

INTERIM STATEMENT

The information provided herein is of an interim nature. Readers are advised that new information may become available that may alter this interim statement prior to the publication of the final report.

1. The South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) is conducting a safety investigation into a Bell 205 flight involving ZU-UHI which crashed into a game reserve on 22 April 2015 at Bainskloof area, Western Cape Province, at GPS coordinates 33°36'30.68"S, 19° 6'29.18"E.
2. The investigation is being conducted in accordance with the international protocol set out by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). The investigation team includes Investigator In-Charge (IIC) from the South African Civil Aviation Authority and the operator.

History of flight

1.1 History of Flight

1.1.1 On Thursday 22nd April 2015 at approximately 1535B a helicopter A, (with an unknown registration) was dispatched together with a spotter aircraft (fixed wing) from Tulbagh aerodrome to assist in a fire fighting operation in the Bainskloof area. The helicopter lifted-off uneventfully with the pilot and a fire fighter on-board. The spotter aircraft was also reported to have gotten airborne safely and arrived at the fire scene almost at same time with helicopter A. On arrival, the spotter pilot established communication with the Incident Commander (IC) at the scene. The IC instructed the spotter pilot to advise the helicopter's to use the national road R301 as the Landing Zone and he further gave him the go-ahead to bomb the fire. The spotter pilot relayed message to the helicopter pilot to land and deploy the "bambi bucket". Helicopter (A) successfully landed and (HSL) deployed the "bambi bucket and it lifted-off to fetch more water.

1.1.2 It was further reported by the spotter pilot that at approximately 16:05B, helicopter B with registration ZU-UHI approached from the southern side. The spotter pilot instructed ZU-UHI to use the tar road adjacent to the fire to discharge the "bambi bucket". The accident aircraft, ZU-UHI flew over the landing zone and turned around to fly into wind coming from the Wellington side. As ZU-UHI was on short final approach for the Landing Zone at approximately 2 -4m from the ground, the spotter

pilot saw the accident aircraft pitch up and bank to the left with the tail low.

- 1.1.3 At approximately 16:08B helicopter crashed, and Spotter immediately called the dispatch to advise that helicopter has crashed and medical assistance is required. The Incident Commander immediately ran towards the crashed helicopter.
- 1.1.4 At approximately 16:09B Incident Commander arrived at the wreckage and advise that the turbine is still running. Spotter advised the Incident Commander to look for red master switch to switch off the turbine. The IC could not find the switch however the turbine stopped on its own after running out of fuel from the ruptured tank.
- 1.1.5 At approximately 16:10B the wreckage starts burning and the Spotter advised helicopter (A) to put his load over the burning helicopter and he also asked the Incident Commander to assist personnel (pilot and the assistant). Helicopter (A) and kept on dropping water on the wreckage. The wreckage and the surrounding area were secured.
- 1.1.6 As part of the investigation, the Incident commander was requested to submit a written statement to the Aircraft Accident Investigator-In-Charge giving a description of what transpired. According to the IC, prior to the accident, he was directing helicopter communicating through a hand held radio, ZU-UHI to land safely on the road. He further stated that during this process of directing the accident helicopter, a vehicle approached from the Wellington side which he managed to stop in order to give way to the helicopter to land. The IC states that he is of the opinion that the helicopter pilot saw the same vehicle through the mirrors (the mirrors are attached under the fuselage of the helicopter as seen in figure 2 and 3) and thought it was too close and probably steered the helicopter away from the road in the direction of the mountain in an attempt not to collide with the vehicle. According to the IC, the pilot of ZU-UHI consequentially seemed to have lost control of the helicopter and it impacted the mountain and came to rest on its left hand side against the mountain.
- 1.1.7 The accident occurred at the GPS coordinates 33°36'30.68"S, 19° 6'29.18"E at the Elevation 645m. The GPS coordinates for the landing zone was 33°36'39.09"S, 19°06'29.18"E. The distance from the road to the accident site was approximately 91meters.

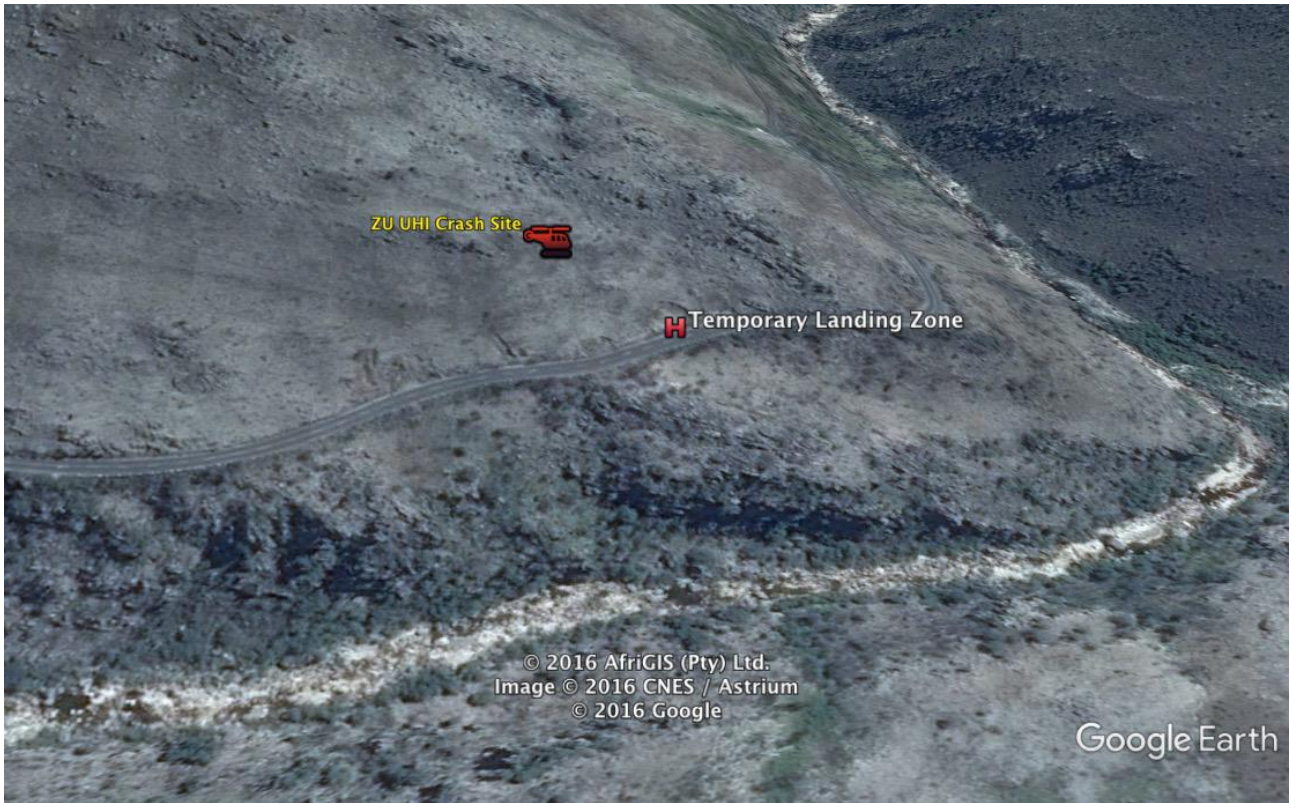


Figure 1: Picture from Google earth indicating the accident site and the national road R301



Figure 2: Photo of the aircraft after catching fire.

3.1 Findings

- 3.1.1 The pilot had a valid commercial licence and was properly rated on the aircraft type.
- 3.1.2 The pilot had a valid medical certificate which expired on the 30th November 2015.
- 3.1.3 According to available records the aircraft was properly maintained. The last Mandatory Periodic inspection that was carried out on the aircraft prior to the accident was on the 12 January 2015.
- 3.1.4 The helicopter was engaged in a fire fighting operation prior to the accident.
- 3.1.5 The (HSL) was assisting the pilot to deploy the bambi bucket.
- 3.1.6 Prior to the accident the bambi bucket was stowed inside the helicopter, it was going to be deployed after the landing.
- 3.1.7 The helicopter was destroyed by pre or post impact fire which ignited after the ruptured fuel tank.
- 3.1.8 Weather was not a contributory factor to the accident.

4 The following safety recommendation has been issued by the SACAA.

4.1 None

The SACAA investigation is on-going.

END.