



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Preliminary Report

Location:	Lihue, HI	Accident Number:	ANC20MA010
Date & Time:	12/26/2019, 1657 HST	Registration:	N985SA
Aircraft:	AIRBUS AS350B2	Injuries:	7 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 135: Air Taxi & Commuter - Non-scheduled - Sightseeing		

On December 26, 2019, about 1657 Hawaii standard time, an Airbus AS350 B2 helicopter, N985SA, was destroyed by impact forces and a postcrash fire when it collided with terrain about 24 miles northwest of Lihue, Hawaii. The commercial pilot and six passengers were fatally injured. The helicopter was registered to SAF LTD and operated by Safari Aviation Inc., doing business as Safari Helicopters, as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* Part 135 on-demand commercial air tour flight. Company flight following procedures were in effect for the visual flight rules flight, which departed Lihue Airport (PHLI), Lihue, Hawaii at 1631.

The accident flight was the pilot's eighth and last scheduled 50-minute aerial tour flight of the day. About 1632, the pilot radioed Safari Helicopters' headquarters reporting a departure time of 1631. Shortly thereafter, another company pilot heard the accident pilot report his position at "Tree Tunnel," an air tour reporting point, on the common traffic advisory frequency.

About 1645, an air tour pilot from a different company reported that he heard the accident pilot report "Upper Mic," which was a compulsory air tour reporting point that indicated the accident helicopter was exiting the Waimea Canyon and beginning a transition over to the Na Pali coastline via Koke'e State Park.

About 1731, ten minutes after the accident helicopter was due to arrive back at PHLI, the flight follower for Safari Helicopters notified the company's director of operations that the helicopter was overdue, and flight-locating procedures began. An extensive search was initiated, and search operations were conducted by personnel from Safari Helicopters, the US Coast Guard, the Kauai Fire Department, the Kauai Police Department, the Civil Air Patrol, and the Hawaii Air National Guard.

On December 27, about 0932, the accident site was located within the Koke'e State Park. The helicopter impacted tropical mountainous terrain on a north facing slope at an elevation of about 3,003 ft mean sea level (msl) and came to rest at an elevation of about 2,900 ft msl. All of the helicopter's major components were located within the debris field, and the wreckage was largely consumed by a postcrash fire.

A witness located about 1.5 to 1.75 miles up the Nualolo Trail within the Koke'e State Park near the time of the accident reported weather conditions of about 20 ft visibility in rain and fog. He heard what he described as a hovering helicopter followed by a high-pitched whine. Knowing something was wrong, he attempted to locate the helicopter but was unable due to the adverse weather conditions and fading daylight.

The figure below shows a typical tour route via Tree Tunnel to Upper Mic, as described by Safari Helicopters. The accident site is noted in the upper left portion of the figure. As the accident helicopter did not have flight tracking equipment onboard, the exact flight path is unavailable.

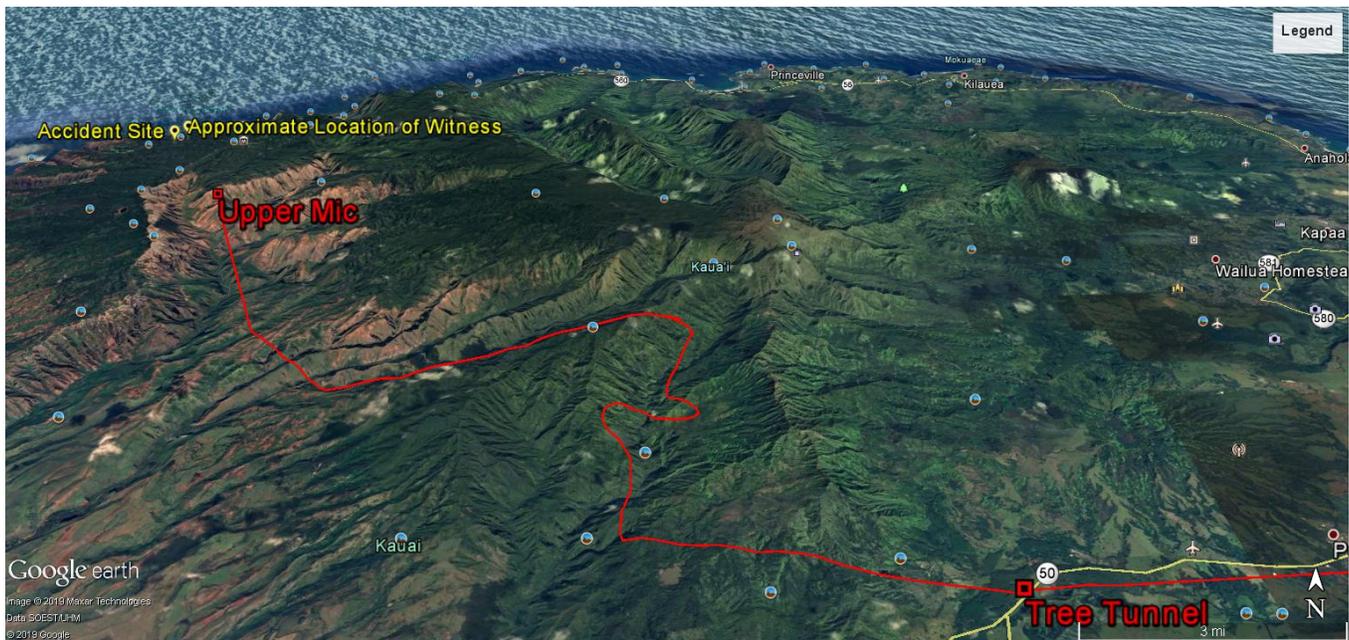


Figure 1 – Typical tour route to Upper Mic with approximate accident site and witness location depicted.

The closest official weather observation station to the accident site was Barking Sands Pacific Missile Range Facility (PABK), Kauai, Hawaii, located about 9 miles southwest of the accident site. The 1656 observation reported wind from 310° at 12 knots, gusting to 15 knots; 10 statute miles visibility; few clouds at 1,200 ft, broken clouds at 3,400 ft and 4,700 ft, overcast clouds at 6,000 ft; temperature 70°F; dew point 57°F; and an altimeter setting of 29.90 inches of mercury.

A PABK special weather observation at 1718 reported wind from 350° at 10 knots; 2 1/2 statute miles visibility in rain and mist, overcast clouds at 3,000 ft; temperature 73°F; dew point 72°F; and an altimeter setting of 29.90 inches of mercury.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	AIRBUS	Registration:	N985SA
Model/Series:	AS350B2	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Amateur Built:	No		
Operator:	Safari Aviation Inc.	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	On-demand Air Taxi (135)

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:		Condition of Light:	
Observation Facility, Elevation:		Observation Time:	0256 UTC
Distance from Accident Site:		Temperature/Dew Point:	23° C / 22° C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Few / 1200 ft agl	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	12 knots / , 310°
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 3400 ft agl	Visibility:	10 Miles
Altimeter Setting:	29.9 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	Company VFR
Departure Point:	Lihue, HI	Destination:	Lihue, HI

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	6 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	Unknown
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	Unknown
Total Injuries:	7 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	22.161667, -159.626389 (est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	David B Banning
Additional Participating Persons:	Patrick Lusch; Federal Aviation Administration; Washington, DC
Note:	The NTSB traveled to the scene of this accident.