



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Preliminary Report

Location:	Chapelle, NM	Accident Number:	CEN22FA317
Date & Time:	July 16, 2022, 19:20 Local	Registration:	N911SZ
Aircraft:	Bell UH-1H	Injuries:	4 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Public aircraft		

On July 16, 2022, about 1920 mountain daylight time, a Bell UH-1H, N911SZ, was substantially damaged when it was involved in an accident near Chapelle, New Mexico. The pilot, two tactical flight observers, and the rescue specialist sustained fatal injuries. The helicopter was operated as a Title 41 *United States Code* public aircraft flight.

After several firefighting missions were flown in support of the U.S. Forest Service, the helicopter was fueled at Las Vegas Municipal Airport (LVS), Las Vegas, New Mexico. The helicopter departed LVS about 1838 and flew to the dip site/staging area followed by the firefighting location, then flew back to the staging area, where the remainder of the crew was loaded to return home to Double Eagle II Airport (AEG), Albuquerque, New Mexico.

About 1915, the helicopter departed the staging area on a westbound course. About 1920, the last automatic dependent surveillance-broadcast (ADS-B) data indicated the helicopter was about 0.5 mile east of the accident site. The helicopter was level on a westbound course about 550 above ground level of the accident site, with a steady groundspeed of 133 knots.

Two witnesses on a ridge about 0.5 mile east of the accident site were observing the sunset and reported the helicopter flew past their location westbound, then rapidly descended without making any turns. A large plume of dust occurred when the helicopter impacted the ground.

The helicopter impacted rural terrain with a westerly debris path. The initial impact area included a tail rotor tip cap that was partially buried. The left and right skids were about 38 ft and 77 ft beyond the initial impact area, respectively, and the main wreckage was found inverted about 160 ft beyond the initial impact area. The tail boom fractured at the aft end of the fuselage and was located about 20 ft beyond the main wreckage.

The main rotor was about 40 ft to the left of the main wreckage, with the main rotor mass fractured immediately below the hub. One main rotor blade was minimally damaged and the other blade was fractured at the spar, with the trailing edge separated and located nearby. The main rotor blade grips had minimal damage.

The helicopter was retained for further examination.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Bell	Registration:	N911SZ
Model/Series:	UH-1H	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:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KLVS,6870 ft msl	Observation Time:	19:53 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	17 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	27°C / 3°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Scattered / 11000 ft AGL	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	11 knots / , 150°
Lowest Ceiling:		Visibility:	10 miles
Altimeter Setting:	30.23 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Departure Point:	Las Vegas, NM (LVS)	Destination:	Albuquerque, NM (AEG)

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	4 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	4 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	35.38004,-105.23736 (est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Folkerts, Michael
Additional Participating Persons:	Dennis Beattie; Flight Standards District Office; Albuquerque, NM
Note:	