

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION
HH-60G, S/N 91-26401
33d EXPEDITIONARY RESCUE SQUADRON
KANDAHAR AIR BASE, AFGHANISTAN
29 November 2007

On 29 November 2007, at 2040 hours local time (1610 Zulu time), an HH-60G, S/N 91-26401, on a medical evacuation mission to pick up a two-year-old Afghani female, sustained a hard landing approximately 75 miles northeast of Kandahar Air Base, Afghanistan. The mishap crew and mishap aircraft were assigned to the 33d Expeditionary Rescue Squadron, 451st Air Expeditionary Group. The mishap resulted in two members of the crew sustaining non-life-threatening injuries, and damage to the aircraft estimated between \$3.7 million and \$6 million.

The mission was flown at night under low illumination. A US Army Apache helicopter provided escort functions and communicated with a coalition ground party at the accident site. To mitigate the extreme darkness and to illuminate the landing zone, the Apache was tasked with deploying infrared rockets. Because permission from the ground party to fire the rockets was denied or the request was not understood, the infrared rockets were not deployed.

Subsequently, following two reconnaissance passes over the landing zone, but despite not having rocket illumination, the mishap crew elected to attempt a landing. During the approach, the mishap crew encountered "brownout" conditions that affected visibility during the final descent. With an abnormally nose-high attitude, the tail wheel contacted the ground first. To prevent inadvertent rearward aircraft movement, as the mishap pilot caused during a brownout approach several weeks earlier, he abruptly reduced collective control inputs, resulting in violent, accelerated ground contact.

The impact occurred at over ten "G" forces, and tore the forward-looking infrared sensor from the bottom of the fuselage. However, no abnormal engine or systems indications were observed, and no structural damage was detected by the mishap crew during an external visual inspection at the site.

After considering the potential enemy threat in the area, the mishap crew elected to continue the mission. The mishap medics retrieved the patient and determined her condition was misdiagnosed or exaggerated. The actual extent of the burns on the girl's back was relatively minor and non-urgent. The mishap crew then flew eight miles to Forward Operating Base Tarin Kowt without incident.

Causation. Pilot error was the cause of the mishap. Additionally, however, squadron leadership was contributory in that it failed to identify and mitigate a known difficulty of the mishap pilot in accomplishing brownout approaches and landings. Also contributing to the mishap was squadron leadership failure to maintain effective command and control over mission execution. This failure was illustrated by the decision to attempt the approach without the planned use of risk-mitigating flares, and by the decision to fly the aircraft following impact – both decisions being made without coordination or approval from squadron leadership. Finally, the entire mishap mission was based on a distorted patient condition that did not warrant the accepted risk of the mission.

Under 10 U.S.C. 2254(d), any opinion of the accident investigators as to the cause of, or the factors contributing to, the accident set forth in the accident investigation report may not be considered as evidence in any civil or criminal proceeding arising from an aircraft accident, nor may such information be considered an admission of liability by the United States or by any person referred to in those conclusions or statements.