

Aircraft: Enstrom 280C G-TOYS (Light single engine helicopter)

Year of manufacture: 1982

Date and time (GMT): 18 January 1983 at 1724 hrs

Location: Three Gates Farm, Market Harborough, Leics

Type of flight: Private

Persons on board: Crew - 1 Passengers - 1

Injuries: Crew - Slight Passengers - Nil

Nature of damage: Helicopter extensively damaged

Commander's Licence: Private Pilot's Licence

Commander's Age: 45 years

Commander's total flying experience: 104 hours 20 minutes, (all on type)

The helicopter left Shoreham at 1538 hrs in clear weather to fly to the owner's home at Butterley in Derbyshire. The proposed routing was via Woodley, Daventry, East Midlands and Ripley, some 143 NM. The Enstrom's normal cruise speed is 80 kts giving a still air time of 1 hr 47 min. The forecast 2000 ft wind was 300 degrees 35 kts for the southern part of the route, and 310 degrees 45 kts for the northern section, giving a minimum time en route of 2 hrs 23 min with an ETA of 1801 hrs. The end of civil twilight on 18 January 1982 was 1655 hrs.

The pilot stated that unexpectedly strong headwinds and various diversions slowed his progress such that it became apparent that it would be necessary to land at East Midlands Airport and leave the aircraft overnight. When north of Daventry it became dark and it was no longer possible to read the map by the red hand held light. As he considered that he was lost he contacted East Midlands Airport for assistance but his transmissions were very weak. A QDM of 300° was passed to the helicopter and an attempt was made to interrogate the helicopters' transponder, but without success. LATCC "Distress and Diversion" controller was asked by East Midlands if they could see the transponder signal but they also were unable to identify the helicopter.

The 330° QDM took the helicopter into a snow storm which the pilot thought was cloud. He turned through 180° and let down to try and fly under the weather, turning back onto his original heading. The lights of a town could be seen ahead so the pilot turned starboard away from the town as he was still in snow. Whilst in the turn he was distracted by his passenger, and when he looked back at his instruments he noticed that the airspeed was rapidly reducing towards 30 kts. He lowered the nose whilst continuing in the turn and shortly afterwards the aircraft crashed into a ploughed field. Both occupants managed to escape and there was no fire.