

**Aviation Safety Investigation Report
199801114**

**Bell Helicopter Co
47G-3B-1 Soloy**

05 April 1998

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NOTE: All air safety occurrences reported to the ATSB are categorised and recorded. For a detailed explanation on Category definitions please refer to the ATSB website at www.atsb.gov.au.

Occurrence Number: 199801114 **Occurrence Type:** Accident
Location: 10km N Kambalda
State: WA **Inv Category:** 4
Date: Sunday 05 April 1998
Time: 1100 hours **Time Zone** WST
Highest Injury Level: Fatal
Injuries:

	Fatal	Serious	Minor	None	Total
Crew	1	0	0	0	1
Ground	0	0	0	0	0
Passenger	0	2	0	0	2
Total	1	2	0	0	3

Aircraft Manufacturer: Bell Helicopter Co
Aircraft Model: 47G-3B1
Aircraft Registration: VH-SRQ **Serial Number:** 6625
Type of Operation: Non-commercial Pleasure/Travel
Damage to Aircraft: Destroyed
Departure Point: Kambalda WA
Departure Time: 1100 WST
Destination: Kalgoorlie WA

Crew Details:

		Hours on	
<u>Role</u>	<u>Class of Licence</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Hours Total</u>
Pilot-In-Command	Commercial	114.7	201

Approved for Release: Friday, October 2, 1998

The helicopter was on a private flight from Kambalda to Kalgoorlie. Witnesses reported observing the helicopter flying at a very low height, north along the Kalgoorlie/Kambalda road immediately prior to striking a set of powerlines that crossed the road. The helicopter struck the powerlines in a level attitude before falling heavily onto the road. The two passengers were able to escape the cockpit but the pilot had received fatal injuries. Although fuel was flowing from a ruptured fuel tank, there was no post-crash fire. An emergency locator transmitter (ELT) was not fitted to the aircraft. None of the helicopter's occupants carried a portable ELT.

The weather was clear and the terrain near the crash site was undulating. Two powerlines, with a span of approximately 250 m, passed over the road from a telecommunications tower on a hill adjacent to the road. One powerline was approximately 1 m higher than the other. The power lines passed approximately 30 ft above the road and were supported by poles that were green coloured and surrounded by vegetation of a similar colour and height. Evidence indicated that the helicopter had struck the ground with the main rotor under power. However, the upper of the two powerlines had severely bent one of the helicopter's two main rotor pitch change rods and severed the other. The main rotor pitch change rods normally transmitted the pilot's control inputs to the helicopter's main rotor; therefore, when the rods were damaged, the pilot was unable to control the helicopter.

The pilot had approximately 200 hours total flying experience and he was eager to enter the commercial helicopter industry. Several of the pilot's acquaintances reported that he was a conservative pilot. However, the pilot had previously commented to them that the helicopter's owner, who was not a pilot, had pressured him to fly at a low height. One of the surviving passengers was the helicopter's owner and he reported that he had flown with the pilot on several previous occasions where the pilot had operated the helicopter at a low height. He confirmed an eyewitness report that the pilot had flown the helicopter down the same road at a similar height the previous day. However, the owner asserted that he had never placed any pressure on the pilot to fly at a low height.

Although the pilot had undergone low-flying training and had a low-flying approval from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, the purpose of the flight did not conform with the requirements and conditions of the civil air regulations that permitted an aircraft to operate below 500 ft.

Due to their colour being similar to the surrounding terrain, the powerlines and their supports would have been difficult to see. However, if the pilot had operated the aircraft in accordance with the civil aviation regulations and had flown at minimum height of 500 ft, the wire strike would not have occurred. The pilot's inexperience and his reported history of low flying were probably factors that contributed to the accident.
