No: 1/89

Ref: EW/C1087

Category: 2a

Aircraft Type

and Registration:

Sikorsky S-61 N helicopter, G-BDII

No & Type of Engines:

2 General Electric CT58-140 turboshaft engines

Year of Manufacture:

1975

Date and Time (UTC):

17 October 1988 at 2040 hrs

Location:

Between Cape Wrath and Handa island, off the NW coast of

Scotland

Type of Flight:

Search and Rescue

Persons on Board:

Crew - 4

Passengers - None

Injuries:

Crew - None

Passengers - N/A

Nature of Damage:

Buckling of the starboard boat hull and centre fuselage structure. Starboard sponson attachments failed. Aircraft immersed in sea

water.

Commander's Licence

Airline Transport Pilot's Licence (Helicopters)

Commander's Age:

48 years

Commander's Total

Flying Experience:

7200 hours (of which 6800 were on type and 1700 SAR\* flying)

**Information Source:** 

AAIB Field Investigation

The helicopter, fitted with specialised equipment, was chartered to HM Coastguard and was carrying out a Search and Rescue\* (SAR) mission at the southwest corner of Handa island. Handa island is situated 1/4 nm west of Laxford Loch, south of Cape Wrath, Scotland.

The crew had received the call to "scramble" at 1903 hrs and lifted off at 1911 hrs. The task comprised a search, centred at the southwest corner of Handa island, for two crew members of a sailing dinghy which had been reported as overdue. Following an hour of search, the Coastguard informed the crew of the S 61 that one survivor had been rescued by a yacht and that he had reported seeing his colleague, who was not wearing any floation aid, sinking beneath the sea surface twice. Furthermore, the capsize had occurred at about 1430 hrs. Consequently, following another sweep of rocks in the area, the crew were considering a return to base and the commander was bringing the helicopter to a hover.

With the helicopter heading into wind, at about 200 feet, as the commander was carrying out this manoeuvre, the Winch Operator informed him that the aircraft was travelling backwards at an unacceptable speed.

During his attempt to recover the helicopter to either a hover or to forward flight, the commander realised that a considerable rate of descent had been established and that impact with the sea was

inevitable. Despite his efforts to recover the situation, the aircraft struck the sea, banked to the right in a slightly nose-down attitude. Almost certainly at this time, the right sponson separated from the fuselage. The helicopter immediately rolled inverted and settled into a nose-down attitude, sinking slowly. Three of the four crew members effected a rapid escape from the aircraft, but the winchman escaped only because the others opened the rear port emergency exit from the outside. All four then boarded the liferaft, to await rescue.

At 2058 hrs, the Coastguard controller, appreciating the lack of normal radio telephonic communications (RTF) with the helicopter, declared an emergency to the Rescue Co-ordination Centre, at Edinburgh, who, at 2103 hrs, scrambled a Royal Air Force Sea King helicopter from RAF Lossiemouth to their rescue. This decision was supported by a 999 call received by the police near Kinlochbervie, at 2052 hrs. The rescue was effected at 2213 hrs and the S 61 crew were returned to Stornoway for medical checks.

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