

Aircraft type and registration: Sikorsky S76 G-BHYB

No & Type of engines: 2 Allison 250-C30 turboshaft engines

Year of Manufacture: 1980

Date and time (UTC): 9 December 1987 at 1848 hrs

Location: One quarter mile final approach to the "Fulmar A" North Sea oil platform

Type of flight: Public Transport (Charter)

Persons on board: Crew — 2 Passengers — 8

Injuries: Crew — None Passengers — None

Nature of damage: Minor damage to the main rotor blade spindle assemblies. None to the undercarriage or fuselage

Commander's Licence: Airline Transport Pilot's Licence

Commander's Age: 47 years

Commander's Total Flying Experience: 6540 hours (of which 870 were on type)

Information Source: AAIB Field Investigation

The purpose of the flight was to conduct the fourth sector of a series of shuttle flights between the "Fulmar A" and "Auk" oil platforms. The previous three sectors had been accomplished without incident and the aircraft lifted off the Auk helideck for the fourth sector at 1843 hrs.

Throughout the evening the weather had provided good visibility with about half cloud cover and a wind of 350/11 kt. Even in this good visibility, when approaching the Fulmar from the south, no other rig or platform is visible for use as an aid to visual judgement of aircraft speed or attitude.

Because of the relative position of the two platforms, and the wind direction, the previous approach to the Fulmar had been from a direction slightly west of south such that a crane jib, sticking out to the west side of the platform, did not interfere with the final approach to land. On the second approach, the fourth sector of the shuttle, this jib had been stowed away and no longer influenced a more into wind approach, from almost due south. Therefore, the visual aspect of the platform, during the second approach, differed slightly from that during the first by placing the "flare" tower and the drill derick, both very brightly lit, closer to the line of sight to the helideck.

The 5 minute flight was conducted at approximately 500 feet above the sea, and it was the intention of the commander to decelerate the aircraft from a position about one mile from the platform, abeam the Floating Storage Unit anchored at that position. At somewhere between 1/2 and 1/4 of a mile from the platform, the co-pilot looked up and saw that the platform, whilst

initially appearing to get closer, was in fact presenting a significantly higher aspect than would be normal at that stage of the approach.

Following a very swift dialogue between the pilots, either the co-pilot or both pilots 'pulled' a considerable amount of collective pitch, but not quite in time to prevent a slight contact with the surface of the sea. The amount of power applied enabled the aircraft to become airborne again, and the flight was continued to an uneventful landing on the Fulmar helideck.

The Chief Inspector of Accidents has ordered an Inspector's Investigation.