

AIB Bulletin

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SPECIAL BULLETIN

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Aircraft type and registration:	Sikorsky S-61N, (heavy helicopter – public transport) G-BEON	
Year of Manufacture:	1977	
Date and time (GMT):	16 July 1983 at 1136 hrs	
Location:	1½nm NE of St Mary's Aerodrome, Isles of Scilly	
Type of flight:	Scheduled passenger	
Persons on board:	Crew – 3	Passengers – 23
Injuries:	Crew – 1 fatal	Passengers – 19 fatal
Nature of damage:	Aircraft destroyed	
Commander's Licence:	Airline Transport Pilot's Licence – Helicopters	
Commander's Age	37 years	
Commander's total flying experience:	Not known	

The helicopter was operating a scheduled passenger flight from Penzance heliport to St Mary's Aerodrome in the Isles of Scilly when the accident occurred. Flights from Penzance had been delayed during the morning because of poor visibility but by 1046 hrs the weather had sufficiently improved to enable the first aircraft to make the flight to St Mary's where it landed at 1106 hrs. The second aircraft to make the flight was G-BEON. It carried a crew of 2 pilots, both of whom were qualified S-61 captains, and one cabin attendant. One of the pilots had been nominated as the aircraft commander and he was also to be the handling pilot. The helicopter took off at 1120 hrs with 23 passengers on board and climbed to an en-route height of 2000 feet. At 1126 hrs, when the helicopter was 18 nm from St Mary's, a descent to a height of 500 feet was made. Since

This Bulletin contains facts relating to the accidents which have been determined up to the time of issue. This information is published to inform the public and the aviation industry of the general circumstances of the accidents at the preliminary/stage and must necessarily be regarded as tentative and subject to alteration or correction if additional evidence becomes available.

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the commander could not see the surface of the sea at that height he descended further to 250 feet as indicated by the aircraft's radio altimeter. This is the minimum height permitted by the British Airways Helicopters Operations Manual for a flight in daylight over the sea under the Visual Flight Rules.

The commander states that at this height he was in continuous visual contact with the surface of the sea but with no external horizontal reference. A weather observation made at St Mary's at 1130 hrs gave the following information:— wind from 300 degs at 5 knots; visibility 2200 metres in mist with $\frac{3}{8}$ of cloud cover at 500 feet and $\frac{7}{8}$ at 1200 feet. By this stage of the flight the helicopter's landing gear was down and the pre-landing check list had been completed, except that the radar had yet to be switched to standby. The barometric altimeters were set to the St Mary's Aerodrome surface level pressure datum (QFE) of 1010. Whilst the co-pilot was monitoring the helicopter's position by cross referencing the Decca flight log and the aircraft's radar the commander informed him that he intended to reduce speed to about 90 knots from 110. Neither pilot however has subsequently been able to recall what actual speed was reached during this reduction. The helicopter's final communication with Air Traffic Control was at 1134 hrs when the co-pilot reported that the aircraft was 2 nm from the St Mary's Aerodrome, at which time clearance to land was given.

A shortwhile later the helicopter unexpectedly struck the sea in an approximately level attitude and whilst on a steady heading. Neither pilot could subsequently account for this event in terms of a mechanical or technical malfunction on the part of the helicopter which at the time appears to have been flying quite normally. After three successive impacts with the sea, which at the time was calm, the helicopter rolled over and sank almost immediately. The force of the impact had ripped open the bottom of the fuselage and also removed the sponsons containing the aircraft's emergency flotation gear. Just four of the passengers were able to escape from the aircraft together with the two pilots. None of them was wearing a life jacket and they supported each other for approximately the next 50 minutes until they were found by the St Mary's Life Boat. The rescue operation was considerably hampered by fog.

The helicopter was subsequently salvaged from a depth of 200 feet by the salvage vessel Seaforth Clansman assisted by a team of Royal Navy divers. The bodies of all but 3 of the remaining occupants of the helicopter were recovered during this operation. The wreckage of the helicopter was then removed to the Accidents Investigation Branch hangar at Farnborough for detailed examination.

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