

metal flooring has just been completed on the bridge. cemen.

SURVIVING FROM CHOPPER CRASH

By MARTIN STUART-FOX

(EDITOR'S NOTE: UPI correspondent Martin Stuart-Fox was injured in a helicopter crash Sunday morning but helped fellow passengers out of the wreck and then joined in fighting a fire which threatened to engulf the pilot. The 26-year-old correspondent describes the incident in the following dispatch).

AN KHE, VIET NAM, Sept. 12 (UPI).— Two soldiers tried to wrench the pilot free while a third hacked at the wreckage with a knife and his bare hands. The entire tail section of the helicopter was on fire.

As the flames crept closer, one man drew a machete and got ready to chop off the pilot's pinned leg. «Better a leg than a life,» he said grimly.

I was just behind the pilot, spraying a small hand extinguisher against the fiercely-burning fuselage. The extinguisher soon was empty and the soaring heat drove me back. Bullets were staring to explode in the blazing aircraft.

At the risk of their own lives, the battered crew members and some American paratroopers managed to pull the pilot free, just seconds ahead of the spreading flames. Both of his legs were broken. His other injuries were serious.

Luck saves us

We crashed four miles northwest of An Khe in the Vietnamese central mountains. But we were lucky enough to land amid the second platoon of B company, 502nd battalion of the U.S. 101st airborne brigade. The paratroopers saw our chopper go down and were helping us within minutes of the crash.

We were returning from a routine re-supply mission to troops on a jungle patrol when I heard a loud report. At first I thought it was a shot, and that the UH-1B «Huey» had been hit by ground fire. But the crewmen now think it was engine failure.

The pilot took over the controls from co-pilot David

R. Smith and tipped up the nose in a «flare» designed to slow down the helicopter and speed up our rotor blade. We were dropping quickly, very quickly, with nothing but the spinning blade to act as a parachute.

I started forward in my seat, looking down at the jungle rushing up at us. My mind was blank and I don't remember thinking anything. But somewhere in the back of my head there was a feeling of panic.

Falling straight

The rotor stopped turning at 50 feet and we fell straight down into the jungle. We ripped through the branches and thudded onto the soft earth. The helicopter twisted over on its left side, pinning the pilot and the left door gunner.

I was on the free side of the wreck, cut, bruised and limping but otherwise alright. I helped out two other passengers—fellow newsman Robin Mannock of London, England, and Capt. David L. Pinson of Murray, Kentucky. Later I realized I had broken or spained my ankle.

By this time the paratroopers had run up and were hacking at the burning wreck to free the pilot and the door gunner.

It was the fine airmanship of that trapped pilot and the cool heads of every other crew member that got us out of the crash alive.

Mannock suffered a gash on his hip which required six stitches.

The pilot and the left door gunner were so badly hurt that their commander asked me to withhold their names until their families can be notified.