

## AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT REPORT No 3/89

### REPORT ON THE ACCIDENT TO SIKORSKY S61 HELICOPTER, G-BDII, NEAR HANDA ISLAND OFF THE NORTHWEST COAST OF SCOTLAND ON 17 OCTOBER 1988

The Inspector's report on this accident was submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport on 2 June 1989. He has agreed to its publication and the report is now available from HMSO Bookshops and accredited agents.

The duty SAR crew were called out from their base at Stornoway to conduct a Search and Rescue flight for the two occupants of a small fishing boat, which had capsized somewhere in the area of Handa island. Towards the end of the search, whilst performing a hover manoeuvre, a crew member commented that the helicopter was travelling backwards very fast.

The commander's attempted recovery from this manoeuvre resulted in the aircraft striking the sea and immediately rolling over. All four crew members eventually boarded the liferaft and were later rescued by a Sea King SAR helicopter from RAF Lossiemouth which returned them to Stornoway.

The report concludes that the causal factors to the accident were:-

- (i) The commander failed to anticipate the effect of the loss of visual references in uncoupled<sup>1</sup> low speed flight at night.
- (ii) The commander suffered a degree of spatial disorientation which led to unintended and undetected backward descending flight.
- (iii) Following the crewman's warning, there was insufficient height remaining for the recovery to forward climbing flight which was attempted by the commander.

One Safety Recommendation was made:-

It is recommended that the Civil Aviation Authority examine the requirement for the provision of a more accessible rear port emergency exit release mechanism for occasions when the helicopter is flooded whilst inverted, and illuminating it and the existing handles with Exis lights or other means.

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<sup>1</sup> **Uncoupled** refers to flight undertaken with only stabilisation being provided by the Automatic Flight Control System