

No: 5/91

Ref: EW/G91/03/01

Category: 2b

Aircraft Type and Registration: Aerospatiale AS355F1, G-SETA

No & Type of Engines: 2 Allison 250-C20F turboshaft engines

Year of Manufacture: 1981

Date and Time (UTC): 1 March 1991 at 1432 hrs

Location: Leysdown, Isle of Sheppey, Kent

Type of Flight: Commercial (aerial ambulance)

Persons on Board: Crew - 1 Passengers - None

Injuries: Crew - None Passengers - N/A

Nature of Damage: Tail rotor blades dented and tail pylon severely bent

Commander's Licence: Airline Transport Pilot's Licence (H)

Commander's Age: 38 years

Commander's Total Flying Experience: 6,460 hours rotary wing (of which 566 were on type) and 40 hours fixed wing

Information Source: Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot

The aircraft was responding to an emergency in the village of Leysdown. It landed on a large grassed park area where two paramedics disembarked and discovered from a by-stander the exact location of the patient's house. They set off on foot to attend the patient and the commander took off alone to find a landing site closer to the patient's house. He conducted an aerial search and decided to land about 10 metres from the rear of the patient's single-storey chalet house on a grassed area which was approximately 20 metres wide and 40 metres long. On approach to the landing site, at a height the commander estimated to be 30 ft above ground level, he suddenly experienced a restriction in tail rotor control. The helicopter commenced a rapid yaw to port which he could not contain and so he lowered the collective lever to reduce the yaw and initiate an emergency landing. The aircraft rotated to his left through approximately 3½ turns before contacting the ground in a wings-level but slightly tail-down attitude. On touchdown the commander was not aware of any sensation of hard vertical impact. He lowered the collective fully and the helicopter stopped rotating after a further 30° of yaw finally coming to rest close to the intended landing spot but facing about 210° to the left of the intended direction. The engines and electrics were shut down and the commander, who was unhurt, vacated the aircraft through the normal exit door.

Eye witnesses on the ground had seen a double bed sheet drawn into the tail rotor during the approach. The light coloured sheet had been hanging on a washing line beside the patient's house which was parallel to and about one foot from its pale coloured walls. The sheet was the only item on the washing line and the commander has since stated that he failed to see it during his pre-landing inspection of the site. There were no ground marks indicative of a heavy landing or tail rotor strike but the tail pylon had collapsed downwards and to the left.