



Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	Potrero, CA	Accident Number:	WPR25FA062
Date & Time:	December 16, 2024, 10:30 Local	Registration:	N617GC
Aircraft:	AMERICAN EUROCOPTER LLC AS350B3	Injuries:	1 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Public aircraft		

On December 16, 2024, about 1030 Pacific standard time, an Airbus A350 B3 helicopter, N617GC, was substantially damaged when it was involved in an accident near Potrero, California. The pilot was fatally injured. The helicopter was operated as a public use flight.

According to a representative of Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the helicopter was scheduled for a routine aerial support mission. Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) data from the Federal Aviation Administration showed that the helicopter departed Brown Field Municipal Airport, San Diego, California about 0856 on a westerly heading and subsequently began a climbing right turn to the north. At 1006:54, approximately 1,000 ft mean sea level (msl), the helicopter turned east and continued to climb as it gradually transitioned to a northeasterly heading. At 0933:59 the helicopter leveled off at approximately 5,800 ft msl and then turned southeast for approximately 7 minutes as it descended. At 0950:38, the helicopter reached 4,650 ft msl, and began another climb that would return it to an altitude of 5,800 ft msl over the next 14 minutes.

At 1007:52, the helicopter made an extended left hand 360° turn, descended to about 4,600 ft msl and climbed again to about 5,600 ft msl. At 1021:58 the helicopter turned to the southwest and leveled off 4 minutes later at 4,300 ft msl. At 1029:26, in the next 49 seconds the helicopter made two S-turns as it descended from 4,200 ft to 3,100 ft msl. According to the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center, the emergency locator transmitter sent its first detection at 1030:34.

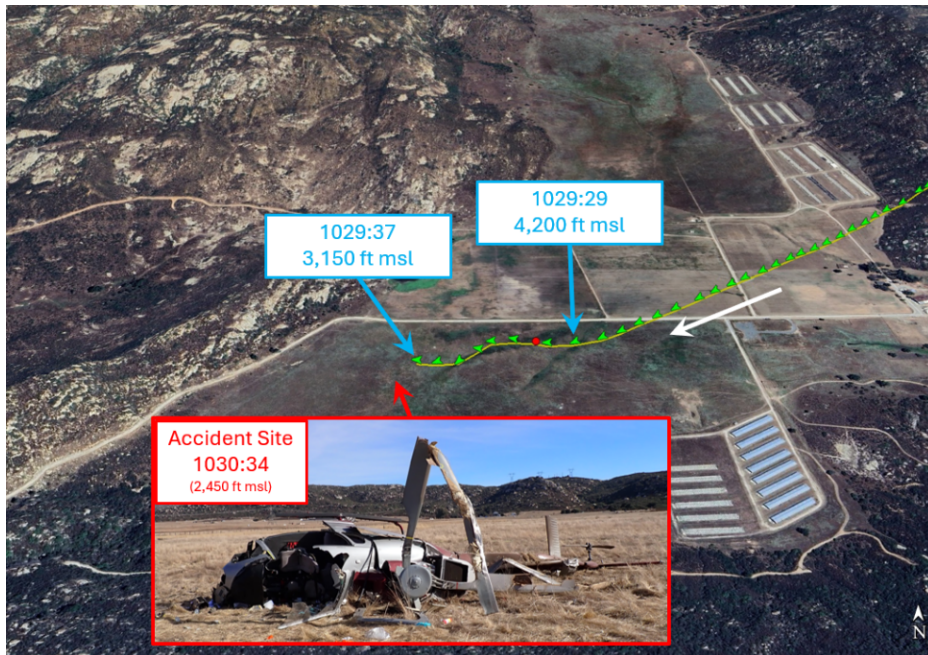


Figure 1: ADS-B Flight track and accident site

The helicopter came to rest on its left side in a field of dry brush on a magnetic heading of 309° at a field elevation of about 2,450 ft mean sea level. Three distinct ground scars were observed near the tailboom. A 4 foot long by 2 foot wide ground signature was located next to the outboard end of one of the main rotor blades. Another main rotor blade was resting within a second ground scar located approximately 1 foot forward of the first ground scar. A third ground scar was located about 6 inches away from the left horizontal stabilizer. All three main rotor blades remained attached to the rotor hub and were fractured at various points with broom strawing and fragmentation.

The helicopter wreckage was retained for further examination.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	AMERICAN EUROCOPTER LLC	Registration:	N617GC
Model/Series:	AS350B3	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	Department of Homeland Security	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None
Operator Designator Code:			

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	VMC	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KSDM,525 ft msl	Observation Time:	10:24 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	18 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	17°C /3°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	6 knots / , 130°
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility:	8 miles
Altimeter Setting:	30.14 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Departure Point:	San Diego, CA (SDM)	Destination:	San Diego, CA (SDM)

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	32.65218,-116.6242 (est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Stein, Stephen
Additional Participating Persons:	Roger Messick; Federal Aviation Administration; San Diego, CA Seth Buttner ; Airbus Helicopters; Dallas/Ft Worth, TX Bryan Larimore; Safran Helicopter Engines; Dallas/Ft Worth, TX Joel Beckett; US Customs and Border Protection; Tucson, AZ
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	