Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	RIALTO, California	**Accident Number:**	LAX99TA115
Date & Time:	March 9, 1999, 17:55 Local	**Registration:**	N626SB
Aircraft:	McDonnell Douglas 600N	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Defining Event:		**Injuries:**	3 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Public aircraft		

Analysis

During a routine law enforcement patrol flight, the pilot responded to the 4,700-foot mean sea level mountainside to investigate circumstances related to an apparent abandoned vehicle. Upon arriving at the site, the pilot performed a toe-in landing to discharge his crewmember. The crewmember proceeded to evaluate the vehicle while the pilot orbited the area. While orbiting, the pilot observed that low elevation clouds were approaching. However, the visibility initially was about 10 miles, and the cloud height appeared between 500 and 600 feet above the ground. After a few minutes, the crewmember returned to the helicopter, and they departed. Seconds after taking off the pilot lost visual reference with the ground. The pilot further indicated that he continued flying by reference to his flight instruments and the helicopter began spinning. Between 1 and 1.5 minutes later the spinning stopped, and the helicopter lost altitude until impacting the mountainside.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The pilot's improper in-flight decision to maneuver in the area while observed inclement weather approached, which led to a loss of control. Contributing factors were the low ceilings, mountainous terrain and spatial disorientation.

Findings

Occurrence #1: LOSS OF CONTROL - IN FLIGHT
Phase of Operation: MANEUVERING

Findings
1. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - LOW CEILING
2. TERRAIN CONDITION - MOUNTAINOUS/HILLY
3. (C) IN-FLIGHT PLANNING/DECISION - IMPROPER - PILOT IN COMMAND
4. (C) FLIGHT INTO KNOWN ADVERSE WEATHER - INADVERTENT - PILOT IN COMMAND
5. (C) AIRCRAFT CONTROL - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND
6. (F) SPATIAL DISORIENTATION - PILOT IN COMMAND

Occurrence #2: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: DESCENT - UNCONTROLLED

Findings
7. (F) TERRAIN CONDITION - MOUNTAINOUS/HILLY

Factual Information

On March 9, 1999, about 1755 hours Pacific standard time, a McDonnell Douglas 600N, N626SB, entered instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) and collided with 4,700-foot mean sea level mountainous terrain about 7 miles north of Rialto, California. A company visual flight rules (VFR) flight plan was filed. The helicopter was substantially damaged. The commercial pilot, the flight officer (crewmember), and the passenger sustained minor injuries. The aircraft was operated by the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, San Bernardino, California, as a public-use aircraft under the provisions of 14 CFR Part 91. The local area flight originated from San Bernardino about 1708.

In the pilot's completed report, and during an interview, he indicated that the accident occurred while on a routine law enforcement patrol flight. In summary, the pilot reported that he was on a mission to investigate circumstances related to an apparent abandoned vehicle. Upon arriving at the mountainside, he performed a toe-in landing to discharge the crewmember. While the crewmember evaluated the vehicle, the pilot orbited the area, and noted that low elevation clouds were approaching. However, the visibility was about 10 miles, and the clouds appeared to have been between 500 and 600 feet above the ground. After a few minutes, the crewmember returned to the helicopter, and they departed. Seconds after taking off the pilot lost visual reference with the ground. The pilot further indicated that he continued flying by reference to his flight instruments and the helicopter began spinning. Between 1 and 1.5 minutes later the spinning stopped, and the helicopter lost altitude until impacting the mountainside.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial; Military	**Age:**	34,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land	**Seat Occupied:**	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Restraint Used:**	
Instrument Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Second Pilot Present:**	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	**Toxicology Performed:**	No
Medical Certification:	Class 2 Valid Medical--no waivers/lim.	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	August 9, 1998
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	
Flight Time:	1654 hours (Total, all aircraft), 35 hours (Total, this make and model), 1612 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 104 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 72 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 4 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	McDonnell Douglas	**Registration:**	N626SB
Model/Series:	600N 600N	**Aircraft Category:**	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:		**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	RN024
Landing Gear Type:	Skid	**Seats:**	8
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	February 18, 1999 AAIP	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	3850 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	66 Hrs	**Engines:**	1 Turbo shaft
Airframe Total Time:	266 Hrs	**Engine Manufacturer:**	Allison
ELT:	Installed, activated, aided in locating accident	**Engine Model/Series:**	250-C47M
Registered Owner:	SAN BERNARDINO CTY SHERIFF DPT	**Rated Power:**	808 Horsepower
Operator:		**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	None
Operator Does Business As:		**Operator Designator Code:**	

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Instrument (IMC)	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	ONT ,943 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	17 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	17:53 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	208°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Scattered / 5000 ft AGL	**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	11 knots /	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	/
Wind Direction:	240°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	/
Altimeter Setting:	30 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	11°C / 6°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	RIALTO , CA (L67)	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	Company VFR
Destination:		**Type of Clearance:**	VFR on top
Departure Time:	17:08 Local	**Type of Airspace:**	Class G

Airport Information

Airport:		**Runway Surface Type:**	
Airport Elevation:		**Runway Surface Condition:**	
Runway Used:	0	**IFR Approach:**	
Runway Length/Width:		**VFR Approach/Landing:**	None

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	2 Minor	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	1 Minor	**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	3 Minor	**Latitude, Longitude:**	34.100776,-117.380821(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Pollack, Wayne
Additional Participating Persons:	ERIC JACKSON; RIVERSIDE , CA
Original Publish Date:	January 18, 2001
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=45899