

# NIGHT-FLYING 'CHOPPERS' BUSY IN KOREA

SO YOU want to be an aviator and fly night and day? If it is flight hours you want, complete with Communist bullet holes in the wings and four or five combat hops a day, then join VMO-6 in Korea.

Flying the smallest airplanes and helicopters in the combat zone, this Marine outfit probably logs more hours of flying time than any other combat outfit, Navy or Marine. During May, for instance, the squadron logged 2,626 hours of flying—this despite the fact the KoWar had slowed down and flying of wounded Marines to rear areas was not as urgent as it had been. Even so, VMO-6's HTL helicopters made 222 evacuation flights that month. Just recently the bigger HOSS's began replacing the Bells.

Operating with 10 OE's (Cessna's) and 11 Bell pinwheels, the 33 pilots take pride in their flying records. Capt. Oliver D. Higgins led the "chopper" list with 43.6 hours in May. The champion OE pilot was MSgt. John T. Cain, since missing, with 184.1 hours.

VMO-6 is the senior helicopter unit in Korea, having been continuously in operation there since July, 1950, a month after the war started. Men are rotated out of the war zone, but the squadron stays on. During that time it has flown more than 4,000 wounded men from the front lines to hospitals and aid stations.

Besides Marines, the squadron also has evacuated Korean Marines and U. S. Army wounded. Night evacuation flights for the latter soldiers were taken over when the Marines were the only remaining helicopter outfit in Korea doing night hops.



**ANSWERING** a call for an emergency evacuation, a VMO-6 Bell helicopter starts off from the base camp to front lines; note OE's and HTL's on the flight line in sun-baked Korea hills

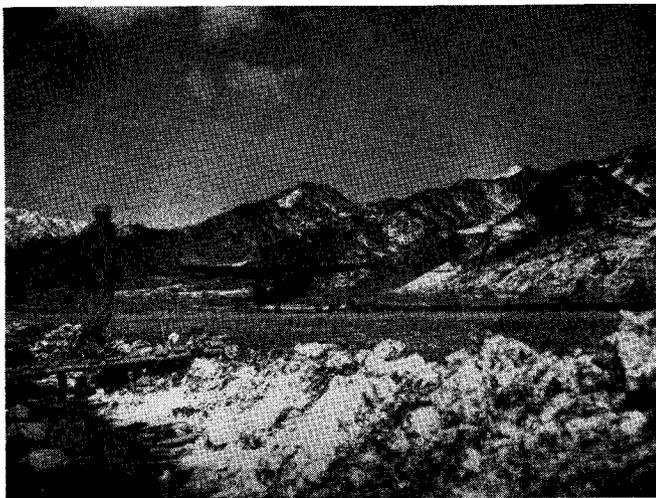
The helicopters do a lot of night flying, although their only instrument for that kind of "feeling around in the dark" is a turn and bank indicator. During April this year, 32 night evacuation flights were made, with flares and a searchlight on the plane belly being used to make landings on blacked-out airstrips.

One night Lt. Gerald L. Lillich picked up a patient in the "Punch Bowl" area of eastern Korea front lines. With only his searchlight to aid in landing, he flew down a road. Every time he saw an MP sentry's check-point fire, he would land and ask the direction to the next post. He made seven landings on the black road before he got his wounded

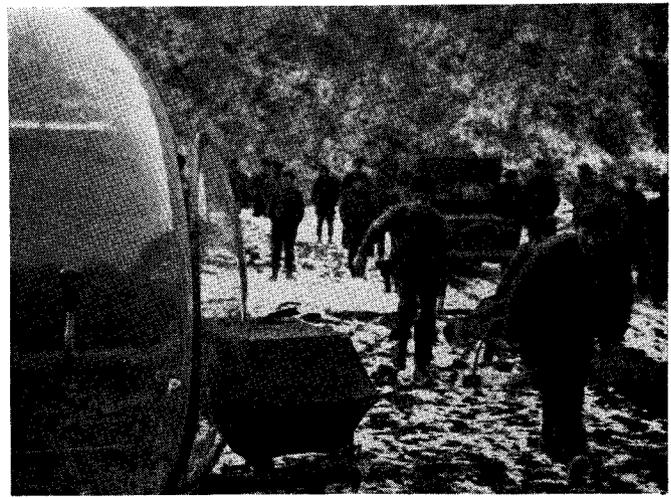
rider to a first aid center.

Another job of VMO-6 is to fly in VIP's and entertainers. Singer Monica Lewis was to be brought in to Kwandae-Ri one day. Pilots flipped a coin to see who won the honor of flying her in. Capt. Samuel F. Martin won, but was disappointed when the thrush decided she would rather fly in a helicopter than Martin's little OE.

Ordinarily the little squadron's flying runs between 1,000 and 1,750 hours a month. The OE's go out two and three times a day for artillery gunfire spotting, observation of enemy movements, taxi hops and mail runs to rear areas. Bomb racks were installed on their wings and when the big Chinese push was expected



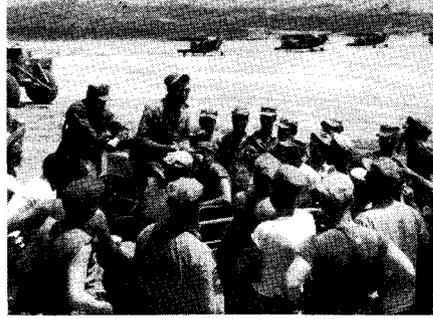
**WINTER OR** summer, VMO-6's little Cessna OE-1's take off from gravel runways to spot Marine artillery fire on Korean Commies



**JEEP** ambulance brings wounded Marine to an advanced field where an evacuation helicopter from VMO-6 will fly him to a hospital



**MARINES** land rescue helicopters anywhere clear space can be found for the rotors



**WHEN MAIL** call goes out at advanced base, line of Marines eagerly awaits distribution



**MARINE** helicopter pilots stand by for any calls for aid to move wounded from the front

the night of June 25, the 2nd anniversary of the war's start, they dropped flares over the lines to pinpoint night troop movements.

The little Cessnas also run air strikes, giving advice to dive bombers or fighters as they come on the target.

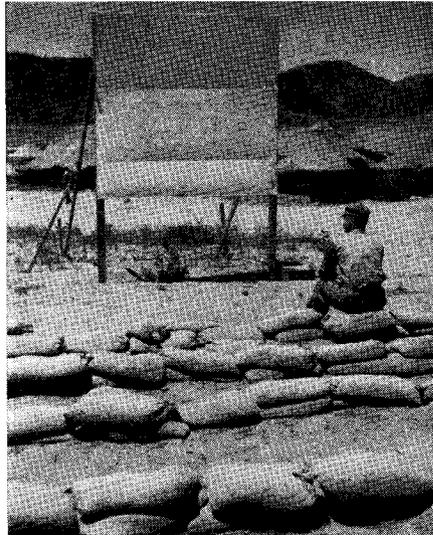
To protect them from ground fire, pilots wear the new fiberglas bullet-proof jackets and have steel armor plating around their seats. Flying low and slow, they are prime targets for small arms fire and automatic weapons because the Communists know double-trouble fighters and dive bombers soon follow in their wake.

**SINCE** it has been operating in Korea for two years straight, VMO-6 has done plenty of cold and hot weather flying. During the superheated Korean summers, helicopters have difficulty in getting enough lift to carry more than one passenger. In the winter, when temperatures sometimes go as low as minus 22° F, the flying is easier, though chilly. Wounded men are placed in snug sleeping bags in the external litters to keep them from freezing.

Two of VMO's sergeants, Paul W. Fulcher and Herman F. Petruck, developed an idea which has been valuable in saving wounded men's lives. They perfected an aluminum bracket to fasten to the helicopter fuselage, a couple of feet above the litter. A bottle of blood plasma is placed in this rack and the life-giving fluid fed into the man's arm as he is being flown out of the combat zone.

Shortly after they developed the plasma-holder, it was used to save a young Marine's life. The Leatherneck was critically wounded in the abdomen while on a night raid. Capt. Robert W. Baker, forward air controller with the ground party, put in a radio call for a VMO-6 helicopter. Twenty minutes later it arrived.

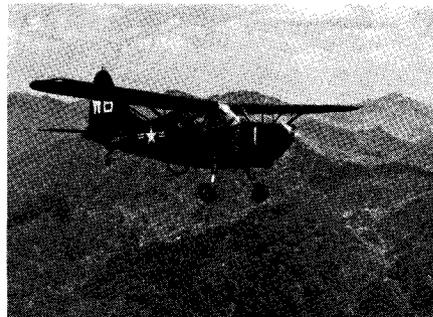
The plane landed in the grey dawn, loaded the injured man into a litter pod and flew him back to a rear area hospital. Baker visited the helicopter outfit later



**WAITING** for the evening show to begin in VMO-6's deluxe air-cooled movie theater

to personally thank Capt. Robert E. McCluen for saving the Marine's life. McCluen, however, gave much of the credit to the plasma bottle idea of Fulcher and Petruck.

McCluen, incidentally, figured in another front line tale. A rescue call came in for a helicopter. When it arrived to pick up the wounded man, front line fighters were amazed to see McCluen leap out of the cockpit to help load the man in the stretcher. Although within range of Communist snipers, he was decked out in a freshly-pressed khaki gabardine uniform with campaign ribbons on his chest. Bars of his rank sparkled in the sunlight.



**OBSERVATION** planes like this OY-2 helped Marine spotters locate Red ground troops.

It turned out McCluen was on the point of departing for rest and recreation leave in Japan when the emergency call came through for the evacuation. He had gone without taking time to change into flight gear.

The little Bell pinwheels have no hoist to use when picking up men marooned in inaccessible areas. A rope can be lowered with a sling on the end, into which he can get and be flown out. One mechanic, who went along on an evacuation hop, almost got left when the helicopter came under ground fire and started to soar off. Rather than be left behind, he grabbed onto the ski-like skid on which the pinwheels land and threw a leg over it. Hanging thus, he rode 25 miles back to safety.

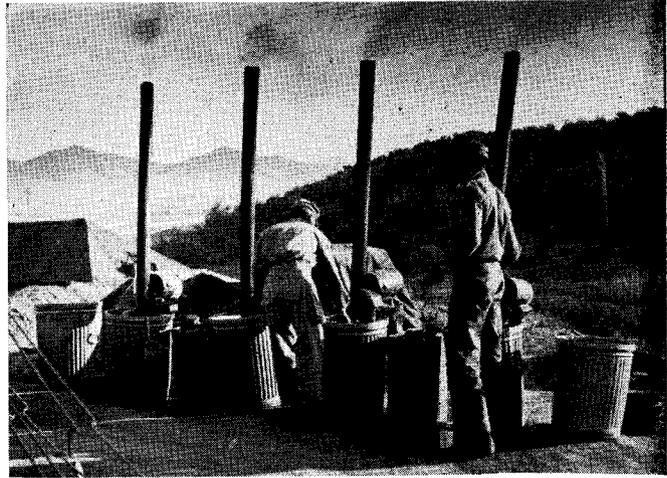
One VMO-6 pilot in an OE was wounded while flying over enemy lines and the observer, Lt. R. F. R. Purdon, flew the plane back to a landing. 1st Lt. Edward B. Keyes, making his first hop as an observer, had to fly another plane back when his pilot was wounded, despite the fact he never had flown an airplane before. Just to prove his durability, he went on to make 317 flights across the Communist lines. In that time his planes were hit 45 times by small arms fire, but never were shot down.

Some close calls also have been recorded by VMO-6 pilots. MSgt. John R. Stone was flying along over a Red area when an 85 mm aircraft shell burst nearby. Fragments blew out one of his OE's tires but the plane kept on flying. Stone, incidentally, has more than 9,000 hours of flying time to his credit. 1st Lt. Kenneth M. Scott, on his last mission as an observer before being rotated, got a bullet through his right sleeve which drew blood.

**A**LTHOUGH they fly choppers and little *Grasshoppers*, VMO-6's pilots believe in the old Boy Scout motto about preparedness. Some evenings 1st Lt. William A. Brockman stands at the end of the little gravel runway with a couple of LSO paddles in his hands. Each plane coming in gets a carrier



**SOLID** comfort is the motto of VMO-6 enlisted men who view outdoor movie lying flat on backs in the dust, even in a blackout



**NOTHING** fancy about VMO-6's tent city in the Korea hills; men sterilize their food trays in hot water after finishing chow

landing routine.

"After all, none of us knows when he may be transferred to a carrier-based fighter outfit," says the rotund Brockman. "It doesn't hurt to keep your hand in."

Although it is close to front lines, the helicopter squadron sees many stars of high-ranking officers and is checked out in military protocol.

BGen. Merrill B. Twining, assistant commanding general of the 1st Marine Division was being flown on a front line tour of inspection by 1st Lt. William J. White. A second helicopter carrying another high officer was flown by Capt. Walter T. McMillin.

The latter's pinwheel developed engine trouble and landed in a rice paddy. White brought his plane down alongside it. BGen. Twining stepped out to let LGen. Franklin A. Hart, Commander of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, have his seat, then stood ankle deep in the mud to wave a "cheerful" farewell to the three-star general.

Helicopters and OE's have had no trouble from enemy planes, although one pilot spotted a *Yak* fighter in the distance. Occasionally the little Cessnas are used to fly aerial photographic hops for 1st Marine Division intelligence. The rear seat was turned to face aft for better shooting.

**C**OMMANDING officer of the observation unit, which is noted for its excellent morale despite its rugged operating conditions, is Maj. Wallace J. Slappey, with Maj. William A. McLean as executive officer.

The squadron's little 1,100 foot gravelled runway is located a few miles down a narrow valley from their "rich cousins", HMR-161, flying the big HRS-1 helicopters. The big helicopters are used for carrying large numbers of troops to mountain top areas and other tactical movements.

One of its sidelines, however, is dusting the troop areas in the region with DDT to kill flies and mosquitoes.

VMO-6 can vouch for its efficiency at the latter task—one of its late-afternoon softball games was broken up when an HMR-161 pinwheel liberally doused the diamond and players with a cloud of choking chemical while a game was in progress.

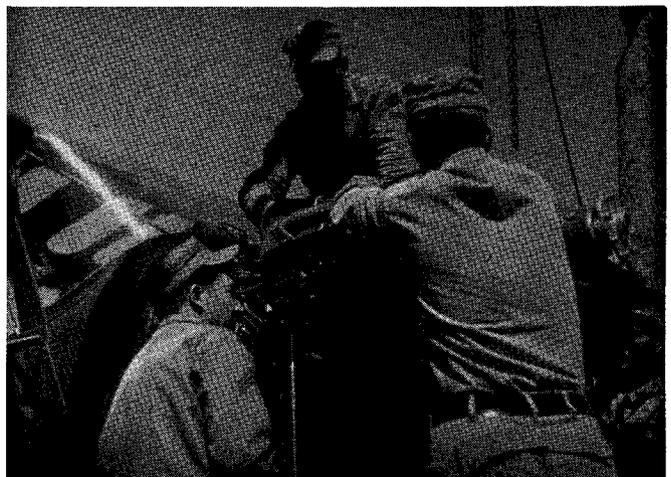
With no running water in its base camp, VMO-6 for a long time was hard-pressed for showers for tired, dusty pilots and crewmen. They had the choice of walking a mile down a dusty road to another unit's crude shower tent or else washing off in a foot-deep stream a mile in the other direction. Then someone discovered an underground spring right off the runway and from then on everyone enjoyed a welcome though frigid shower on their own premises.

New pilots reaching VMO-6 are visibly shaken when first assigned operations duty. In full view of the operations tent is a grave-size mound of dirt. The headboard bears the legend:

**"THIS OPERATIONS DUTY OFFICER MADE ONE MISTAKE!"**



**BRACKET** on HTL fuselage holds blood plasma bottle during hop; Sgt. Fulcher, Capt McCluen, Sgt. Petruck developed the device



**SGTS.** Requero, Bates, Mueller and Pfc. Gayle perform an engine change in one day on OE alongside runway at their base