

No: 6/85

Ref: EW/G85/04/01

Aircraft type and registration: Robinson R22 G-BLMD (light single engine helicopter)

Year of Manufacture: 1980

Date and time (GMT): 8 April 1985 at 1020 hrs

Location: West of Lesmahagow, Lanarkshire

Type of flight: Private (pleasure)

Persons on board: Crew — 1 Passengers — 1

Injuries: Crew — Minor Passengers — Serious

Nature of damage: Tail boom severely bent, blades buckled, cabin area completely collapsed

Commander's Licence: Private Pilot's Licence (helicopters)

Commander's Age: 42 years

Commander's total flying experience: 80 hours (of which all were on type)

Information Source: Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by pilot and AIB enquirers.

The pilot intended to fly from Cardross, some 17 nm north-east of Glasgow, to Ticehurst, E Sussex, refuelling en route at Carlisle. His point of departure and intended route were affected by a moist north-easterly airstream with low stratus, occasional rain and hill fog. Nevertheless, he considered that he had sufficient visibility and cloud ceiling to fly safely in contact with the ground and he took off for Carlisle.

Approaching the Lowther Hills, where the ground height varied between 1000 and 2400 feet amsl, he ran into drizzle beneath a 500 feet cloud ceiling. He decided to land in a field beside the main Glasgow to Carlisle road and wait for an improvement in the weather. Twenty minutes later he took off again but found his route south, which required him to climb over tall power lines, was still blocked by poor visibility and low cloud. He landed again and, with his passenger, walked through the drizzle back up the field to assess the weather to the north. Finding it slightly better he decided to depart to the north and either find an alternative route or return to his point of departure. Accordingly, he took off again but found the cloud base lower than he expected. At this time the moisture from the occupant's wet clothes began to condense on the inside of the canopy with the result that the pilot was late in seeing the power lines and had to turn steeply to avoid them. During the turn he lowered the collective lever and reduced power. The aircraft started to descend and part of it, thought by the pilot to be one of the skids, struck another, smaller power line that he had not seen in the poor conditions. The main rotor struck the ground and the aircraft crashed on its side. There was no fire. The pilot escaped with minor bruising and his passenger sustained a broken collarbone and minor injuries.

In his report on the accident, the pilot stated that he did not obtain a weather forecast before the flight. However, in response to a later query from the AIB, he said that he had telephoned the Meteorological Office at Glasgow but found that the information he was given was not very specific in regard to conditions below 2000 feet. Because of the implications of this statement a report was called for from the Senior Meteorological Officer at Glasgow airport. This report declared that there was no record of an enquiry on 8 April from the pilot of G-BLMD but stated that, had the pilot telephoned for information, he would have been briefed, according to the required standard procedure, from the current forecast summary. The details on the summary current at 0800 hours on 8 April for the area covering Glasgow and the Lowther Hills were: visibility 8 km, occasionally 4 km in rain; cloud: broken Stratus base 700 feet tops 1500 feet with the base reducing locally to 300 feet with fog on hills.