

GOOD SHOW



CAPT WILLIAM E. WILLIAMS



CAPT WILLIAM I. MILLER



TSGT JOHN B. LEWIS

THROUGH THE HOT and steaming jungle of British Guiana, the Essequibo River winds its way slowly to the coast of South America. One thousand feet in the air close by the banks of this river, the crew of an H-21 belonging to the 1370th Photo Mapping Wing, Turner AFB, Ga., were confronted with an emergency which could have resulted in an aircraft accident. That it didn't is a tribute to the professional abilities of the aircrew.

It happened like this:

The H-21B was assigned to Aerial Survey Team No. 5 and, on the day of the incident, was scheduled for a resupply flight from Atkinson Field to Mahdia, British Guiana. Capt William E. Williams, an instructor pilot, was in the right seat; an aircraft commander, Capt William I. Miller was in the left seat, and TSgt John B. Lewis was helicopter mechanic.

Engine runup and preflight briefing covering standard and emergency procedures were normal. Climb was made to flight altitude of 1,000 feet in unrestricted visibility beneath a scattered to broken deck of clouds. Radio contact with a civilian Cessna 175 flying cover was established.

Twenty-five minutes after takeoff, a routine fuel transfer from the auxiliary fuel tank to the main tank was begun. Immediately a slight loss of RPM was observed and the chopper lost a hundred feet of altitude. This is not an unusual occurrence in an H-21 so Capt Miller increased engine RPM to 2500 and initiated a climb back to 1,000 feet.

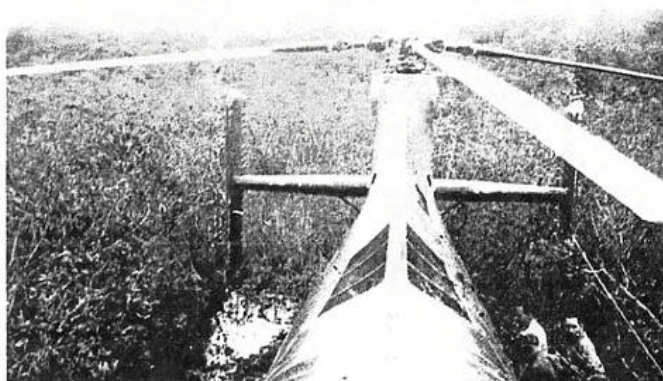
Suddenly the fuel quantity gauge needle began to drop off and at the same time the engine lost power.

The two pilots reacted as a well rehearsed team. Capt Miller put the collective pitch control full down and started autorotation procedures — exactly as covered in the pre-departure briefing. Capt Williams stopped fuel transfer procedures and put the mixture control in the full rich position. No good. The engine quit completely and Capt Williams as IP took control of the aircraft.

The H-21 was set up for maximum autorotation glide. A break had come the way of the distressed aircrew.



Above, a strange nesting place, but a safe one in a tree-studded South American jungle. Below, note water in swampy undergrowth.



Just ahead, a clearing in the midst of the 150-foot jungle growth was visible. Could the powerless helicopter make it? It would be close, but it was a chance, the only chance to stay out of the tall trees.

There was just enough room. The chopper slipped over the trees at the clearing edge. No time for anything fancy. Capt Williams put it down straight ahead in the muck and six to ten foot growth of shrubs and small trees.

Capt Miller hadn't been idle on the way down. He had broadcast the "Mayday", then cut the switches and performed the other necessary procedures as the pilot snapped out the commands. The whole sequence took about 28 seconds. Twenty-eight valuable seconds with the two pilots squeezing the maximum out of every one.

Once on the ground, the crew secured the cockpit and checked for fire and other hazards. Finding none,

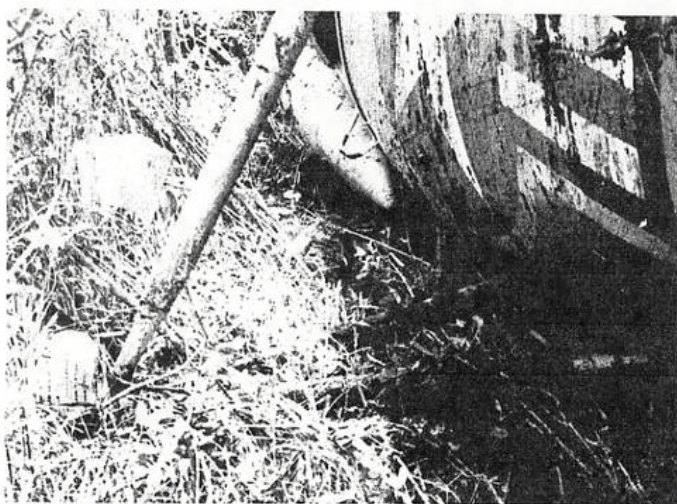
they established radio contact with the cover aircraft. The Cessna took the message back to Atkinson. "Only slight damage, no one hurt," was the good word.

The aerial survey team commander chartered a Grumman "Goose" amphibian and a rescue party headed for the scene. Landing was on the river a half-mile from the downed H-21. From there it was a hot and sweaty trek with machete and muscle-power to the site.

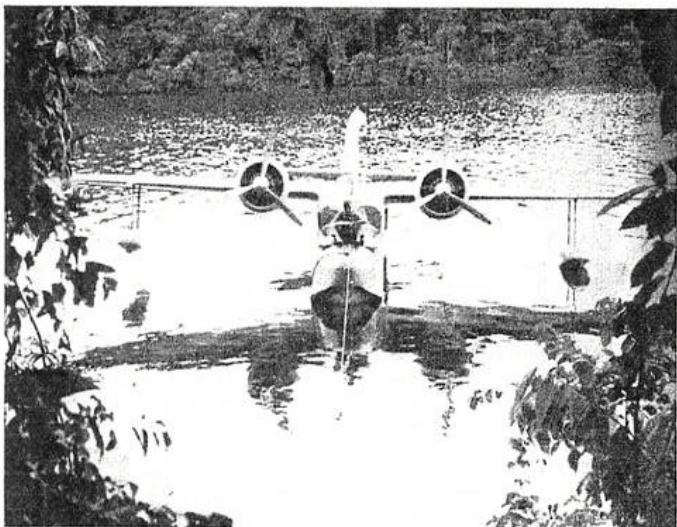
The rescue party and aircrew then returned to Atkinson, leaving the jungle creatures to ponder over this strange new "bird" in their midst.

Recovery of the H-21 got underway the next day. Another helicopter, escorted by a C-47, flew into Atkinson from Ciudad Bolivar, Venezuela.

The following day these two aircraft moved to McKenzie, 15 miles from the stranded helicopter. From McKenzie, parts and personnel were ferried to the scene. The carburetor



Above, the crew's view when they stepped out. At left, a welcomed friend has arrived. Below, rescuers tie up, then chop their way for half a mile to the helicopter crew.



and fuel screens were cleaned and the main fuel tank drained. The nose wheel was dug out and placed on platform of 2" x 6" boards. The main gear was dug out and the jungle growth was cleared away. The engine was run up and checked O.K. On the evening of the second day following the emergency landing, Capts Williams and Miller lifted off from their temporary landing site and successfully returned the H-21 to Atkinson.

Scratches and dents on all rotor blades and the right vertical stabilizer were not serious enough to affect safety of flight and the mishap was not classed as an accident.

Cause of the trouble was contaminated fuel in the auxiliary tank. (Until this incident the auxiliary tanks had no fuel drain plugs.) The carburetor was full of water, the fuel screens were covered with a brown mud-like substance and two gallons of dirty water were drained from the lines upstream from the carburetor before gasoline appeared.

It had been over two months since the auxiliary tank had been used on a flight and the unit involved was unable to pinpoint the source of contamination. It could have been the end result of numerous refuelings from old and rusty steel drums even though such fuel was strained through a chamois.

Control of moisture is a tough problem in the humid tropics. As a result of this incident, isolated APCS units have tightened up their inspection and control of POL sources. H-21 fuel screens are also inspected at every 10-hour postflight and drain plugs have been installed in the auxiliary fuel tanks.

There is no question that the superb airmanship of Capts Williams and Miller prevented a serious accident. It's true they got a break when that little jungle opening appeared as the engine quit, but if they had hesitated one second, if they had been a trifle less sure in their reaction, the helpless H-21 would never have made it to a safe landing. This professional team richly deserves congratulations and a "Good Show."