

AAIB Bulletin No: 11/94

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Category: 2.3

Aircraft Type and Registration: Bell 206B Jet Ranger III, G-REVS

No & Type of Engines: 1 Allison 250-C20 turboshaft engine

Year of Manufacture: 1968

Date & Time (UTC): 17 September 1994 at 1225 hrs

Location: Hambleton Hall Hotel, Hambleton, Leicestershire

Type of Flight: Private

Persons on Board: Crew - 1 Passengers - 3

Injuries: Crew - Minor Passengers - Minor

Nature of Damage: Damaged beyond economic repair

Commander's Licence: Private Pilot's Licence

Commander's Age: 41 years

Commander's Flying Experience: 2,004 hours (of which 13 were on type)
Last 90 days - 72 hours
Last 28 days - 30 hours

Information Source: AAIB Field Investigation

The landing site

The helipad was in the south west corner of a paddock, to the south of the hotel and adjoining the formal garden which fronted it. It was defined by four white paving blocks inset into the rough but short field grass. The square had 12 metre sides and the uneven surface sloped upwards to the north; there was a definite 'mound' on the south east corner. An iron boundary fence, about 1 metre high, ran east/west about 10 metres to the south of the centre of the helipad. There were two large trees within 20 metres of the centre of the helipad; one was at 19 metres to the SSE and the other at 17 metres to the NNW. There were other isolated trees close to the landing area. It was normal to approach from the south west or south east and usually face east for the landing. There was limited vehicular access to the paddock via a dirt track in the north east corner.

History of flight

Prior to the flight the pilot contacted the hotel for information about the helipad; this was faxed to him. It was of limited value as it contained only the grid reference and the statement that there were 'four white markers in square configuration 200 metres south west of house.'

The helicopter approached the helipad from the south east; the weather was good and the surface wind was north westerly at 10 to 15 kt. The pilot positioned it in the middle of the landing area and touched down on the front of the skids before lowering the helicopter to the ground. He reported that it became apparent to him that the tail skid was resting on an earth mound and the helicopter felt unstable, consequently he decided to bring it back into the hover to reposition it. While attempting this manoeuvre, the main rotor blades struck a tree and the helicopter sank back onto the ground, in a level attitude, from a height the pilot estimated as 3 to 4 metres.

A witness to the accident, who was standing about 10 metres from the helipad, stated that the helicopter initially hovered over the helipad, about 2 feet agl, facing towards the hotel (north east). It then began to manoeuvre, as if trying to determine a suitable landing direction, before touching down with the front of the skids first; the rear of the skids then lowered slowly onto the ground. He saw the helicopter lift off again; it moved to its left towards the large tree to the NNW. The main rotor blades cut off some small branches of this tree before making a cut about half way through the trunk about 7 metres agl; pieces of the rotor blade broke off and the helicopter sank to the ground.

The front seat passenger vacated the helicopter immediately and assisted the two rear seat occupants to escape; the pilot carried out the shutdown drills before leaving. All four suffered minor injuries from the impact.

The ground was wet on the day of the accident. Some of the emergency vehicles did experience difficulty. It was the opinion of the driver of one of the fire tenders that this access would not have been usable had the ground been any wetter.