

Semaken Survives Copter Rotor Wounds

Not many people tangle with the tail rotor of a helicopter and live to tell about it.

During the manning operations on Fire 6D8, this summer, in the Lake Minchumina area, Mr. Gilbert Semaken, a 12 year BLM firefighter from Kaltag, Alaska, was critically injured when he disembarked from a helicopter, and while concentrating on the large rotor above, stepped into the whirling blades of the tail prop.

After a month and a half in Bassett Army Hospital, Gilbert returned to Kaltag this past week rejoicing that he would soon see his wife, Margaret, his two children, Matthew and Gloria, and his ten dogs.

His one regret was not the eye patch, or the stiff arm, it was that because of the sensitive skin graft he would not be able to trap this winter.

"The doctors say it will be a couple of years before I will be able to trap and fish," he said. "It is going to be hard to get adjusted to a new way of life".

When he was struck down on August 2, Gilbert's left arm was severed, his left eye gone, and the left side of his face seriously disfigured.

Fully conscious, Gilbert directed the first aid efforts and it was only after a pit was dug, filled with branches, and he was covered with every available coat was he able to sleep.

Two companions ran five miles to use the walkie-talkie. Gilbert was then taken to the hospital at Fort Wainwright, Fairbanks.

"Some of the wire sutures in my arm caused an infection and I was put in isolation for fifteen days. It was like being in jail. But it's ok now."

Home for the winter, Gilbert plans on returning to Fairbanks next summer to continue working for the Bureau of Land Management.

This is one person who tangled with the rotary prop of a helicopter who is alive and who is winning.