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New York Airways Collection - Bell Helicopter Material (1 of 2), 1959 and undated

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[[column 1]]

ple, while in West Virginia, attending an executive conference of a major auto manufacturer, I saw an old friend who is a senior pilot for the corporation. He had never flown a helicopter before. Yet, following an hour and a half of dual instructional flight, he proved himself competent enough to fly solo. By such competence in pre-solo stages, I mean the demonstrated ability to take-off and land repeatedly within an area less than the smallest city-size heliport or helistop, and to safely execute a power-off landing.

Perhaps there are those among you who are thinking I'm glossing over this matter of helicopter safety a little glibly. You are probably recalling the times you picked up your newspaper and read of another helicopter accident. Lest I be accused of being a "safety ostrich," let me give you some of the causes and reasons for many of these accidents. First, divide all the helicopters into two groups: those in scheduled service and those in other general utility roles. Scheduled helicopters, those which travel from point A to point B over fixed routes and land at familiar heliports, have set a remarkable record of safety over the past eight years. Most other helicopters have in common the factor of operating anywhere, whenever they're called on. It is not unusual for a utility helicopter working in a remote area to make a hundred landings a day in many different spots, with each landing representing a problem that requires different attention and judgment from the pilot. Utility work takes place in some of the most remote, rugged spots in the world, including jungles, swamps, forests and mountain peaks. The hazards of landing in unfamiliar territory also include the possibility of collision with unseen obstructions. Yet in contrast, the record shows that in one area alone - Los Angeles - over 100,000 take-off and landing operations were made from the safe, familiar post office heliport without a single incident.

[[column 2]]

From this, one can see that the helicopter accident rate is not as bad as it may seem. Those accidents we hear of usually occur under unfamiliar or difficult operating conditions, and involve a pilot lacking experience or judgment to meet the situation. On the other hand, an ordinary city-county type operations (scheduled as well as corporate air taxi service), the record verifies the exceptional safety of the helicopter. The greater the number of heliports or helistops planned by a city for its future, the greater the ultimate safety of its helicopter transportation.

In considering over-all helicopter safety, particularly in the light of worsening air traffic congestion, the matter of air traffic control invariably comes up. Many of today's airports have reached traffic saturation, and others are not far behind. This problem becomes especially severe during instrument flight weather. I want to emphasize that the prospect of heavy helicopter usage in large cities does not complicate the problem in the least. First, because of the helicopter's flight characteristics it need not utilize the same crowded approaches to the airport, or be integrated into existing airplane traffic. Second, the majority of helicopter operations, other than airport arrivals and departures, will be made in areas which are "off airways" - at altitudes not normally flown by fixed-wing traffic. During inclement weather the helicopter, because of those unusual flight characteristics, can meet changing conditions simply by flying slower. When necessary, it can easily set down at any of numerous landing areas.

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