

This event occurred on June 29, 2021, in a BH-206B (N134VG) at Griffiss International Airport (KRME) in Rome, NY. While conducting a Part 135.293 (VFR Only) Competency check, during the “Power failure and autorotation to a power recovery” event, the aircraft had a hard landing, which resulted in the aircraft accident.

Inspector Charles Lewis and I arrived at the airport at 0800 local. We were there to conduct a Part 135.293 check on two pilots. Charles was there to receive both Level 2 and 3 OJT for a Part 135 check. I am an OJT trainer for this event. From 0800 to approx. 1140, I completed the check on the first pilot. I conducted the flight portion of the check from the front seat, while Charles was in the back. At the end of the check, Charles and I discussed whether to take a break but we decided to begin the second check. Charles was ready and begin the second check at approx.. 1145. The oral was completed around 12:50. Preflight was conducted in the hanger and the aircraft was positioned outside approx.. 13:10 and we departed minutes later. Charles was in the front left pilot seat, I was in the left rear passenger seat. Charles had the pilot perform a series of the required in-flight maneuver events before returning back to KRME for the “power failure and autorotation to a power recovery.”

Everything I am about to say is from my perspective from the passenger seat. I have limited view of the instrumentation due to aircraft design. But I am in communication with both the inspector and pilot. (Note: Before the flight portion, Charles had a discussion with the pilot about how the autorotation was to be conducted.)

The pilot elected to perform a straight-in autorotation to runway 33 at KRME. He initiated the maneuver by reducing the collective and simultaneous bringing the throttle to the idle position. The initiation was performed at a proper point to ensure we made our intended point of termination. During the auto, I could hear the pilot making proper call-outs (i.e. Airspeed, rotor, touchdown point.) The deceleration was begun too high and a little too aggressive. Because of this, it is not uncommon for the “low rotor” audio warning to come on. I knew there was a problem when the audio warning continued. I attempted to look at the rpm gauge, but before I could verify whether or not the throttle was returned to the “open” position, we impacted the ground. The last 10-15’, the aircraft dropped at a high rate. An indication of low rotor. (Note: I told the authorities we were about 20-30’ when we fell. However, I feel 10-15’ is more appropriate.) After the initial impact, we seemed to bounce. The aircraft began to rotate to the right and roll to the left. It came apparent to me we were going to continue the roll. I braced myself for the impact of the main rotors with the ground. After everything stopped, I called to the others to ask them if they were ok. Fuel began to enter my compartment and I yelled to the others to evacuate. I had to climb out of the right passenger door. I went to the front of the aircraft and helped Charles out first. (He had to exit through the front windshield which was broken.) Charles and I both helped the pilot out through the same location. I asked Charles if he had shutoff the engine. He stated he had done so. While evacuating both Charles and the pilot, I noticed smoke coming from the engine compartment and fuel on the runway. We exited a safe distance from the aircraft. An airport operations person arrived within seconds of us walking away from the aircraft. He states he was in his truck watching us (which allowed him to get to us so quickly.) Fire personnel, police and other airport personnel soon arrived. They asked if we needed medical attention and I stated “yes.” Charles was obviously in pain in his left shoulder. The pilot was bleeding from the bridge of his nose and seemed in shock. I was developing pain in my lower back. Charles and I elected to be transported to the local hospital (Rome Health).

Things I am unaware of or unable to recall:

I am not sure if the pilot returned the throttle to the open position. Normally you can hear the engine coming back to the full open position, but because of the low-rotor audio, the difficulties of viewing the instrument gauge from the back and because of the impact noises, I cannot confirm whether this was done.

After the aircraft came to a stop, I cannot confirm as to whether the engine was still operating before I exited the aircraft.

This is a true statement given by me (Joseph Fernandez) on July 6, 2021.

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Joseph Fernandez. A small horizontal line extends from the right side of the box.

Joseph Fernandez

Fleet Training Program Manager (FTPM)

Flightsafety International CMU