

Aircraft type and registration: AS 355 FI Twin Squirrel G-BKIH

No & Type of engines: 2 Allison 250-C20F turbine engines

Year of Manufacture: 1982

Date and time (GMT): 8 April 1986 at 0905 hrs

Location: Swalcliffe near Banbury, Oxfordshire

Type of flight: Private (pleasure)

Persons on board: Crew — 1 Passengers — 5

Injuries: Crew — 1 (fatal) Passengers — 5 (fatal)

Nature of damage: Aircraft destroyed

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

Commander's Age: 38 years

Commander's Total Flying Experience: 3874 hours (of which 469 were on type)

Information Source: AIB Field Investigation.

The flight was delayed for 45 minutes whilst waiting for the weather at Heathrow Control Zone to improve sufficiently to permit a special VFR flight along the defined helicopter routes. The aircraft took off from Hayes heliport at 0820 hrs and flew via Helicopter Route H2 to Marlow and thence to a landing site near Pangbourne, Berks, where five passengers were embarked. The planned destination of the flight was Alton Towers near Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, routing via the Oxford and Coventry non-directional radio beacons (NDB). The pilot obtained initial clearance to climb to 2400 feet from the Air Traffic Control Unit at RAF Benson.

The weather over southern England during the morning of 8 April 1986 included layers of stratus cloud with the base at about 500 feet agl. North of the Midlands the weather was generally better with an improved cloud base but a lower surface temperature.

The aircraft flew in Instrument Meteorological Conditions (IMC) overhead the Oxford NDB at 2500 feet. The pilot contacted RAF Upper Heyford for permission to transit the Radar Advisory Service Zone. This was approved. At 0902 hrs Upper Heyford reported to the pilot that unidentified traffic was observed on their radar in a position five miles ahead of him. They advised him to turn left onto a heading of 270° (M) for avoiding action. This was acknowledged by the pilot who restated that he was in IMC. At 0903 hrs the pilot was advised to resume his own navigation from his position three miles to the northwest of Barford St John, a disused airfield.

At 0905 hrs the pilot transmitted a distress call to Upper Heyford saying that he had suffered engine failure. After a repeated call further communication with the aircraft was lost. The helicopter was heard by several people in the village of Swalcliffe and seen by three witnesses as it emerged from the low cloud base (approximately 1-200 feet) in a normal attitude but

descending fairly rapidly. Some witnesses report hearing unusual noises such as the grinding of gears and low frequency blade swish. The helicopter descended almost vertically into a cultivated field located at the northern edge of Swalcliffe. It was banked slightly to the right. As soon as the main rotor struck the ground the helicopter was 'pole-vaulted' to its left snapping off the tail boom which came to rest lying alongside the main fuselage.

The six occupants were killed on impact. There was a fire almost immediately following the impact. Those first on the scene were prevented from rendering further assistance by the severity of the fire. Appliances from Banbury Fire Station arrived within 12 minutes of the accident and extinguished the fire using foam and water. Locally obtained sand was used to douse the burning magnesium parts of each engine.

The Chief Inspector of Accidents has ordered an Inspector's Investigation into this accident.