



SHANNON D. DICUS, SHERIFF-CORONER

On 080122, I was assigned to work as Pilot in Sheriff's Patrol Helicopter 40K3 (Airbus H-125 N833SB). My crew that day consisted of a Tactical Flight Officer (TFO) and a TFO in training. At approximately 1540 hours, we conducted a rescue of an injured hiker in the area of the Deep Creek Hot Springs, in the mountains south of Apple Valley, California.

After locating our injured hiker, I conducted an off-site landing up on a ridge nearby and dropped off my TFO. The TFO walked down to the injured hiker and attempted to walk her up to where we had landed. The hiker was unable to climb the ridgeline, so I looked for a lower location to land. After locating another spot, I conducted another off-site landing that was easier for the injured hiker to access. The TFO who was on the ground, helped guide me into my landing spot and just prior to landing I had my TFO in training advise the TFO on the ground to move himself and the hiker to my left to avoid the main rotor. I landed with the TFO and victim kneeling near the left skid of the helicopter. After touching the ground, I felt the ground to be unstable due to soft dirt and a rearward slope. The TFO on the ground asked the TFO in training to exit the helicopter. I advised the TFO in training I was going to stay light on the controls meaning I would keep the collective up a small amount and the cyclic forward holding the skids into the upsloping terrain. I did not see any tall obstacles nearby or any terrain that would come close to the main rotor. There was brush surrounding the landing area, but all the bushes were low to the ground and tallest being no taller than a couple of feet.

The TFO in training unbuckled her seat belt and verbalized that she was going to slowly exit the helicopter paying attention to go around the flight controls. The TFO in training made it out of her seat and was standing on the left skids of the helicopter. She rotated her body to the left and was looking to assist the TFO on the ground and inadvertently sat down on the left side collective. The collective went full down which caused the helicopter to roll backwards suddenly. I attempted to pull up on the collective and pressed forward on the cyclic. The helicopter stopped rotating at approximately a 5 degree nose up attitude when the heels of the skids contacted the ground. I could feel a light shuddering in the cyclic which was similar to when a blade comes out of track when the main rotor is idling. I fought to keep upward pressure on the collective and I could feel a large amount of resistance. I yelled, "You're on the collective!" The TFO in training realized what had happened, turned back around and attempted to get her gun holster over and away from the collective. I was able to reestablish a more level attitude and the shuddering immediately stopped. I asked my TFOs if we had hit anything. I was afraid the tail rotor or stinger had contacted something on the ground and the knocking I was feeling was a ground resonance from throwing a rotor blade out of track. The TFOs advised we had not contacted anything when we rolled back, and that the area was clear. I told the TFO in training to get back in and the injured hiker was loaded up in the backseat. I rotated the cyclic around in a circle a few times to see if I could observe anything abnormal and it seemed normal.

I advised we would take the victim to the nearby Bowen Ranch parking lot and shut down the helicopter for inspection, just to be safe. We flew the short distance to the landing area and the helicopter's flight characteristics felt normal. I landed, shut down the helicopter and inspected the tail and main rotors. From the ground I did not see any evidence of the rotors contacting anything. I started the helicopter again, flew to pick up my other TFO and then flew back to San Bernardino International Airport. Upon landing I immediately got one of our department aviation mechanics and told them what had happened. I asked the mechanic to look over the aircraft because of my fear I had hit the tail and I told him about the shuddering I had felt. At this time, Corporal Ryan Pepler was starting his shift and was relieving me to work as pilot in the same helicopter. I told him about the event and why I had called the mechanic over to look at the helicopter. I then authored and submitted safety hazard report which is emailed to all supervisors in the Aviation Unit.

Cpl. Paul Kowalski  
EOD, Aviation Unit