

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT REPORT No. 1/93

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REPORT ON THE ACCIDENT TO PIPER PA 28-161, G-BPJT, AT KIDLINGTON, OXFORD ON 12 JULY 1992

Sunday 12 July 1992 was the day of the British Grand Prix motor race at Silverstone and Oxford Airport, Kidlington was in use as a feeder airport for helicopters to transfer passengers to and from the race circuit and also to refuel. There was therefore, unusually for a weekend, a large number of aircraft movements on that day. The weather was fine with a light to moderate westerly surface wind and the grass runway 27 was in use.

The Piper PA-28-161, G-BPJT, was being flown on a dual instruction flight of circuits and landings. A Sikorsky S-61N helicopter, which was transferring passengers between Kidlington Airport and a landing site near Silverstone, came to the hover over runway 27 and then turned left to hover-taxi clear of the left side of the runway. Shortly afterwards witnesses observed the Piper descend on the final approach to the same runway and then, at a height of about 30 feet, the engine power was heard to increase as a 'go around' was initiated. As the nose of the aircraft was raised and some right bank smoothly applied, the aircraft was observed to flick suddenly to the right before the nose dropped and it descended steeply to the ground. The instructor was fatally injured at impact and his student died shortly after reaching hospital.

The report concludes that, whilst landing, the Piper encountered wake vortices or turbulence generated by the Sikorsky S-61N helicopter which, at the time of the accident, was hover-taxiing close to the active runway. The crew of the Piper may have decided to continue the approach without realising that a large helicopter was still in hovering flight close to the runway. The dangers caused by rotor downwash generated by large helicopters when hovering close to an active runway have not been sufficiently researched and, although helicopter downwash and wake vortex is recognised as being hazardous it may be that such conditions associated with hovering helicopters are not widely appreciated.

Six Safety Recommendations have been made dealing with the need to publicise the dangers associated with turbulence generated by hovering helicopters, the requirement for further research of the phenomenon and the need to re-consider current guidelines on separation given to air traffic controllers.