

From the Editor: In our last issue, we began coverage of "the early days," a little over 50 years ago, with Bill Lysrter's and Bill Crawford's recollections of their experiences at Gary AFB (San Marcos), Texas. We now continue, with a look at the school from the eyes of Lt Robbie Robinson. As I mentioned previously, this was the same time your Editor proceeded to Gary after winning his wings at Vance AFB, Oklahoma (Multi-Engine [B-25] Training).

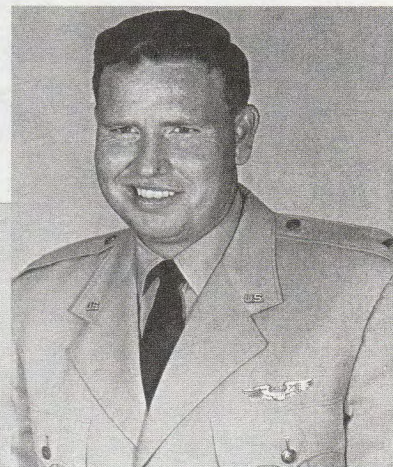
Local Base Rescue

The Beginning

Crawford, Lyster, Freedle and Robinson

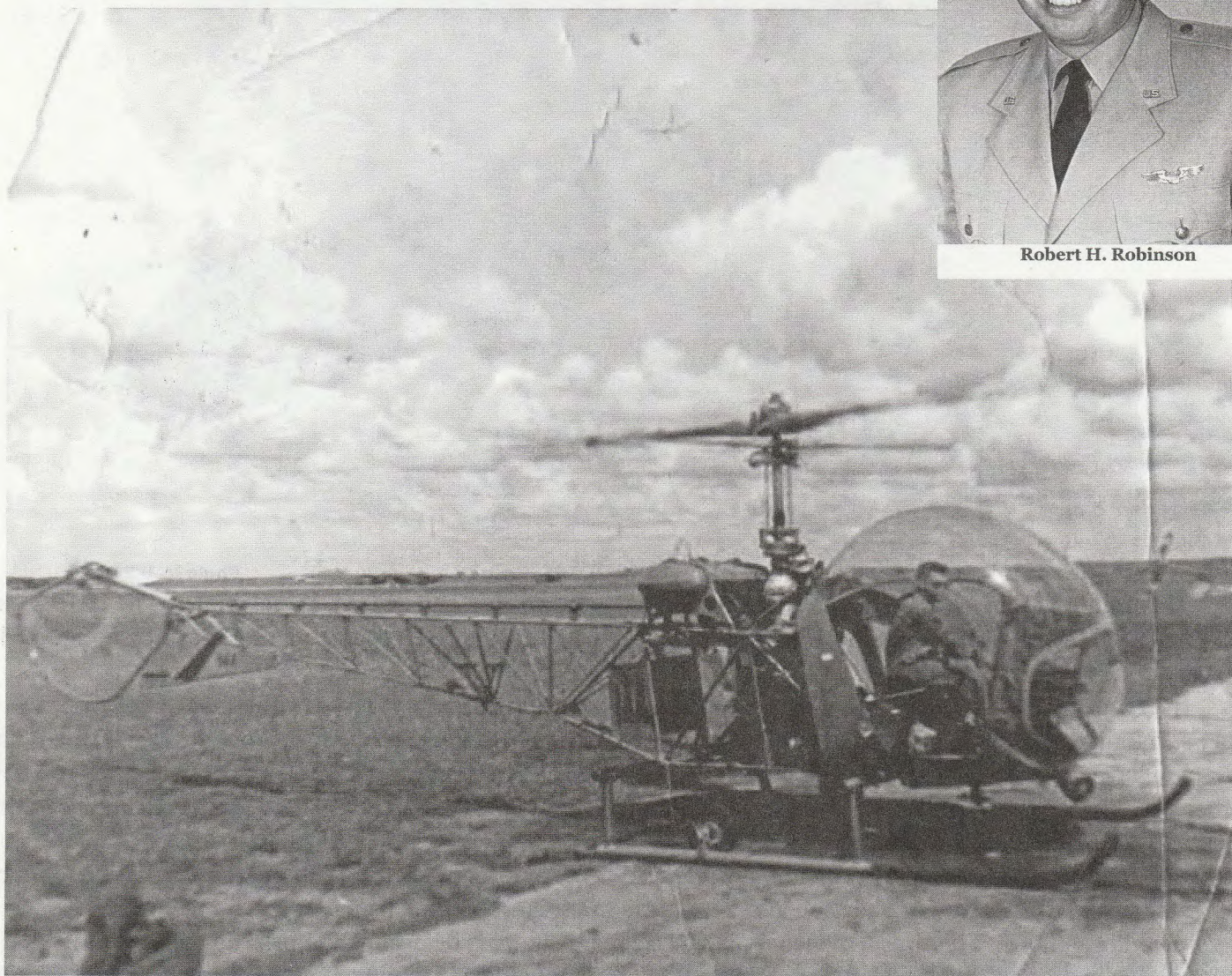
Air Force Helicopter School

In September 1955, after completing flight school, I selected Helicopter School as my next assignment. Helicopter School at that time was referred to as Advanced Flying Training. I started my training in November, 1955 at Gary AFB, Texas in the H-13 helicopter, often referred to as the Bell Bubble. The school had two models of the H-13 helicopter; the E and G models. The battery in the E model was stored behind the instrument console. The G model had the battery stored in the tail section.



Robert H. Robinson

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H-13E Model

Photo by Meredith R. Freedle

Since the center of gravity (CG) was very critical in the E models, too much weight in the cockpit, about 350 pounds, would cause the pilot to run out of cyclic stick, and be unable to stop or come to a hover. My instructor would almost fight to get a G model so that he wouldn't have to change the battery location. *(what Robby is obliquely pointing out here is that he is a BIG guy (played for Baylor University [football] prior to joining the Air Force.--Ed.)*



H-21 Helicopter

Photo by Bill Lyster

The training in the H-13 helicopter was completed and I moved on to the H-19 helicopter. The H-19 seemed like a giant after the H-13, but the CG was no problem, I finished up the H-19 course and successfully completed the final check ride.

Everyone was interested in moving on to their new assignments except those of us in a Pipeline Status (no further assignment). Four of us from the class were informed that we would be the first group to start a new training program in the monster H-21. The class included Lts. Brubaker, DeWald (now deceased), Madsen (location unknown) and me. We were each given 10 hours of instruction and a check ride, which everyone failed. At that time, an additional five hours was added to the program.

We were all experiencing the same problem—the rear rotor wanted to be in front. The flight training was good for both students and instructors. My instructor had very few hours in the H-21. I think he got as much practice as I, especially on turning autorotations. This was a maneuver when the rear rotor was determined to pass up the cockpit. After the additional five hours, we all passed our check ride. I always thought the instructors decided to pass all of us before someone got hurt! I remember telling my wife “If I ever see that damn helicopter again, it will be too soon!”

*When our class arrived for helicopter training in October, 1955, four of us were in the "Pipeline Status" mentioned by Robbie. The instructors informed us that our class was too large, and, if we wanted to stay over until the next class, we could pull additional duties at a rate of \$4.00 per day--WOW! If you think \$4 per diem was small potatoes--for Second Lieutenants making \$222.30 each month, that \$4 was BIG MONEY! Robby and I spent the next month as Tac Officers for the Pre-Cadets (enlisted troops waiting at Gary to get into the Air Force Cadet Training Program). Our boss was Major Marvel, and the first thing the 1st Sergeant said to us before we met the major was "You should have been here when he was **Captain Marvel!**"--Ed.*



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H-19A Helicopter

Photo by Robert H. Robinson

After the H-21 program, I was told that I would be staying as a helicopter instructor. After a few hours of instructor's school in the H-13, I started with my first students, I had learned to try REAL hard to get a G model because of the CG problem. Although all my students were about the size of jockeys, I occasionally had to transfer the battery. I also learned to carry safety wire and a pair of pliers so that I could make the change without waiting for one of the maintenance men on the flight line. After a number of hours as an instructor in the H-13, I was checked out as an H-19 instructor. The helicopter school was moved to Randolph AFB, TX in 1956 because Gary AFB was going to close.

(Lieutenants Brubaker and DeWald also stayed on as instructors, with Brubaker instructing on the "Army Side" [up until June 1956, the US Air Force was in charge of primary helicopter training for US Army helo pilots]. Gary AFB was also the location where Army pilots would receive their primary fixed-wing training in the L-19 "Grasshopper" aircraft; they would then travel to Fort Rucker [Dothan, Ga.] for basic training and award of their wings as an Army Aviator. If they were selected for training as helicopter pilots, they would then return to Gary, and, after primary training, return to Rucker for their Basic Helicopter Training and rating as an Army Helicopter Pilot. In June 1956, Gary AFB was turned over to the Army, and the US Army began their own training of their pilots at the new Camp Gary--Ed.)



H-19A Helicopter

Photo by Robert H. Robinson

At Randolph I continued to instruct in the H-19 for a few more months. After completing a morning session with students, I was told by the Operations Officer to eat a quick lunch and return. I returned as told, thinking about what I might have done wrong, and was informed I would be checked out as an H-21 instructor. This was almost enough to cause me to lose my lunch!

As I recall, I was given about five hours, the last flight being a check ride. After the flight, the check pilot said nothing to me, but walked in and talked to the Operations Officer. I stood outside the office wondering what was going to happen next. In a little while the Ops Officer walked out with two folders. He handed me the two folders and said, "These are your two new students for the H-21; be here in the morning."

Being a helicopter instructor is when you actually learn how to fly a particular aircraft, if for nothing more than to stay alive. After a number of hours in the H-21, I felt very comfortable, with lots of room and enough visibility to be scary. Out of the Air Force helicopter inventory at that time, the H-21 was my favorite. (*Mine, too!--Ed.*)

WE NEED YOUR PHOTOS

Do you have some photography from your tours of duty in Air Rescue Service from the years 1957 and 1982 (and beyond)??

We would like to feature (as we have since 1996) each year a look-back at 50 and 25 years ago. Photos don't have to be of an operational nature, but can be those of a typical duty day in the life of Rescue personnel.

We will return them to you after publication (or before, if you need them returned in a hurry). Send to your Editor: Address Inside Front Cover

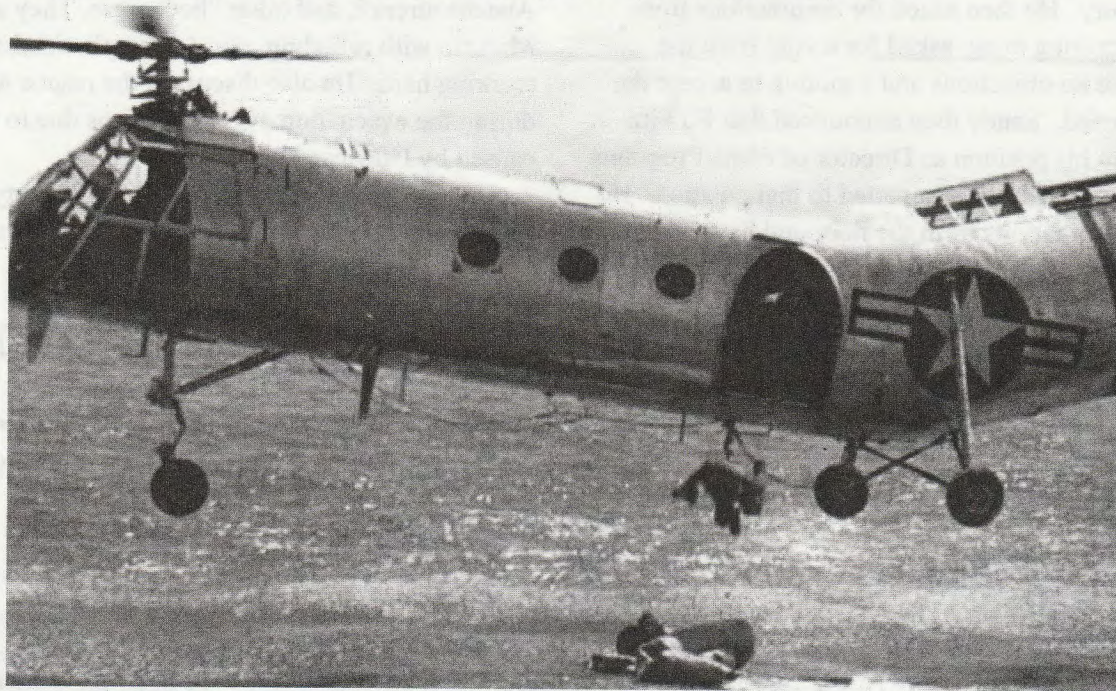
One of the highlights as an H-21 instructor was going TDY to France in 1957 to teach French students to fly the H-21. Residing in a hotel on the French Riviera, all provided by the French, was also a big plus. *(Your Editor was assigned PCS to the 55th ARSg, Thule, Greenland, as an Air Rescue RCC [SH-21B] in June 1957--brrr!)*

The helicopter course established by the French consisted of basic transition work and about 20 hours of mountain training in the French Alps. When you don't speak French, trying to instruct through an interpreter sitting on a toolbox between the 2 pilots was a real challenge. On some occasions the French students would drink too much red wine for lunch. On the afternoon flights, instructing through the interpreter, trying to keep the wine-soaked student awake, would cause me to say things that weren't very nice; in the U.S. we might refer to it as "Please pardon my French!"

The mountain training in the French Alps was conducted in lots and lots of snow. After flying in Texas for a number of months, flying in the Alps was a drastic change. The majority of the French students were a great group and good pilots. They kept asking to extend the number of hours they received in the course. They knew that as soon as they graduated they would be going to Algeria during the crisis there. I think they were supposed to receive more instruction in Algeria before going into combat.

After the four months TDY in France, it was back to Randolph AFB, where once again I was instructing in the H-21. Being back at Randolph, I had no snow, no interpreter--- but lots of memories!

R.H.R.



H-21A Helicopter

Photo by Robert H. Robinson