

The Louisiana Jury Verdict Reporter

The Most Current and Complete Summary of Louisiana Jury Verdicts

August 2026

Statewide Jury Verdict Coverage since 2011

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Civil Jury Verdicts

Timely coverage of civil jury verdicts in Louisiana including court, division, presiding judge, parties, case number, attorneys and results.

Helicopter Negligence - A contractor being transported on a helicopter from an offshore rig suffered serious injuries when the helicopter crashed after the operator suffered a medical event and became incapacitated – the theory was that 15 minutes before the incapacitation, the pilot had briefly blacked out and at that time the pilot should have aborted the flight or returned to the platform

Romero v. Westwind Helicopters,

6:23-442

Plaintiff: Mark Steven Owens, *Owens Law*, Lafayette and C. Michael Hill, Lafayette

Defense: M. Ross Cunningham and F. David Denny, *Cunningham Swaim*, Dallas, TX

Verdict: Defense verdict on liability

Federal: **Lafayette**

Judge: S. Maurice Hicks

Date: 7-31-26

Robert Romero was working in telecom services for Tampnet US on 10-26-22. He'd been doing work on an offshore platform (Ship Shoal 349) in the Gulf of Mexico. His work was done and he was returning to land. Romero was to be transported back on a Bell 407 helicopter operated by Westwind Helicopters. The pilot was James Bullock.

The helicopter took off without incident in the afternoon. Romero was in the front seat of the helicopter to the right of the pilot. Another worker was in the back seat. A few minutes into the flight, Bullock reported to Romero that he had just blacked out. This was alarming to

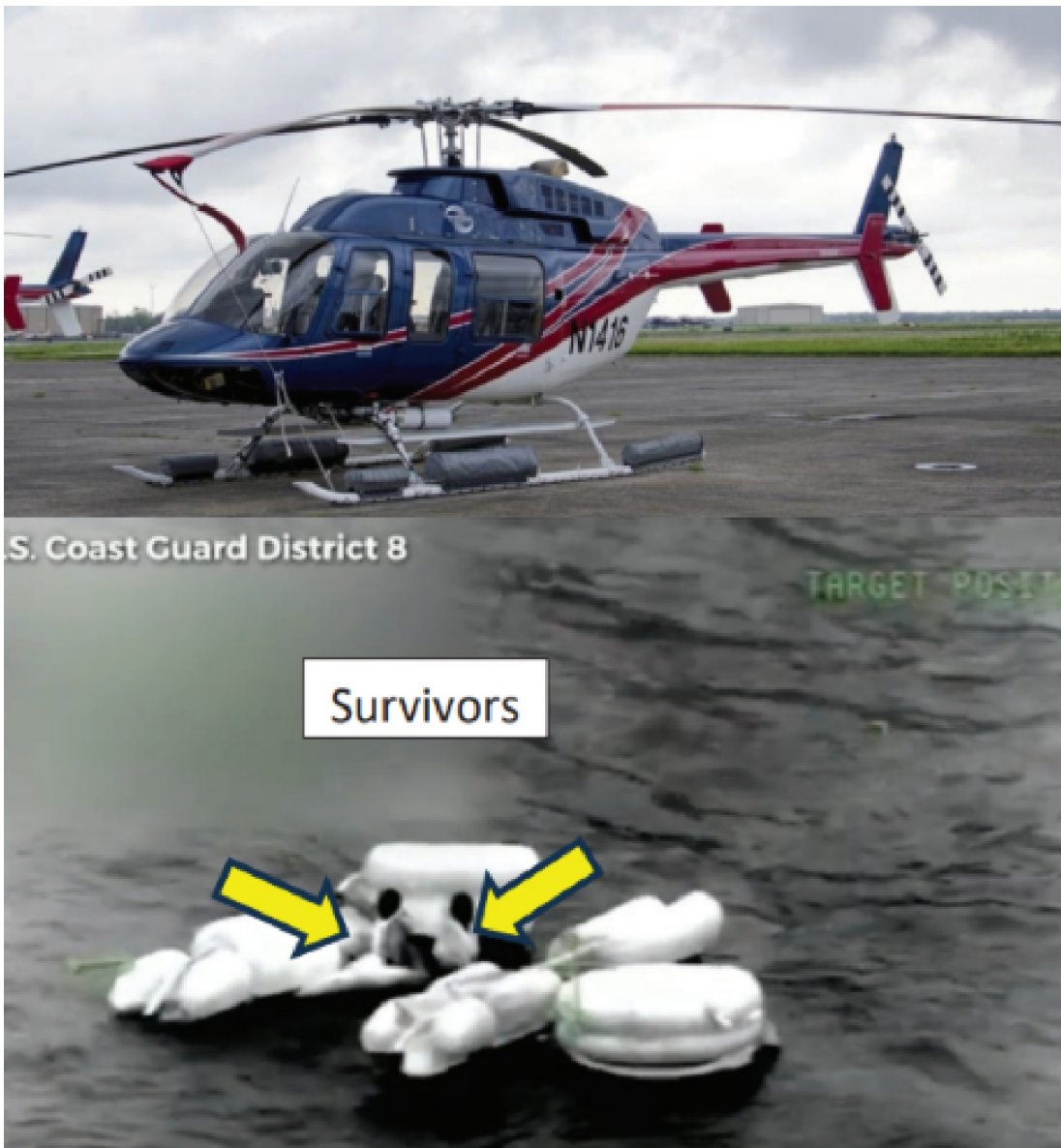
Romero as Bullock was the only helicopter pilot aboard. Romero implored Bullock to return to the platform, land at another platform or even to land in the sea. Bullock continued the journey – the helicopter was flying 1,500 feet above the sea.

Fifteen minutes later Bullock said his last words. They were, "I'm overheating. I'm not going to make it." He then slumped over. Romero tried to manipulate the controls on the helicopter. That was of little help. The helicopter descended rapidly from 1,500 feet in 19 seconds before striking the water hard. The helicopter then flipped over. It had floats on it and remained buoyant.

Romero and the passenger were able to get out of the helicopter. They could not rescue Bullock. He drowned in the helicopter. The two survivors were now just adrift on the floating wreckage. Westwind Helicopters back on land wasn't monitoring the flight nor had it been in communication with Bullock. When the helicopter didn't show at the Westwind base in Abbeville, LA, Westwind called the Coast Guard. Another hour later the Coast Guard rescued the two men and recovered Bullock's body. The helicopter was lost at sea.

Romero suffered serious injuries in the helicopter crash and upon his rescue, he was flown by helicopter to a hospital in New Orleans. His injuries including a mild TBI, L1-3 fractures, a bruised lung, facial fractures and a broken femur.

Romero sued Westwind (it is a Starr



The Bell 407 and then the survivors on the wreckage

Indemnity insured) and alleged negligence by Bullock in continuing the flight after he had first blacked out. His aviation expert was David Downey, Southlake, TX. Romero developed his damages with a triumvirate of experts, Denis Boudreaux, Economist, Ted Deshotels, Vocational and Shelly Savant, Life Care Plan.

The case was originally filed in

Iberia Parish. The theory that advanced to trial was state law negligence by Bullock in operating the helicopter. A cardiologist expert, Dr. Ankur Lodha, Lafayette, explained that Bullock had not sustained a sudden cardiac event (he wasn't sure what caused the incapacitation but it wasn't that), and that Bullock had time to react before the incapacitation. If Bullock

prevailed he sought general damages in two categories (past and future) as well as lost wages, future lost wages and future medical bills.

Romero made claims that were predicated on federal law and Westwind removed the case to federal court. Those claims did not survive to trial as they were subsumed by federal preemption. They included claims against Westwind for negligence in its emergency planning and a lack of operational control in failing to communicate with Bullock, all of which led to a delayed rescue.

Westwind defended the case and focused on a single theme – Bullock's incapacitation was just a sudden disabling coronary event that could not have been predicted. In fact just two weeks before the crash, Bullock had cleared an

FAA physical.

The court's instructions were interesting. Romero was required to separately prove that, (1) Bullock failed to act as a reasonably prudent pilot, (2) this negligence caused Romero's injuries, (3) Romero's injuries were a result of the kind of risk Bullock was expected to prevent, and (4) his damages. Romero's duties were no issue. **Ed. Note** - The third

ROBERT ROMERO

CIVIL ACTION NO. 23-0442

VERSUS

JUDGE S. MAURICE HICKS, JR.

WESTWIND HELICOPTERS INC,
ET AL.

MAGISTRATE JUDGE WHITEHURST

VERDICT FORM**QUESTION NO. 1**

Do you find, by a preponderance of the evidence, that James T. Bullock failed to act as a reasonably prudent pilot under the circumstances?

YES _____

NO ☒ _____If your answer is NO, do not answer any further questions. Your foreperson should sign and date this verdict form and notify the Court that you have reached a verdict.**QUESTION NO. 2**

Do you find, by a preponderance of the evidence, that James T. Bullock's negligence caused Robert Romero's injuries?

YES _____

NO _____

If your answer is NO, do not answer any further questions. Your foreperson should sign and date this verdict form and notify the Court that you have reached a verdict.**QUESTION NO. 3**

Do you find, by a preponderance of the evidence, that Robert Romero's injuries resulted from the kind of risk that pilot James T. Bullock was expected to prevent?

YES _____

NO _____

RECEIVED
DISTRICT COURT*The Romero v. Westwind Helicopters jury verdict*

charge (the kind of risk Bullock was expected to prevent) was odd – what kind of injuries are expected (besides serious ones and death) when a helicopter crashes?

The case was tried for five days and the jury then deliberated for 70 minutes. It resolved the case on the first question, the jury answering that Bullock was not negligent. That ended the deliberations and the jury then did not reach causation or damages. A defense judgment was entered.