

Mayday

CAP aircrew responds when seaplane flips in water

By Kristi Carr

It was all routine — an ordinary Thursday, another beautiful day in the Lake Tahoe area of Nevada, a Civil Air Patrol mission just five minutes from ending for the airborne two-man crew.

To the north, however, another twosome was experiencing anything but the ordinary. Taking off from the lake near Incline Village in their Republic Seabee, the pair was hardly aloft before the seaplane's right side dipped into the water. The occupants suddenly found themselves in an amphibious craft that was not only sinking but also had flipped upside down. They had just enough time to make a Mayday distress call.

The Nevada Wing crew — pilot Lt. Col. James L. Anderson of Blackhawk Composite Squadron and pilot Maj. Russell Johnson of the Reno Composite Squadron — responded to the call, immediately

altering their course toward Incline Village and contacting Maj. Gordon Jobe, CAP mission officer on duty. Jobe contacted local law enforcement and the Coast Guard station in nearby Lake Forest, Calif.

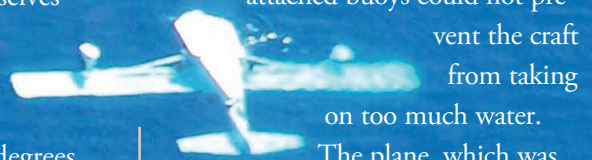
When the CAP plane arrived on the scene eight minutes later, civilians in boats, aided by others on Jet Skis, had already hauled aboard the downed men, who had freed themselves from the topsy-turvy seaplane and a lake with a water temperature of only about 64 degrees.

Of the distress call, Johnson noted, "They said they were in the water, but they were fairly calm about their situation." The seaplane occupants were unhurt and the combined efforts of CAP, the Coast Guard, law enforcement personnel and others at the accident scene made for a

successful rescue.

The seaplane and Lake Tahoe took some hits, however. Though the seaplane leaked fuel into the lake, water intake valves programmed to shut down in an emergency helped contain the leaks. Absorbent booms also were positioned around the spill site to contain the fuel.

As for the seaplane, attempts to tow it to shore initially failed when attached buoys could not prevent the craft from taking on too much water. The plane, which was finally allowed to sink in about 30 feet of water, was later recovered. ▲



A Republic Seabee is upside-down in Lake Tahoe shortly after an attempted takeoff. Two men aboard narrowly escaped from beneath the downed seaplane. They were assisted by a CAP aircrew, which was working nearby, as well as the Coast Guard, law enforcement personnel and others at the scene of the accident.

Photo by Lt. Col. James L. Anderson, Nevada Wing