

Michael Tepper

Statement

Accident on 09/04/2022

I'm a helicopter pilot working for the Air Methods Corporation at the Mercy Air 22 base in Hesperia, California. On the morning of September 4th, 2022 I was participating in a Public Relations event with the Mount Baldy Fire Department. I used helicopter N687AM for the event. The event consisted of flying water and other supplies and people from a base camp at Cow Canyon Saddle to the summit of Mount Baldy, dropping them off and returning to the base camp to pick up more supplies. The base camp is at approximately 4300 feet MSL. The summit of Mount Baldy is at 10064 feet MSL. The summit is approximately 4 nautical miles from the base camp. I estimated that I would need to fly five flights to the summit. I flew the first flight to the summit and back successfully. I delivered two people and one 50-pound jug of water. I kept the rotor RPM at 100% while at the summit. When I landed back at the base camp, I kept the engine running at Idle while the ground personnel loaded one person and 200 pounds of cargo into the helicopter.

On the second flight, I took off from the base camp with one person and 200 pounds of cargo and landed at the summit. The helicopter had approximately 375 pounds of fuel in the tanks at that time, enough for one hour and 15 minutes of flight. I kept the rotor RPM at 100% while the ground personnel at the summit unloaded the person and cargo. I took off solo from the summit of Mount Baldy for the base camp at Cow Canyon Saddle. I flew down-canyon to lose altitude and set up for a steep approach to the confined area landing zone at Cow Canyon Saddle. I slowed from 60 knots to 40 knots as I turned final. Shortly after turning final I saw the low RPM warning light and heard the low RPM warning horn. There were no other warning lights illuminated. There were no other audio annunciations. The controls were responding normally. The engine did not sputter. I saw that the rotor RPM dropped to approximately 95%. I lowered the collective and the rotor RPM went back up to 100%. I don't remember looking at the throttle. I aborted the approach and turned left, down-canyon. I made a Mayday call to the firefighters at Cow Canyon Saddle. I told them I had a partial engine failure and that I was looking for a place to land. They acknowledged my call and said they would send help. I attempted to raise the collective and once again the low RPM warning light and horn came on. I lowered collective again and proceeded down-canyon with a descent rate of 600-700 feet per minute. I did not attempt to put the FADEC into Manual mode because I didn't want to divert attention away from looking for a place to land. I didn't see any good places to land. I considered landing on the main road but decided against it because of the power lines along the road and the narrowness of the road. I saw a small paved road in a clearing at the bottom of the canyon and decided to land there. I did not autorotate. I decided to use what power the helicopter had for landing. There were trees and powerlines down-canyon from the clearing. I was slightly too high to land in the clearing so I flared into the top of a tree on the down-canyon side of the clearing. The flare brought the helicopter to a stop. I started to level the helicopter with forward cyclic. I pulled full collective to cushion the impact. The helicopter came to rest on its right side. I felt pain on the sides of my abdomen. I made a radio call to the firefighters at Cow Canyon Saddle and told them my approximate location. I told them that I might have a back injury. They acknowledged my call. I took off my flight helmet and glasses. I rolled the throttle to the OFF position to stop the engine. I turned off the Battery switch. I climbed out of the left, front door of the helicopter and down onto the ground. I walked about 30 feet up-canyon on the small paved road to await help. After a few

minutes, the firefighters saw me from the main road. They drove down to my location and gave me a ride to the main road. I was taken to the hospital from there by ambulance.