

5TH February 1954.

AFTER JUMPING FROM THEIR BLAZING SUNDERLAND, SEVEN RESCUED FROM ICY WATER.

The captain and crew of six of a blazing Sunderland dived into the icy waters off Milford Haven on Saturday afternoon after the flying boat had made an emergency landing in Angle Bay. The 27-ton aircraft sank almost immediately.

The flying boat took off from Pembroke Dock shortly before 4 p.m. on a routine training flight. After it had been airborne for a short time fire occurred in one of the four engines.

The automatic fire extinguishing apparatus was brought into action at once, but it was soon apparent that the fire was serious. At this time the aircraft was flying at about 800 feet and nearing Milford Haven. The Captain, Flying Officer B. S. M. Jones, set a course downwind from Milford and went in to land. Aircraft usually land into the wind, but a Sunderland, which has a high safety factor, is capable of landing down wind and, with time a vital factor in this emergency, F/O Jones decided to make such a landing.

FLAMES SPREAD

The Captain hoped that he would be able to save his aircraft with fire extinguishers, even though the cockpit and crew space were filled with smoke and flames, but as she came to rest, the flames from the engine spread to the hull and there was no other alternative but to give the order to abandon the aircraft. The men dived into the water and the aircraft was soon burning fiercely. After a while the Sunderland began to sink and in a matter of minutes it had disappeared.

DANGER OF EXPLOSION

Five of the crew were picked up by F/O D. A. Austin, who, despite the danger of the burning aircraft exploding, taxied to the scene in another Sunderland which had been practising on the water.

The remaining two members of the crew were picked up by an R.A.F. Marine Section launch. This vessel had to go in very near to the sinking aircraft for the two airmen were in danger of being enveloped in the flaming petrol which was spreading along the surface of the water.

When recovered from the sea, the drenched airmen were wrapped in any warm clothing available and were rushed to the sick bay where they were treated for slight injuries, shock and exposure. They escaped any serious consequences and were all back on duty on Monday morning.

The cause of the fire will be the subject of an official inquiry.

AMBULANCES STAND BY

As soon as news of the accident became known, ambulances from Pembroke Dock and Tenby were alerted and stood by in the Dockyard with the R.A.F. ambulance. The crowd was just leaving London Road ground after the Boro-Gwynfi soccer match when the Tenby ambulance, its bell clanging an urgent warning, raced along London Road for the R.A.F. Station. The Pembroke Dock ambulance had already rushed at top speed to the station but fortunately neither was required. At the station, fire picquets and emergency landing

crews had already been called into action and launches churned up the water as they made for the crippled aircraft.

The County Fire Brigade wireless car also hurried to the R.A.F. Station and kept in radio contact with county headquarters in Haverfordwest in case further ambulances were required.

At Milford Haven the football crowd at Marb'e Hall saw the Sunderland passing low overhead with clouds of black smoke pouring from her engine. People in the streets also watched the doomed aircraft and as it glided down saw flames gleaming through the smoke.

VERY FRIGHTENING

Mrs. Margaret Lee. 53. of Picton Road. Hakin, was pegging out clothes in her garden when the Sunderland came over at 50 to 60 feet. "It was burning and smoke was pouring from it," she said afterwards. "It was very frightening. After getting a pair of binoculars I ran out to the front and watched it landing. One wing seemed to tip over as it hit the water.

It then seemed to be covered in flames but I saw a yellow dinghy pulling towards it. Almost immediately another boat arrived on the scene and there were also two other Sunderland's in the vicinity."