

## Capt Stovel and Crew



Left to right: Capt. Frederick E. Stovel, aircraft commander; SSgt. Patrick Y. Riggs, helicopter mechanic; and Capt. Douglas G. Smith, copilot.



GOOD SHOW

Capt Frederick E. Stovel and his HH-1H crew of the 304 ARRS (AFRES), Portland IAP, Ore., received a call to air evac little Travis McCrew, a critically ill, 16-day-old infant, from La Grande, Ore., to the University of Oregon Medical School Hospital. Captain Stovel; his copilot, Capt Douglas G. Smith; and the helicopter mechanic, SSgt Patrick Y. Riggs, readied their aircraft for flight and awaited the medical team which was to join them on the mission. A short while later, the team, consisting of Dr. Raul Banagali and nurse Joan Silbernagle, boarded the chopper with a portable incubator. The helicopter flew the team to La Grande hospital to pick up the baby. While the medical team prepared the infant for flight, Captain Stovel flew the chopper to nearby La Grande Airport to refuel.

Forty-five minutes later the Huey returned, and the doctor and nurse came on board carrying the baby in the incubator. It was dark as the helicopter lifted off on its leg to Portland. The first hour of flight went well and when the terrain permitted, the pilot descended to 2,500 feet and navigated along the Columbia River.

The flight was 21 miles east of the Portland airport when the master caution light and several segmented panel lights illuminated, the low r.p.m. audio signal sounded, and the r.p.m. warning light illuminated.

Then the engine failed. Captain Stovel entered

autorotation and steered toward the beach along the river. As the helicopter descended, the crew got off a quick "mayday" to Portland Approach Control and notified the squadron operation section. Sergeant Riggs, to prevent injury to the child, positioned himself on the floor, and steadied the incubator with his feet. Captain Stovel flared the descending helicopter and eased it onto the shore for a slide-on landing. As the chopper slid along, it contacted a large rock, nosed over, and came to a stop on its side, partially submerged in the water.

All six occupants escaped unhurt, but another serious problem faced the survivors. How were they to keep the tiny baby warm with no electrical power for the incubator? It was a cold night and the infant could not survive for long in the cold.

The crew pulled a sleeping bag from the wreckage, and Nurse Silbernagle got into it with the baby. Her body heat kept the infant warm.

In a few minutes another 304th chopper was launched to recover the survivors. Later, all were pronounced in good condition by a physician.

The last word we have indicates little Travis McCrew is back home and doing fine.

This extraordinary mercy mission, which required prompt, expert responses by the crew to emergencies in flight and on the ground is one of which MAC, ARRS, and AFRES can justifiably be proud. "Good Show," Captain Stovel and crew! 