



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Preliminary Report

Location:	Newport Beach, CA	Accident Number:	WPR22FA101
Date & Time:	February 19, 2022, 18:34 Local	Registration:	N521HB
Aircraft:	McDonnell Douglas 500N	Injuries:	1 Fatal, 1 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Public aircraft		

On February 19, 2022, about 1834 Pacific standard time, a McDonnell Douglas 500N, N521HB, was substantially damaged when it was involved in an accident in Newport Beach, California. The pilot sustained minor injuries, and the tactical flight officer (TFO) was fatally injured. The helicopter was operated as a public aircraft flight by the Huntington Beach Police Department.

The helicopter was owned by the City of Huntington Beach and was providing law enforcement air support under a contract service agreement for the City of Newport Beach.

The helicopter departed its home base, Huntington Beach Police Department Heliport (CL65), at 1800, and for the next 30 minutes flew a routine patrol along the coast of Huntington Beach, inland to Costa Mesa, and then south to Newport Beach.

The pilot reported that as they were about to depart the Newport Beach area, they received a transmission over the primary police radio channel that there was a fight taking place just south of their location. The pilot stated that he redirected the helicopter toward the area and began a right-hand orbit while the TFO (who was seated in the right seat) turned on the infrared camera and began searching the ground. The TFO spotted a group fighting, and the pilot began to maneuver the helicopter in a tighter right orbit while the TFO relayed his observations over the police radio channel.

Ground patrol officers arrived on the scene, and the pilot continued the orbits about 500 ft above ground level, while simultaneously viewing the activity through his monitor, and maneuvering the helicopter so the TFO could continue to observe the altercation. The pilot stated that he watched as ground patrol officers got out of their car and approached the group, who by this time had mostly dispersed. He was concerned that one of the group was about to start fighting with an officer, and he slowed the helicopter to keep the camera aimed at the scene longer, so that they would not lose sight of it behind a building.

Suddenly the helicopter yawed aggressively to the right, and he immediately applied full left foot pedal and forward cyclic to try and arrest the rotation, but there was no response. He

continued to apply corrective control inputs, but the helicopter did not respond, and began to progress into a spinning descent. The TFO transmitted over the police radio channel, “We’re having some mechanical issues right now”, followed by, “we’re going down, we’re going down”.

The pilot stated the rotation became more aggressive as the helicopter began to descend. He continued with corrective control inputs, which appeared to be partially effective but did not stop the rotation. He stated that the engine was operating throughout, and his goal was to continue to fly the helicopter with the engine still running, rather than reducing power and performing an autorotation to a populated area. Because it was dark, he had no horizon or accurate external reference, but he could see the lights of houses approaching, and sensed impact was imminent, so he pulled the collective control in an effort to bleed off airspeed.

They then hit the water hard in a downward right rotation, on TFO’s side. The pilot recalled a sudden smash and saw water and glass coming toward him as the canopy shattered. He felt the rotor blades hitting the water, everything then stopped, and within a few seconds he was submerged. The pilot stated that he continued to hold on to the collective as a reference point, then cleared the mouthpiece from his rescue air bottle, and began to use it to breath. Continuing to hold the collective with one hand he reached down and released his seat harness and egressed by pushing himself away with the collective and through the door opening. He exited the helicopter and ascended to the surface, and a short time later, onlookers began to arrive, and pulled him away and toward a boat.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	McDonnell Douglas	Registration:	N521HB
Model/Series:	500N	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Amateur Built:			
Operator:		Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None
Operator Designator Code:			

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	VMC	Condition of Light:	Night
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KSNA, 54 ft msl	Observation Time:	18:53 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	5 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	17° C / 8° C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	3 knots / , 210°
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 23000 ft AGL	Visibility:	10 miles
Altimeter Setting:	30 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	Company VFR
Departure Point:	Huntington Beach, CA (CL65)	Destination:	Newport Beach, CA

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal, 1 Minor	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:		Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Fatal, 1 Minor	Latitude, Longitude:	33.610368,-117.92438

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Simpson, Elliott
Additional Participating Persons:	Benjamin Harris; Federal Aviation Administration FSDO; Long Beach, CA
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.