



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	PACIFIC OCEAN, Pacific Ocean	Accident Number:	LAX00LA103
Date & Time:	February 14, 2000, Local	Registration:	N717ST
Aircraft:	Hughes 369HS	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:		Injuries:	2 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Aerial observation		

Analysis

On the third flight of the day, at 100 feet after takeoff from the fishing vessel, the pilot reported that he felt a grinding sensation from the cyclic control followed by a loud bang. After making the precautionary landing, the helicopter was struck by an ocean swell, rolled over, and subsequently sank. The pilot and observer were rescued uninjured from the water by the fishing vessel. It was noted that the foreign pilot did not possess a U.S. flight certificate.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: An unknown mechanical malfunction that resulted in a precautionary landing at sea and the subsequent sinking of the helicopter by an ocean swell.

Findings

Occurrence #1: AIRFRAME/COMPONENT/SYSTEM FAILURE/MALFUNCTION
Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings

1. REASON FOR OCCURRENCE UNDETERMINED

Occurrence #2: ON GROUND/WATER ENCOUNTER WITH TERRAIN/WATER

Phase of Operation: LANDING - FLARE/TOUCHDOWN

Findings

2. (C) TERRAIN CONDITION - LARGE WAVE/SWELL
3. (C) PRECAUTIONARY LANDING - INITIATED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Factual Information

On February 14, 2000, at 1700 local meridian time, a Hughes 369HS, N717ST, made a precautionary landing due to engine problems in international waters on the Pacific Ocean about 500 miles north of Papua, New Guinea. The helicopter, operated by O'Hara Helicopters, Inc., under 14 CFR Part 91 as a fish spotting operation, subsequently sank in deep water after rolling over in a large ocean swell. The pilot, who held an Australian commercial pilot certificate, and one passenger were not injured. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed for the aerial observation flight. The flight originated from a fishing vessel at an unknown time.

In the pilot's written statement to the Safety Board, he reported that this was the third flight of the day. After takeoff, at 100 feet, he felt a metal-on-metal grinding sensation through the cyclic and then a loud noise. The pilot noted that prior to the precautionary landing the helicopter responded "abnormally" to control inputs. He elected to land immediately on the water instead of attempting to return to the vessel due to safety precautions. The pilot stated that the ocean conditions were rough and after exiting the helicopter it was overturned by a large swell and sank. The pilot and observer were rescued from the water by the fishing vessel.

According to an inspector from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) International Flight Operations (IFO) division, who reviewed the FAA pilot certification database, the pilot did not possess a U.S. flight certificate.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial; Foreign	Age:	34, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 1 Valid Medical--no waivers/lim.	Last FAA Medical Exam:	March 23, 1999
Occupational Pilot:	UNK	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	2470 hours (Total, all aircraft), 365 hours (Total, this make and model)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Hughes	Registration:	N717ST
Model/Series:	369HS 369HS	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Restricted (Special)	Serial Number:	350717S
Landing Gear Type:	Amphibian	Seats:	4
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	December 6, 1999 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	2550 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	92 Hrs	Engines:	1 Turbo shaft
Airframe Total Time:	6221 Hrs	Engine Manufacturer:	Allison
ELT:		Engine Model/Series:	250-C10
Registered Owner:	O'HARA HELICOPTERS INC.	Rated Power:	315 Horsepower
Operator:		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:		Distance from Accident Site:	
Observation Time:		Direction from Accident Site:	
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Visibility	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	0°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:		Temperature/Dew Point:	
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:		Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:		Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	00:00 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:	Precautionary landing

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 None	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	1 None	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	2 None	Latitude, Longitude:	

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Cornejo, Tealeye
Additional Participating Persons:	GARY SUOZZI; BURLINGAME , CA
Original Publish Date:	July 17, 2001
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=48702

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The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for an accident or incident; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “accident/incident investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties ... and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person” (Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* section 831.4). Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by investigating accidents and incidents and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report (Title 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b)). A factual report that may be admissible under 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b) is available [here](#).