Army Reaches New Helicopter Heights in YH-41

World headlines were made Dec. 28 when an Army YH-41 chopped through the frigid air nearly six miles above Wichita, setting three world altitude records.

Piloted by Capt. James Bowman, the Seneca took off from the Military Aircraft Division and soared to 30,355 feet on two record shattering flights. The climbs broke a previous record of 26,931 feet set by a French Alouette helicopter June 6, 1955. The Seneca flights, conducted by the Army in cooperation with Cessna, returned the world helicopter altitude record to the United States. America's last record was set in 1949 by a Sikorsky S52-1 climbing 21,220 feet.

Seneca flight records will be officially confirmed by the National Aeronautic Association in Washington, D.C., acting as the U.S. representative for Federation Aeronautique Internationale. The exact altitude will be verified when a sealed barograph instrument, aboard the helicopter during the history-making flights, is checked by the NAA.

During the first of two flights, the Seneca weighed 2,109 pounds to set a world mark in the 1,102 to 2,204 pound class and unlimited weight class, which includes all helicopters regardless of size or weight. In a second flight the same day, 20 gallons of fuel were added to bring the whirlybird's weight to 2,229 pounds. On this flight Capt. Bowman established the first world altitude record in the 2,204 to 3,858 pound class.

Capt. Bowman is a member of the Army Aviation Board, under the command of Col. Robert R. Williams, of Fort Rucker, Ala. The board tests fixed wing and rotary winged aircraft for future use in the Army's aviation program. Currently, six Senecas are assigned to the Army.

The Seneca that made the record-topping flights was equipped with a pilot oxygen system similar to that in the T-37. Capt. Bowman wore a parachute and a strap-on oxygen bottle as added safety measures.

For his outstanding contribution to world aeronautical achievements, Capt. Bowman was presented with a Distinguished Flying Cross by Army Secretary Wilbur Brucker and Army Chief of Staff Maxwell Taylor at ceremonies in Washington, D.C., January 2.

The American public heard a first hand account of the feat when Capt. Bowman appeared as a guest on the Arthur Godfrey show the same day.

Whirlybird-builders End Production at Pawnee

Helicopter production at the Commercial Aircraft Division will wind up in late January, according to Works Manager Chris Hesse.

Crews are currently working on the eleventh production helicopter to be built by Cessna.

Chris said helicopter jigs and fixtures will be moved to the Wallace plant. Space now taken up by helicopter production will probably be absorbed by the modification section and the combined electrical departments, he said.

All-Jet Training Begun By First T-37 Students

Today at Bainbridge Air Base, Ga., the Air Training Command is taking a big step to "go all jet."

Nearly 80 students will clamber into T-37's, marking the first Air Force class to begin their training in jets. Until now, Air Force student pilot officers have taken primary training in prop-driven planes.

This first regularly scheduled T-37 class will win its silver wings sometime next year, after finishing T-37, then advanced, training.

The move brings this comment from the Air Force magazine: "(Students) have leapt out of the age of . . . 95 mph training planes . . . (their) flight training begins to catch up with the rest of the Air Force."

The T-37, which is replacing the USAF's humpbacked T-28 tandem seat prop-plane trainer, is lauded as ideal by Air Force instructors. Besides getting the "real feel" of a jet, the student has the instructor at his side to show him exactly what to do.