

AAIB Bulletin No: 3/96

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Category: 2.3

Aircraft Type and Registration: Schweizer 269C, G-BPPW

No & Type of Engines: 1 Lycoming HIO-360-D1A piston engine

Year of Manufacture: 1984

Date & Time (UTC): 10 December 1995 at 1200 hrs

Location: Bell Bar, Potters Bar, Welwyn, Hertfordshire

Type of Flight: Private

Persons on Board: Crew - 1 Passengers - None

Injuries: Crew - None Passengers - N/A

Nature of Damage: Heavy landing damage to skids and tail rotor assembly

Commander's Licence: Private Pilot's Licence with Night Rating

Commander's Age: 24 years

Commander's Flying Experience: 76 hours (of which 29 were on type)
Last 90 days - 6 hours
Last 28 days - 2 hours

Information Source: Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and telephone calls to the pilot and the local police

The pilot intended to fly from a private helipad near Welwyn to Redhill Aerodrome. Before leaving home he made enquiries about the weather at Redhill and was informed that it was foggy but expected to improve. He also telephoned a friend in Potters Bar to ask what the weather was like there and was assured that it was reasonable. The pilot then decided to fly the short distance (about 10 nm) to the friend's helipad with the intention of landing there until the weather at Redhill improved sufficiently for him to complete the journey. After this telephone call he walked to the helipad and prepared the helicopter for takeoff; these activities took him nearly an hour.

On takeoff at about 1145 hrs there was no cloud in the Welwyn area and the visibility was three miles. Within five minutes the pilot encountered fog and cloud in the Brookmans Park area whereupon he lost sight of the natural horizon. The helicopter had no artificial horizon or vertical speed indicator and the pilot had never received any instrument flying training; consequently he rapidly became very disorientated. The only visible land mark was a radio transmission mast (500 feet agl) and the pilot decided to use this as an attitude reference whilst making a vertical descent and precautionary landing. During the vertical descent he could see that beneath him was a field but latterly the helicopter entered a vortex ring state and the pilot was unable to cushion the landing. The resulting heavy impact damaged the landing gear and the tail rotor assembly.

The landing was observed by a member of the public who informed the emergency services that an aircraft had crash landed in a field near Bell Bar. The police, fire and ambulance services had difficulty in finding the helicopter because, although it had landed quite close to the A1000 road, by the time they arrived the visibility was much reduced by thick fog.

On the day of the accident there was extensive patchy fog in the South East of England including the North London area but the pilot had not obtained a recognised aviation weather forecast for the area before takeoff from Welwyn. However, he had intended to do so at Potters Bar. Unfortunately, fog had formed or drifted into the Potters Bar area whilst he was walking to the helipad but his friend was unable to inform him of this deterioration.