



Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	Port O'Connor, TX	Accident Number:	CEN23FA125
Date & Time:	March 6, 2023, 21:57 Local	Registration:	N494SH
Aircraft:	ROBINSON HELICOPTER COMPANY R44	Injuries:	2 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

On March 6, 2023, about 2157 central standard time, a Robinson Helicopter Company (RHC) R-44II helicopter, N494SH, was destroyed when it was involved in an accident near Port O'Connor, Texas. The pilot and passenger sustained fatal injuries. The helicopter was operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91 personal flight.

According to the pilot's family members, the intended destination of the flight was unknown. A preliminary review of Automatic Dependent Surveillance–Broadcast (ADS-B) data showed that the helicopter departed from a road right next to the pilot's residence at 2156:08. The helicopter departed to the northwest over a lake, the helicopter performed a teardrop turn to the southeast and traveled to the north passing over the lake again. The helicopter then performed a turn to the east over a road, and the data showed the helicopter descend to the south before the ADS-B data terminated over an open field next to a home at 2157:15. On March 7, 2023, about 1030, first responders notified the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) that the wreckage was located. A postimpact fire consumed the wreckage.

The National Transportation Safety Board, the FAA, RHC, and Lycoming Engines responded to the accident site to conduct documentation and examination work. The direct distance from where the helicopter departed from to the accident site was about 0.25 miles on a northeast heading. The area to the east of the accident site consisted of swamp with no ground lighting sources. The helicopter was found to be equipped for instrument flight; however, the helicopter was not certified for instrument flight rules (IFR) by the FAA. The wreckage was recovered from the accident site and transported to a secure location.

The closest official weather reporting location was from the Calhoun County Airport (PVK), Port Lavaca, Texas, located about 20 miles northwest of the accident site. At 2155, the Automated Weather Observation System reported wind from 160° at 6 kts, visibility 5 miles

with mist, and the ceiling broken at 500 ft agl. An AIRMET Sierra for IFR conditions was issued at 2200 for ceilings below 1,000 ft and visibility below 3 miles with mist and fog present.

A neighbor, whose home was about 1,000 ft southwest of where the helicopter took off from, observed the helicopter's anti-collision lighting system operating as it departed from the road, reported that it was "extremely foggy" when the helicopter took off. The neighbor reported that she could "barely see" her boat dock from her living room, which was about 75 ft away. At the time of the accident, the sun was more than 15° below the horizon, while the moon was about 50° above the horizon at an azimuth of 109°. The phase of the moon was a full moon and was 99.7% illuminated.

The pilot, who was not instrument rated, had previously attended the RHC Pilot Safety Course in September 2008.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	ROBINSON HELICOPTER COMPANY	Registration:	N494SH
Model/Series:	R44 II	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None
Operator Designator Code:	None		

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	IMC	Condition of Light:	NightBright
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KPKV,30 ft msl	Observation Time:	21:55 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	18 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	23°C /21°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:		Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	6 knots / , 160°
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 500 ft AGL	Visibility:	5 miles
Altimeter Setting:	29.99 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Departure Point:	Port O'Connor, TX	Destination:	

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	On-ground
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	On-ground
Total Injuries:	2 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	28.415122,-96.48012 (est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC): Hodges, Michael

Additional Participating Persons: Carl Newton; FAA San Antonio FSDO; San Antonio, TX
Thom Webster; Robinson Helicopter Company; Torrance, CA
Michael Childers; Lycoming Engines; Williamsport, PA

Note: