



## NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Office of Aviation Safety  
Washington, DC 20594

May 31, 2013

### AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL SPECIALIST'S REPORT

CEN13FA192

#### A. AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT

**Location:** Grand Lake, Louisiana  
**Date:** March 15, 2013  
**Time:** 1147 central daylight time (CDT)  
**Aircraft:** N574EH, a Sikorsky S76A, call-sign ERA574

#### B. SUMMARY

On March 15, 2013, about 1147 central daylight time, a Sikorsky S-76A helicopter, N574EH, was substantially damaged after ground impact near Grand Lake, Louisiana. All three occupants on board, the pilot and two maintenance personnel, were fatally injured. The helicopter was registered to Era Helicopters LLC and was operating under the provisions of 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91 as a post-maintenance check flight. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed for the local flight, which departed from Lake Charles Regional Airport (LCH), Lake Charles, Louisiana, at 1119. While returning to LCH in cruise flight about 1,000 feet above ground level (AGL), the pilot radioed to the LCH control tower that he had an emergency and would be immediately landing off the airport. Radar data provided by the FAA showed the helicopter in a descent prior to contact being lost. The wreckage of the helicopter was found about 5 miles southeast of the threshold for Runway 33 at LCH. The helicopter was consumed by a post-crash fire. A witness, who was a helicopter pilot, stated that he observed the accident

helicopter in a shallow descent as it passed just east of his house about 600 feet AGL. He stated that the helicopter was producing an unusual grinding noise as it passed over his house. On-scene investigation of the airframe revealed that two tail rotor blades were missing from the helicopter.

At 1053 the recorded weather at LCH was wind 210 degrees at 9 knots; visibility 10 statute miles; sky clear; temperature 19 degrees C; dew point 12 degrees C; altimeter 30.28 inches of mercury. At 1153 the recorded weather at LCH was wind 200 degrees at 10 knots; visibility 10 statute miles; sky clear; temperature 21 degrees C; dew point 13 degrees C; altimeter 30.27 inches of mercury.

## **C. DETAILS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

The information provided in this report was compiled using the following resources: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) radar data from the LCH Airport Surveillance Radar located at 30.1387N, 93.22716W, and air traffic control (ATC) audio recordings from the LCH Airport Traffic Control Tower.

### **1.0 HISTORY OF FLIGHT**

On March 15, 2013, at 1117, ERA574 called LCH ATC with ATIS<sup>1</sup> information Charlie, requesting permission to taxi on taxiway E to A for an offset departure to the south of the airport for a local area maintenance flight. The pilot stated that he intended to operate within 7 or 8 miles south of the airport at about 1,000 feet. LCH ATC directed ERA574 to squawk VFR<sup>2</sup>, to taxi via taxiway E to A, and to advise when ready for departure. ERA574 acknowledged. (See figure 1)

At 1119, ERA574 called for departure and was cleared for takeoff from taxiway A. LCH ATC directed ERA574 to “proceed on course and to avoid overflying men and equipment on the closed portion of the runway.” ERA574 acknowledged the takeoff clearance.

At 1120, LCH ATC advised ERA574 that the wind was 210 degrees at 11 knots gusting to 16 knots and instructed the pilot to report inbound to LCH at the completion of the maintenance flight. ERA574 acknowledged and advised that they would be remaining on the current LCH ATC frequency.

At 1145, the pilot of ERA574 advised LCH ATC that he was about 10 miles to the south and would be returning for landing. LCH ATC advised ERA574 that the wind was 190 degrees at 12 knots gusting to 16 knots. The controller cleared ERA574 to land on taxiway A north of taxiway E and reposition at pilot’s discretion. ERA574 acknowledged. (See figure 2)

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<sup>1</sup> ATIS – Automatic Terminal Information Service - The provision of current, routine information to arriving and departing aircraft by means of continuous and repetitive broadcasts throughout the day or a specified portion of the day.

<sup>2</sup> Squawk VFR – an ATC assigned non-discrete Mode 3/A aircraft transponder code of 1200 indicating that the aircraft is operating under visual flight rules (VFR).

At 1146:57, ERA574 called LCH ATC and advised they had a problem and needed to “put this thing on the ground.” LCH ATC acknowledged and asked if the pilot was declaring an emergency. ERA574 acknowledged with “yes ma’am.” LCH ATC asked ERA574, when able, to say nature of emergency and if they needed assistance from Air Med or the fire truck. ERA574 did not respond. There were no further communications between ERA574 and LCH ATC. (See figures 3 and 4)

At 1148, the controller called airport fire and rescue Unit 51 and advised that ERA574 was experiencing an unknown emergency approximately 4 miles south of the airfield. Unit 51 responded that they were not able to respond to an off-airport accident. LCH ATC asked Unit 51 if they would contact local emergency services to respond, adding that smoke was observed 4 miles southeast of the airport.

At 1155, Unit 51 called LCH ATC for an update on the emergency. The controller advised that local fire and rescue had been notified via 911 and were responding.

Shortly after the accident, the pilot of a twin Cessna departed LCH, overflew the accident site, and reported seeing smoke and flames.

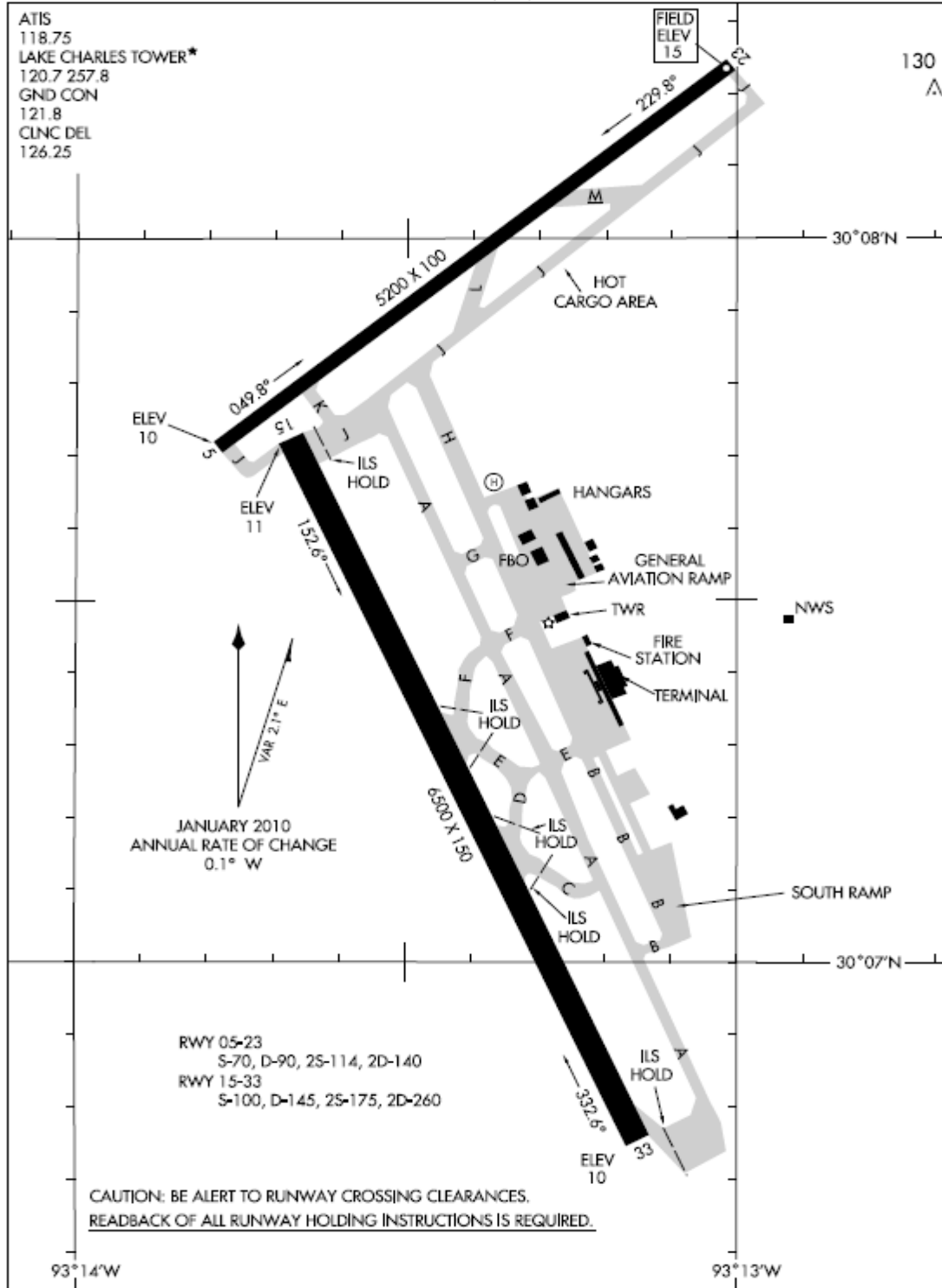
At 1204, ERA702, a company helicopter, departed LCH followed by Air Med 5 to provide rescue and personnel movement services from the accident scene. ERA704 and Air Med 5 landed at the scene at 1209 and 1211 respectively.

10266

# AIRPORT DIAGRAM

AL-5083 (FAA)

LAKE CHARLES RGNL (LCH)  
LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA



# AIRPORT DIAGRAM

10266

LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA  
LAKE CHARLES RGNL (LCH)

Figure 1 – Lake Charles Regional Airport Diagram

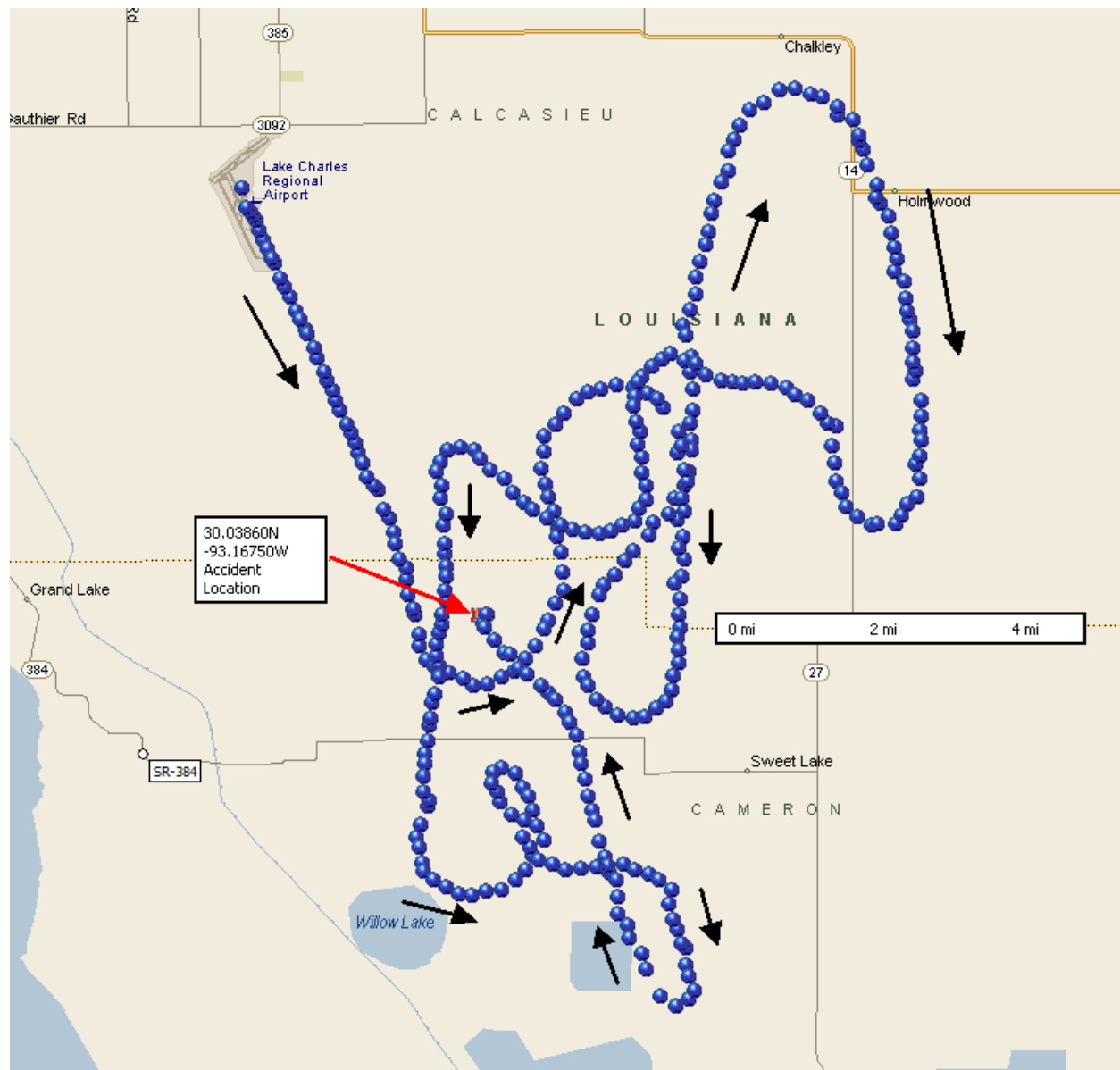


Figure 2 – ERA574 radar flight track is indicated by blue dots. The direction of flight is indicated by black arrows. The accident site is indicated by a red pushpin.

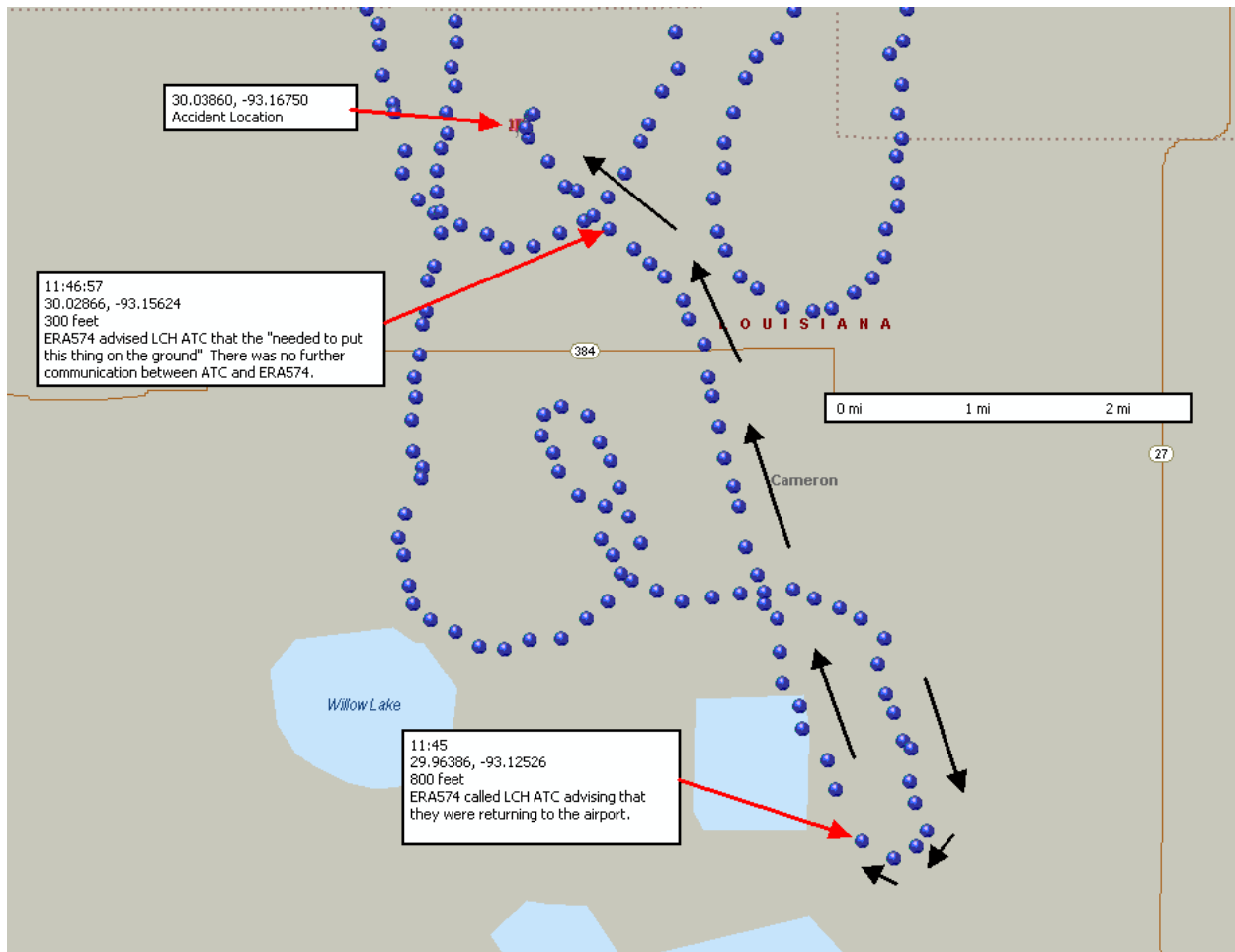


Figure 3 – ERA574 radar flight track is indicated by blue dots. The direction of flight is indicated by black arrows. The accident site is indicated by a red pushpin.

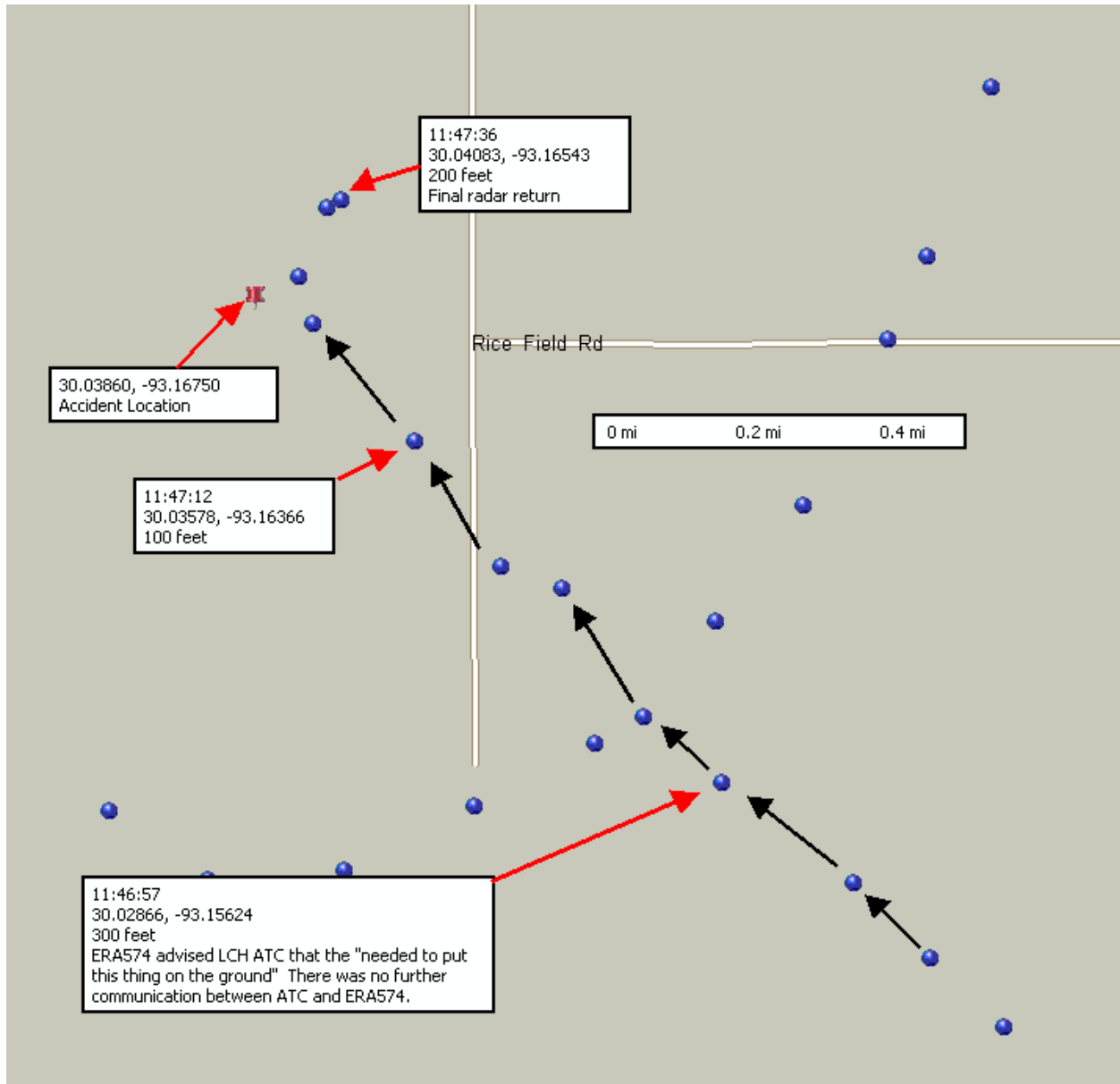


Figure 4 – ERA574 radar flight track is indicated by blue dots. The direction of flight is indicated by black arrows. The accident site is indicated by a red pushpin.

Dan Bartlett  
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