

# DCA Crash: Army aviation operational insights in the NCR

**MISSION:** The UH-60 Black Hawk was conducting a routine training mission as part of the 12th Aviation Battalion's operational readiness requirements.

**PILOT EXPERIENCE:** Both pilots were experienced. The instructor pilot had 1,000 flight hours, and the other pilot had 500 hours. Both pilots were aircraft commanders. They had flown this route before as part of their standard training.

**FLIGHT PATH ALTITUDE REQUIREMENTS:** The designated altitude for Route 4 over the Potomac River is a maximum altitude of 200 feet MSL for aircraft transiting the corridor. This is a standard operational limit set for safe flight in this controlled airspace.

**FREQUENCY:** When the weather is good, these flights along Corridor 4 occur multiple times each day by multiple government agencies and services, including the Army.

**NIGHT-VISION GOGGLES:** The pilots were equipped with night-vision goggles, which is standard for nighttime operations. However, due to the well-lit nature of the area, flying unaided was also an option.

**SAFETY:** Every flight undergoes a rigorous risk assessment and mission-approval process, including pre-flight briefings, route planning, air traffic coordination and post-mission debriefs.

**COLLISION AVOIDANCE SYSTEM:** The aircraft was in contact with air traffic control, which provides situational awareness. Transponders for automatic dependent surveillance–broadcast and squawk codes are assigned by air traffic control to designate aircraft position on ATC systems and certain aircraft systems. Standard Army aviation procedures also emphasize aircrew coordination and external scanning.

**DATA REVIEW:** Investigators will analyze air traffic control communications, flight recorder data, radar tracking and the physical wreckage to determine the cause of the incident.

**NEXT STEPS:** The Army will support the NTSB investigation, conduct its own internal review, and assess whether any safety or operational adjustments are necessary.

## Army Aviation Training and Operational Procedures

### Aircraft and Crew

- The UH-60 Black Hawk is a twin-engine, medium-lift utility helicopter used for troop transport, medevac and operational support.
- The crew typically consists of two pilots and one crew chief for non-combat mission flights.
- The instructor pilot had 1,000 flight hours; the copilot had 500 flight hours. The rear crew member was a very experienced standardization instructor for crew chief training.

### Training and Mission Operations

- 12th Aviation Battalion conducts routine training flights for operational readiness and pilot proficiency.
- Pilots follow standardized flight routes in the National Capital Region, including Route 4 over the Potomac River.
- Training includes day and night operations, with night-vision goggles available as needed.
- All flights undergo a mission-approval process, including a risk assessment and preflight briefing.

### Flight Safety and Airspace Coordination

- Army aviation follows strict air traffic control coordination within controlled airspace.
- Pilots are required to monitor air traffic and communicate with ATC for situational awareness.
- Designated flight altitudes for Route 4 over the Potomac River are 200 feet mean sea level.
- Collision avoidance is managed through aircrew coordination, ATC advisories and visual scanning techniques.

### Accident Investigation Process

- The NTSB is leading the investigation, with support from the FAA and the Army.
- Investigators will review flight data recorders, ATC communications, radar tracking and physical evidence.
- The Army will conduct its own internal safety review to assess lessons learned and recommend any operational changes.

### Frequently Asked Topics

- Use of Night-Vision Goggles: Pilots are trained to operate both with and without NVGs, depending on environmental conditions.
- AI and Autonomous Systems: This Black Hawk was not involved in AI-enabled flight testing.
- Operational Necessity: Flights in the NCR are necessary for mission readiness, VIP transport and emergency response preparedness.