Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	VENICE, Florida	**Accident Number:**	ATL99LA108
Date & Time:	July 16, 1999, 08:10 Local	**Registration:**	N5317V
Aircraft:	Hiller UH12-C	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Defining Event:		**Injuries:**	2 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

According to the pilot, the helicopter lost power while flying at 50 knots and 100 feet above the ocean during a flight to record video footage of the area. The pilot made an auto-rotation into the water. Both the pilot and passenger were immediately rescued by a nearby boat. Examination of the helicopter by the FAA found that the engine had sustained salt water contamination. Further examination established continuity throughout the engine and the drive train. Additionally, the magnetos sparked when rotated, there was oil/water in the crankcase, and there was fuel/water in the fuel tanks. The fuel shutoff valve control lock was inspected and it was found that it could be repositioned to allow movement of the control to the 'off' position by a slight downward pressure on the control knob. The fuel shutoff valve control knob was directly to the left of the passenger's left foot and approximately one inch off the floor. The exact position of the fuel shutoff valve prior to the accident was not determined. The passenger was wearing his seatbelt loosely to allow him to film directly out of the doorway.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: Loss of engine power due to fuel starvation as a result of the passenger inadvertently shutting off the fuel supply.

Findings

Occurrence #1: LOSS OF ENGINE POWER
Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings
1. (C) FUEL TANK SELECTOR POSITION - INADVERTENT - PASSENGER
2. (C) FLUID,FUEL - STARVATION
3. (C) FUEL SYSTEM,FUEL SHUTOFF - CLOSED

Occurrence #2: FORCED LANDING
Phase of Operation: EMERGENCY DESCENT/LANDING

Occurrence #3: DITCHING
Phase of Operation: EMERGENCY LANDING

Findings
4. TERRAIN CONDITION - WATER

Factual Information

On July 16, 1999, at 0810 eastern daylight time, a Hiller UH12-C, N5317V, ditched into the Gulf of Mexico following a loss of engine power near Venice, Florida. The helicopter was operated by the commercial pilot under the provisions of Title 14 CFR Part 91, and visual flight rules. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed at the time of the accident and no flight plan was filed for the local flight. The pilot and one passenger were not injured and the helicopter sustained substantial damage. The helicopter departed Venice, Florida, at approximately 0750.

According to the pilot, the helicopter lost engine power while flying at 50 knots and 100 feet above the ocean during a flight to record video footage of the area. The pilot made an auto-rotation into the water. Both the pilot and passenger were immediately rescued by a nearby boat.

Examination of the helicopter by the FAA found that the engine had sustained salt water contamination. Further examination established continuity throughout the engine and the drive train. Additionally, the magnetos sparked when rotated, there was oil/water in the crankcase, and there was fuel/water in the fuel tanks. The fuel shutoff valve control lock was inspected and it was found that it could be repositioned to allow movement of the control to the "off" position by a slight downward pressure on the control knob. The 245 pound passenger in the right seat was filming with a production type video camera and had brought several pieces of equipment on board. The aircraft was unsymmetrically loaded to the right and the doors were not installed on this flight. The passenger was wearing his seatbelt loosely to allow him to film directly out of the doorway. The fuel shutoff valve control knob is directly to the left of the passenger's left foot and approximately one inch off the floor. The exact position of the fuel shutoff valve prior to the accident was not determined.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial; Flight instructor	**Age:**	57,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Single-engine sea; Multi-engine land; Multi-engine sea	**Seat Occupied:**	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Restraint Used:**	
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	**Second Pilot Present:**	No
Instructor Rating(s):	Airplane single-engine; Instrument airplane	**Toxicology Performed:**	No
Medical Certification:	Class 2 Valid Medical--w/ waivers/lim	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	July 19, 1998
Occupational Pilot:	UNK	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	
Flight Time:	1276 hours (Total, all aircraft), 188 hours (Total, this make and model), 1133 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 101 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 60 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 5 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Hiller	**Registration:**	N5317V
Model/Series:	UH12-C UH12-C	**Aircraft Category:**	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:		**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	768
Landing Gear Type:	Skid	**Seats:**	3
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	December 6, 1998 Annual	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	2500 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	42 Hrs	**Engines:**	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	1750 Hrs	**Engine Manufacturer:**	Franklin
ELT:		**Engine Model/Series:**	O-335-50
Registered Owner:	CANAAN HELICOPTERS	**Rated Power:**	210 Horsepower
Operator:	MICHAEL B. PRITCHARD	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	None
Operator Does Business As:		**Operator Designator Code:**	

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	SRQ ,27 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	20 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	09:53 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	340°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	7 knots /	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	/
Wind Direction:	70°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	/
Altimeter Setting:	30 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	28°C / 24°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	, FL (VNC)	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	None
Destination:		**Type of Clearance:**	None
Departure Time:	07:50 Local	**Type of Airspace:**	Class G

Airport Information

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

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 None	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	1 None	**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	2 None	**Latitude, Longitude:**	27.089052,-82.429695(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Wilson, Butch
Additional Participating Persons:	TOM GROSS;
Original Publish Date:	August 3, 2000
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=46827