It hit the side of the roof, and flew apart," he said. "It just exploded. Pieces were flying everywhere. Things were flying into the street. Hot pieces of the building were sitting in the street."

In bare feet, Mr. Simpkins ran over to the building. One of the people in the helicopter, a man in a red shirt, was standing on the roof, yelling to people below to stay away.

A National Transportation Safety Board investigator said the helicopter, which was holding 80

gallons of fuel, would be lifted off the roof this morning with a crane.

"It was coming down from the front," said Volda Benjamin, who saw the crash while walking home. "It made a bucking noise like it was trying to keep up."

When she got home, rescue workers "told me to evacuate the house in case there was an explosion."

A resident of 2514 Cortelyou Road, Joyce Johnson, was in her apartment when the helicopter hit. Its approach, she said, sounded like a truck passing with a shrill whistling sound. She felt the building tremble and saw debris dropping from the roof.

"This is going to give me nightmares," she said. Her first thought was, "It's Judgment Day."

The shooting that the helicopter was assigned to cover involved three people, though none of the injuries were life-threatening. Two men were shot. A third was then shot by police officers, law enforcement officials said. None of the officers were hurt.

It was not immediately clear whether the helicopter had malfunctioned or what caused the crash. A spokeswoman for WNBC-TV, Anna Carbonell, could not say what went wrong. The station, she said, lost contact with the helicopter at 6:21 p.m..

"Within seconds, we learned the chopper had gone down and landed on a rooftop," Ms. Carbonell said.

Two young women watched the helicopter fall from the next block. One woman, who identified herself only as Nika, said it sounded like "dropping bombs."

Her friend, who said her name was Nancy, said the helicopter was so close that "we saw the faces of the people inside."

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