

Aircraft type and registration: Hiller UH12E G-ATED (Light single engined helicopter)

Year of manufacture: 1959

Date and time (GMT): 19 July 1984 at 1215 hrs

Location: Luton, Lincolnshire

Type of flight: Aerial Application

Persons on board: Crew — 1 Passengers — Nil

Injuries: Crew — 1 (minor) Passengers — N/A

Nature of damage: Substantial damage to tail boom and tail rotor. Main frame and skids damaged.

Commander's Licence: Commercial Pilot's Licence (Helicopters)

Commander's Age: 59 years

Commander's total flying experience: 12,827 hours (of which 2625 hours were on type)

Information Source: Accident Report pro-forma.

The helicopter had been spraying potato fields and was climbing through 200 feet in a south-easterly direction en-route to the next spray area. The pilot was flying the aircraft with little friction applied to the collective pitch lever, as was his custom during spraying operations. A patch of moderately severe turbulence then dislodged maps which fell from the right hand passenger seat onto the floor.

The pilot, holding the collective in position by bracing it with his left knee, controlled the cyclic with his left hand and reached across with his right hand to retrieve the maps. At this point he was taken unaware by a sudden spontaneous upward movement of the collective which necessitated robust corrective action during which the aircraft descended from 200 feet to 100 feet and speed decreased from 50 kt to 30 kt. Main rotor RPM also fluctuated with initially a sharp decay followed by a substantial overspeed, although this was not sufficient to give undue concern to the pilot.

The aircraft then, without warning, yawed uncontrollably to the right and entered a vicious erratic spiral while continuing to travel in a south-easterly direction. The pilot assumed that there had been a yaw control failure but because of the low height/speed situation he used power to prevent a high sink rate from developing. The aircraft hit the ground in a wheat field where the tail skid and tail rotor blades became detached. It then bounced into an adjacent field and came to rest facing the opposite way to its direction of travel. The pilot escaped with minor wrist and leg bruises.

Subsequent examination showed that the main rotor blades were undamaged and that there was no evidence of a control malfunction.