



“One of the Lessons I’ve Learned”

By Officer/Pilot Jeff Jonkey

I consider myself fortunate to be a pilot for the Long Beach (CA) Police Department and even more fortunate for the training that I have received and continue to receive on a constant basis as a result of the events of May 5, 2002. Normally, I am a day pilot, but a colleague needed a night off and, since he had worked for me one week prior, I agreed to work the night shift. This actually worked out well because the safety officer had been hounding me to complete monthly night training and this was a perfect opportunity to satisfy him.

I was assigned a relief observer who had all of one prior night shift before this one. He is normally assigned to narcotics and is a fixed wing pilot. The night began normally and remained fairly slow throughout the evening. We remarked how unusually slow it was given that it was Cinco de Mayo weekend. Our flight requirement is five hours per shift (ten hour shifts). It was approximately 0100 hours that I began to do my training.

The safety officer requires that I complete pinnacle approaches, confined area operations, SWAT insertions and emergency procedures. I had already done the pinnacles to the World Trade Center, Long Beach and headed to the airport to do emergency procedures. The Long Beach Airport closes at 2345, so I had the field all to myself. I did a few

power recovery auto rotations from 500 feet, practicing "making the spot." We had been doing a lot of surveillance lately, so I climbed to surveillance altitude (2000 feet) to do an auto from there.

I selected the intersection of runway 25L and 30 to be my intended emergency landing zone. I pointed out the location to my partner and flew directly over the top of it before I rolled off the throttle. We began the descent normally, spiraling down to make the spot. As we reached about 150 feet, I felt a gentle jolt on the collective. I wondered what had caused it, but as I was in the bottom part of the auto, I didn't have a whole bunch of time to investigate.

The intersection was now coming up very quickly and I began to roll the throttle back in as we are required to in power recovery autos. The engine spooled back up as I entered the flare, everything was looking just fine. I held the flare and began to add pitch to cushion the landing when I realized that I was not able to lift the collective. It was then that I realized that I had a bona fide emergency and I was going all the way down.

I told my partner to hold on and by now was pulling on the collective with all my might and it wouldn't budge. I decided that since I still had a little altitude left, I would hold the flare as long as I could to bleed off more airspeed.

At the last possible moment, I brought the ship level and touched down. We made one bounce before sliding to a stop.

After we stopped and I took a moment to breath again, I looked down at the controls and discovered what the problem was. Our aircraft is equipped like most, with a searchlight and the controller that operates it. Normally, the control head is velcroed to the bulkhead. However, in this instance, it had broken free from its mount and slid down onto the collective (the jolt that I felt in the auto). As I began to add collective, it wedged itself into the console preventing me from operating the controls. The good news was that once my heart rate returned to normal and the ship stopped sliding, I found myself smack in the middle of the intersection of 25L and 30.

The lesson I learned, to me, is paramount. From now on, I will ensure that all items in the cockpit are secured before doing auto rotations. The searchlight controller is now painted bright white to help locate it in the dark environment.

While this event turned out to be successful and a relatively minor emergency, it is something that could occur to just about all of us patrolling the skies.

