



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	TULLAHOMA, Tennessee	Accident Number:	ERA19TA110
Date & Time:	February 28, 2019, 15:00 Local	Registration:	N260MW
Aircraft:	Sikorsky HH-60L	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:	Other weather encounter	Injuries:	2 Serious
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Ferry		

Analysis

The flight crew was on a visual flight rules (VFR) ferry flight to reposition the helicopter for maintenance and inspection. Prior to departure, they had expected VFR conditions along the entire route of flight. During an intermediate stop for fuel about 42 miles from the destination, they noted the weather conditions appeared to be clear, but they did not obtain an updated weather briefing. After departure, about 10 miles away from their destination, they encountered heavy rain, moderate turbulence, and deteriorating visibility (a nearby airport reported a visibility of 2.5 statute miles in mist and an overcast cloud ceiling at 300 feet). They descended to about 100 feet above ground level to maintain visual contact with the ground. When VFR flight conditions “were no longer possible,” they performed a turn and attempted a precautionary landing in a field. During the landing, the helicopter struck trees and impacted terrain.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

The flight crew’s improper decision to continue the VFR flight into deteriorating weather conditions, which resulted in a collision with trees during a subsequent precautionary landing attempt.

Findings

Personnel issues	Decision making/judgment - Flight crew
Environmental issues	Low ceiling - Decision related to condition
Environmental issues	Low visibility - Decision related to condition

Factual Information

History of Flight

Enroute-cruise	Other weather encounter (Defining event)
Landing	Collision during takeoff/land

On February 28, 2019, about 1500 central standard time, a Sikorsky HH-60L, N260MW, was substantially damaged when it was involved in an accident near Tullahoma, Tennessee. The two pilots received serious injuries. The helicopter was operated as a 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91 repositioning flight.

The purpose of the flight was to reposition the helicopter for maintenance and inspection. The special airworthiness certificate and ferry flight permit were issued for the flight from Enterprise Municipal Airport (EDN), Enterprise, Alabama, to THA, which included a restriction for visual flight rules (VFR) operation.

According to the pilot-in-command, the crew departed EDN earlier that morning, destined for THA. It was a route they had “flown many times and were familiar with” and “VFR conditions were expected along the entire route of flight from point departure to destination.” They had stopped at Scottsboro Municipal Airport, Alabama (4A6), which was about 42 miles from the destination, for fuel and lunch. He recalled that the weather at that time appeared to be clear. He did not report receiving an updated weather briefing while at 4A6. They departed from 4A6 at 1400 with no issues. While enroute to THA, the pilot recalled that they had “encountered severe heavy rain, moderate turbulence, along with rapidly deteriorating visibility. We descended to approximately 100 ft AGL to maintain visual contact with the ground. When VFR flight conditions were no longer possible, we executed a turn and attempted to land the helicopter in an open field.” He said there were no problems or issues with the helicopter and did not recall any further details about the accident sequence.

A witness located about 1/2 nautical mile from the accident site was outside her home when she heard the sound of a helicopter nearby. She could not see the helicopter due to the clouds, and she noted that it was raining lightly at the time. She said the helicopter sounded “really loud and low, as if it were trying to land behind her house.” She heard the helicopter for about 30 seconds before hearing a loud “whump whump” sound followed by a loud boom.

Examination of the wreckage by a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) inspector revealed that all major components of the helicopter were present at the accident site. The fuselage came to rest on its left side and nearly inverted, at the edge of a wooded area. The majority of the tailboom was in an adjacent tree about 30 ft above the ground. The main rotor blades were all separated from the hub, fragmented, and strewn across an area about 100 yards in diameter.

The 1455 weather conditions reported at the THA, located about 2.5 nautical miles northeast of the accident site at an elevation of 1,084 ft mean sea level (msl), included an overcast cloud ceiling at 300 ft above ground level (agl), visibility 2.5 statute miles in mist, temperature 13° C, dew point 12° C. The visibility had reduced to 1 mile at the next recorded observation at 1515. A review of the graphical aviation forecast issued by the National Weather Service at 1302 revealed that overcast skies were expected in the area around the time of the accident with cloud bases at 1,100 ft msl and tops at 9,000 ft msl. Two airmen's meteorological information advisories were issued at 1200 and 1500, warning of instrument meteorological conditions expected in the area of the accident.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial; Flight instructor	Age:	70, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	Restraint Used:	5-point
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane; Helicopter	Second Pilot Present:	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):	Airplane single-engine; Helicopter; Instrument helicopter	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 2 With waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	August 1, 2018
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	6800 hours (Total, all aircraft), 2500 hours (Total, this make and model), 5506 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 13 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 11 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 3 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Co-pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	Age:	Male
Airplane Rating(s):		Seat Occupied:	Right
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	Restraint Used:	5-point
Instrument Rating(s):	Helicopter	Second Pilot Present:	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):		Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 2 With waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	March 13, 2018
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	6800 hours (Total, all aircraft), 2500 hours (Total, this make and model), 3000 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 13 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 3 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 3 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Sikorsky	Registration:	N260MW
Model/Series:	HH-60L	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:	1986	Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Restricted (Special); Special flight (Special)	Serial Number:	86-24560
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	February 25, 2019 Continuous airworthiness	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	23500 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	2 Turbo shaft
Airframe Total Time:	3889 Hrs as of last inspection	Engine Manufacturer:	General Electric
ELT:	Not installed	Engine Model/Series:	GE-T700-701C
Registered Owner:	Aircraft Investment Holdings Llc	Rated Power:	1890 Horsepower
Operator:	Aircraft Investment Holdings Llc	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None
Operator Does Business As:	Arista Aviation	Operator Designator Code:	

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Instrument (IMC)	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	THA,1083 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	3 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	14:55 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	24°
Lowest Cloud Condition:		Visibility	2.5 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Overcast / 300 ft AGL	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	5 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	310°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	29.93 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	13°C / 12°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	Moderate - None - Mist		
Departure Point:	Scottsboro, AL (4A6)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	Company VFR
Destination:	Tullahoma, TN (THA)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	14:00 Local	Type of Airspace:	

Airport Information

Airport:	Tulahoma Rgnl Arpt/Wm Norther THA	Runway Surface Type:	
Airport Elevation:	1084 ft msl	Runway Surface Condition:	
Runway Used:		IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:		VFR Approach/Landing:	None

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	2 Serious	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:		Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	2 Serious	Latitude, Longitude:	35.345832,-86.270278(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Brazy, Douglass
Additional Participating Persons:	Bill Keeney; FAA/FSDO ; Nashville, TN
Original Publish Date:	March 23, 2022
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=99037

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable causes of the accidents and events we investigate, and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for each accident or event we investigate. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

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](#).