



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

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July 2, 2021

Subject: NTSB investigation ERA21FA275, N134VG, Bell 206B, Rome, New York, June 29, 2021. Interview with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Aviation Safety Inspector pilot Charles Lewis

Mr. Lewis was performing an Initial Part 135 Competency check ride and was seated in the left front seat during the flight. On July 2, 2021, Mr. Lewis provided the following information via telephone:

Mr. Lewis was receiving on-the-job training for conducting check rides from another FAA instructor pilot, Joe Fernandez.

Prior to the accident flight, the two FAA inspectors performed a check ride for another pilot in the accident helicopter. Mr. Lewis was seated in the rear of the helicopter for that flight, which was uneventful. During the flight, Mr. Lewis acclimated himself to the helicopter's instruments, which were different from what he was accustomed to.

The accident check ride began with an oral examination of the accident pilot, Deepak Dhermy, who was the Chief Pilot for Aviation Services Unlimited. Mr. Dhermy answered all the questions correctly. Mr. Lewis and Mr. Dhermy discussed the maneuvers they would fly during the flight, and specifically discussed the type and technique for the planned power recovery autorotation. Mr. Lewis asked Mr. Dhermy if he would prefer a straight-in or an autorotation with turn, Mr. Dhermy chose a straight-in. When asked at what altitude he would recover, Mr. Dhermy advised that the company's general operating manual specified that the helicopter should be recovered to full power, prior to descending below 100 ft AGL, and that was his plan. They discussed which technique Mr. Dhermy preferred for entering the autorotation, Mr. Dhermy indicated that it was to lower the collective first, and then reduce the throttle to idle. Mr. Lewis reminded Mr. Dhermy that it was his (Mr. Dhermy's) responsibility to initiate the maneuver. Mr. Lewis explained that he would not manipulate the controls, and Mr. Dhermy would have to remember to reduce the throttle to idle. Mr. Dhermy acknowledged that he understood.

Prior to the flight Mr. Dhermy performed a preflight inspection of the helicopter using the checklist. Mr. Lewis was seated in the left front seat; Mr. Fernandez was seated in the left rear seat. Mr. Dhermy gave a passenger briefing, then used the checklist for engine start. Mr. Lewis familiarized himself with the helicopter's instruments and their layout, which were slightly different than what he was accustomed to.

After liftoff, the helicopter flew to an open area and climbed to about 2,500 ft MSL where the pilot prepared for a settling with power maneuver. After performing clearing turns, the pilot

began to reduce the airspeed, when they noticed some power lines nearby, and then opted to relocate for the maneuver. After relocating, the pilot entered the settling with power condition, and then lowered the nose and accelerated out for the recovery.

The next maneuver was an inadvertent flight into instrument meteorological conditions, during which Mr. Lewis provided air traffic control-like instructions for turns, climbs and descents. During this maneuver Mr. Lewis noticed that the airspeed reduced to about 55 knots, and the helicopter was out of trim by about 1 ball on the slip/skid indicator. He mentioned this to Mr. Dhermy who then corrected. Mr. Lewis observed that Mr. Dhermy's grip on the controls a little bit "white knuckle" (tight) and he thought the pilot might be a little nervous.

The next maneuver was an unusual attitude recovery, which began at 1,500 ft, straight and level. When Mr. Lewis instructed Mr. Dhermy to lower his head and close his eyes, while Mr. Lewis instructed Mr. Dhermy to enter a left 20-30 degree left turn. Mr. Lewis had to apply a little left and forward pressure on the cyclic to put the aircraft in an unusual attitude. Once in the unusual attitude Mr. Lewis instructed Mr. Dhermy to recover, which he did successfully.

They then flew back towards the airport, where they planned to perform the practice straight-in autorotation to power recovery maneuver, to runway 33. Mr. Lewis asked Mr. Dhermy what the entry conditions would be, he responded that they would enter at 90 knots and 1,500 ft MSL. Mr. Lewis checked the wind conditions with ATC, the winds were 310° at 11 knots gusting to 16 knots. Mr. Dhermy indicated that the intended "landing" point would be the 1,000 ft marker on runway 33. Mr. Lewis reminded Mr. Dhermy that he would need to roll the throttle to idle and then roll it back to full before reaching 100 ft. As Mr. Dhermy entered the maneuver, he lowered the collective, and Mr. Lewis notices a needle split on the tachometer, and concluded the throttle had been reduced. Mr. Lewis did not notice any yaw of the helicopter. The helicopter "floated" somewhat after entry and the descent was smooth. Mr. Lewis guarded the collective and anti-torque pedals, and "everything looked good". As the helicopter decelerated slightly high (slightly above 100 ft), Mr. Lewis checked the throttle grip by attempting to rotate it toward full, and it did not move. As the helicopter continued to decelerate, Mr. Dhermy initiated his initial pitch pull and pushed the nose a little and began to increase the collective to arrest the descent, the helicopter was level, and the airspeed was decreasing. Mr. Lewis noticed the aircraft was higher than usual at the completion of a power recovery autorotation and felt the aircraft descend and thought Mr. Dhermy was lowering the aircraft slightly to a more reasonable altitude. Mr. Lewis assumed that Mr. Dhermy was continuing to a 3 ft hover, when suddenly the low rotor RPM horn sounded, and the low rotor RPM light illuminated. Mr. Lewis glanced inside to confirm the rotor indication but was unable to readily see it and as he was looking back outside and the helicopter impacted the ground. The helicopter then bounced up and was spinning to the right, then descended again it felt like the left skid caught the runway and rolled onto its left side. The helicopter was initially "pounding on the ground". When the pounding stopped, with the engine still running Mr. Lewis yelled to shut it down. Mr. Dhermy was not responding. He noticed Mr. Dhermy's eyes were closed, and he was not moving. Mr. Lewis was unable to reach the left throttle grip because of the aircraft on its left side and his body pressed against the left door. He was initially unable to reach the right throttle grip until he moved Mr. Dhermy out of the way and then rotated the right throttle grip to the IDLE position, which took several iterations of gripping and rotating the throttle with his fingers. He was initially unable to push the detent button to rotate the throttle to off, struggled with it, and then managed to push the button and rotate the throttle to "OFF". Soon thereafter Mr. Dhermy became conscious, removed his seatbelt, fell to the left side of the helicopter and they both egressed on their own.

In retrospect, Mr. Lewis considered that when he checked the throttle by attempting to rotate it, it may have been held in position by Mr. Dhermy, who had been gripping the controls somewhat tightly, and was not against the stop in the full position as he assumed. Or, if it had been, perhaps it was rotated away from full as the collective was raised to arrest the descent at the end of the autorotation.

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