

raft and dumped it overboard.

Meanwhile, four other victims had secured holds on the pontoons, making control extremely difficult. In spite of this and a 21-mile-an-hour wind, Kerechek was able to taxi the aircraft to shore with the five men safely in tow.

All eight people, who had been aboard the plane, were soon rescued.

To the people of Chicago, the incident was another dramatic example of lifesaving action by the Chicago Fire Dept.'s helicopter service.

With the Bell 47 and a JetRanger 206A, the flying arm of the Dept. has carved out an amazing record since its creation in 1965. Besides being used at hundreds of fires, the two copters have performed more than 1,000 rescues, ranging from removing an injured construction worker from a building to plucking a dog from an ice floe in Lake Michigan.

They have also been used to transport injured or desperately ill persons to hospitals. In emergencies they also have helped unsnarl traffic that threatened to paralyze the city.

On numerous other occasions they transported urgently-needed food and supplies, as well as lifesaving blood.

Never before in the history of the Chicago Fire Dept. has a machine accomplished so many different tasks under the most trying circumstances. Its adaptability to virtually any emergency has given fire fighters an extra margin of defense against often overwhelming odds.

This edge was demonstrated vividly a year or so ago when fireboats, which had moved in close to a burning building at wharfside, were in danger of being crushed by a falling wall. Although the boat crews were

not aware of the impending danger, the helicopter personnel hovering above, were.

One of the pilots quickly radioed his colleagues on the boats which withdrew in haste. The boats had barely cleared the area when the five-story wall collapsed, spewing tons of brick in the water where they had been.

Many a Chicago fireman has murmured a quiet thanks to the pilots and their machines for their assistance in tight situations. Among them is Fire Commissioner Robert J. Quinn who advanced the idea of using vertical aircraft in 1957. A helicopter pilot himself, Quinn frequently has flown rescue missions and participated in other emergencies as a pilot.

A couple years ago he landed the Bell 47 on top of an eight-story building, which was under construction, to carry out an injured worker.

A shrewd, farsighted man, Quinn has incorporated many imaginative programs into the Fire Dept. during his 12 years at the helm.

With the approval of Mayor Richard J. Daley, he has acquired considerable modern equipment, consolidated units, inaugurated new ones and improved fire prevention procedures to the point that Chicago now carries a Class Two rating by the National Board of Fire Underwriters.

This classification resulted in the reduction of fire insurance rates for Chicagoans amounting to more than \$2.5 million.

Naturally, there are many innovations and improved methods that account for such fire fighting efficiency but, by Quinn's own admission, the helicopters have been a major factor in the Dept.'s current standing.

The importance of the helicopter is spelled out constantly to the 5,000 firemen who take refresher courses at the fire academy on DeKoven St. Ironically, this five-story facility is built on the site of Mrs. O'Leary's residence, where a cow allegedly kicked over a lantern in 1871, causing the Great Chicago Fire.

The drill tower, where most of the classes are conducted, has a heliport on top, where students can get a first-hand view of chopper operations. Firemen from all over the nation and from many foreign countries have taken training at the academy.

The Dept.'s 12 helicopter pilots

are also required to take refresher courses, both in fire fighting and flying. They study first aid, rescue and recovery, both on land and in water, and salvage operations.

All of the flyers are capable of dealing with virtually every type of emergency because they were picked from the ranks of the Fire Dept., where versatile training is a must. Firefighters Kerechek, Robert Hack, George Tannehill and Leroy Hansch, all with aviation backgrounds, were the first to be chosen for helicopter duty.

On alert 24 hours a day at Meigs Field, the pilots, working in shifts, keep their aircraft primed for action. This sometimes includes whisking high-ranking city and fire officials to scenes demanding their attention.

Both men and aircraft were subjected to grueling tests when crises hit Chicago on several occasions. The Great Snow storm of 1967 kept men and machines in the air 20 hours a day delivering food and medicine, and evacuating seriously ill or injured persons.

They performed similarly in the tornado that swept across Chicago suburbs that spring.

They also worked around the clock spotting fires and trouble areas in last year's racial disturbances.

"Some people would have been in real trouble during those events," pilot Hansch pointed out, "had not it been for the helicopters."

Acts of courage are nothing new among these flying firemen. When they encounter a crisis, they simply handle it the best way they know how, and usually with remarkable success.

One particularly hair-raising recovery was executed several months ago about five miles offshore in Lake Michigan.

A sailboat with five people aboard had capsized and 32-knot winds were forcing the craft farther away from shore.

In desperation, two teenage boys started swimming for the beach, but one sank beneath two-foot waves within a few minutes and drowned.

Realizing he would endanger his own ship by landing in the turbulent water, Lt. Tannehill dropped a rubber raft to the teenagers. Unfortunately, the downdraft from the JetRanger sent the inflated craft bounding over the waves and out of reach of the survivors.

Undaunted, copilot John Wilson climbed out on the strut, completely ignoring his own safety, reached



Lt. George Tannehill (at rear) supervises the packing of stowed floats on JetRanger. In-flight inflation takes 3½ seconds for over water operations.