


LIMITED OCCURRENCE INVESTIGATION REPORT – FINAL

Reference Number	CA18/2/3/10646						
Classification	Accident		Date	25 March 2026		Time	1658Z
Type of Operation	Aerial Works (Part 137)						
Location							
Place of Departure	Newlands Fire Base, Cape Town, Western Cape Province		Place of Intended Landing		Newlands Fire Base, Cape Town, Western Cape Province		
Place of Occurrence	Klein Skoorsteenkop, Table Mountain National Park, Cape Town, Western Cape Province						
GPS Co-ordinates	Latitude	34° 01' 36.63" S	Longitude	18° 22' 34.76" E	Elevation	918ft	
Helicopter Information							
Registration	ZU-LCY						
Make; Model; S/N	Bell; UH-1H (Serial Number: 65-09777)						
Damage to Aircraft	Destroyed			Total Aircraft Hours	9 624.1		
Pilot-in-command							
Licence Type	Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL) Helicopter			Gender	Male	Age	62
Licence Valid	Yes	Total Hours	4348.4	Total Hours on Type		876.3	
Total Hours 30 Days	6		Total Flying on Type Past 90 Days			30.9	
People On-board	1+0	Injuries	0	Fatalities	0	Other (on ground)	0
What Happened							
On Wednesday afternoon, 25 March 2026, a pilot on-board a Bell UH-1H helicopter registered ZU-LCY departed on a bush fire-fighting mission from Newlands Fire Station in Cape Town, Western Cape province, to Klein Skoorsteenkop in Hout Bay, Cape Town, with the intention to land back at Newlands Fire Station. The flight was conducted under visual meteorological conditions (VMC) in accordance with the provisions of Part 137 of the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) 2011, as amended. The pilot reported that he completed two Bambi bucket water drops in Klein Skoorsteenkop. However, whilst on approach to drop the third Bambi bucket water load, the helicopter's main rotor blades on the starboard side struck a rocky outcrop. The helicopter descended vertically, impacted the mountainous terrain, and rolled onto its port side. The pilot managed to disembark from the helicopter unassisted; he was met by emergency medical personnel on his way down the mountain. The pilot sustained minor injuries; the helicopter was destroyed by the bushfire.							



Figure 1: The accident scene. (Source: Cape Town Metropolitan Emergency Medical Service and Rescue)

In an interview with the investigation team, the pilot stated that the helicopter was operating normally and that he had performed two Bambi water drops. He stated that whilst approaching the drop zone for his third Bambi water drop, he was focused on getting close to the fire as it was the last drop of the day; he did not realise how close he was to the mountain face. He heard a loud bang and felt a violent lateral shake after which he decreased the power and let the helicopter descend vertically on the mountainside. After landing, the helicopter rolled onto its port side, breaking the main rotor blades before coming to a stop. Once stationary, he realised he had landed on the fire he was trying to extinguish. Fearing for his safety, he disembarked from the helicopter immediately, leaving the engine running.

A firefighter who was first at the accident scene stated that he was present during the helicopter's first two water drops. During the third drop, he saw the helicopter shaking violently before descending vertically on the mountainside. He further stated that the engine continued to run for approximately 1 hour thereafter. The bushfire consumed the helicopter during which the engine eventually shut down.

The investigating team analysed multiple videos of the accident sequence, and it was found that the main rotor blades of the helicopter struck a rocky outcrop on the north side of the mountain, followed by a puff of dust and a loud bang (see Figure 3).



Figure 2: A still image from one of the supplied video footages; it shows the helicopter's approach during the third drop.



Figure 3: A still image from one of the multiple video footages shows the moment the main rotor blades struck the rocks on the mountainside.



Figure 4: A still image from one of the multiple video footages shows the helicopter during descent after impact.

Findings

1. Personnel Information

- 1.1. The pilot had a Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL) that was initially issued by the Regulator (SACAA) on 19 October 1992. The licence was reissued on 16 February 2026 with an expiry date of 30 November 2026. The helicopter type was endorsed in his licence. The helicopter had accumulated 4 348.4 hours of which 876.3 hours were on the helicopter type.
- 1.2. The pilot had a Class 1 aviation medical certificate that was issued on 16 February 2026 with an expiry date of 31 August 2026. The pilot had the following restriction listed in his medical certificate: Valid only with correction for defective near vision (VNL).

2. Helicopter

- 2.1 The helicopter Certificate of Airworthiness (C of A) was issued on 20 July 2016. The latest C of A had an expiry of 31 July 2026.
- 2.2 The helicopter Certificate of Registration (C of R) was issued to the present owner on 2 May 2025.
- 2.3 Maintenance records indicated that the helicopter's maintenance was conducted by an approved aircraft maintenance organisation (AMO). The last maintenance inspection of the helicopter was certified on 24 September 2024 at 9 492.9 airframe hours, after which a Certificate of Release to

Service (CRS) was issued with an expiry date of 23 September 2026 or at 9642.9 airframe hours, whichever comes first.

2.4 The helicopter had a total of 9 624.1 airframe hours at the time of the accident. It had accrued 131.2 hours since the last maintenance inspection.

3. Environment

3.1. Good weather conditions prevailed at the time of the flight; the weather did not contribute to this accident.

4. Mission

4.1. The helicopter was flown close to the mountainside during the third Bambi bucket water drop.

4.2. The helicopter's main rotor blades struck a rocky outcrop on the starboard side during approach to the drop zone.

4.3. After the rotor strike, the pilot decreased the power and the helicopter descended vertically, impacted the mountainous terrain, and rolled onto its port side.

4.4. The pilot exited the helicopter unassisted after it had come to rest.

Probable Cause(s)

Loss of situational awareness whilst flying close to the mountain resulted in the helicopter's main rotor blades impacting a rocky outcrop on the mountainside.

Contributing Factor(s)

1. Operational pressure.
2. Target fixation leading to reduced situational awareness.

Safety Action(s)

None.

Safety Message and/or Safety Recommendation/s

None.

About this Report

The decision to conduct a limited investigation is based on factors including whether the cause is known and the evidence supporting the cause is clear, the level of safety benefit likely to be obtained from an investigation and that will determine the scope of an investigation. For this occurrence, a limited investigation has been conducted, and the Accident and Incident Investigations Division (AIID) has relied on the information submitted by the affected person/s and organisation/s to compile this limited report. The report has been compiled using information supplied in the initial notification, as well as from follow-up desktop enquiries to bring awareness of potential safety issues to the

<i>industry in respect of this occurrence, as well as possible safety action/s that the industry might want to consider in preventing a recurrence of a similar occurrence.</i> <i>All times given in this report are Co-ordinated Universal Time (UTC) and will be denoted by (Z). South African Standard Time is UTC plus 2 hours.</i>
Purpose <i>In terms of Regulation 12.03.1 of the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) 2011 and ICAO Annex 13, this report was compiled in the interest of the promotion of aviation safety and the reduction of the risk of aviation accidents or incidents and not to apportion blame or liability.</i>
Disclaimer <i>This report is produced without prejudice to the rights of the AIID, which are reserved.</i>

This report is issued by:

**Accident and Incident Investigations Division
South African Civil Aviation Authority
Republic of South Africa**