



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Jungle Flying

On a recent trip into the Amazon jungle with a friend who is a jungle pilot, I realized that landing a float plane on the flooded Amazon River is an exercise in judgment. It's not quite as bad this time of year, but when the rains come in February and March, and the river rises as much as 100 feet, flooding thousands of miles of jungle, it is a nightmare. As the water covers the land and finds its way back to the river, it picks up tons of debris — logs, bushes, stumps. It is not unusual to see whole trees floating down the Amazon, some with small animals still clinging to the branches for survival.

This trip was quick. Made with a pilot from the Jungle Aviation and Radio Service (JAARS). I had written a book about JAARS entitled "Into The Glory" and enjoy keeping contact — flying contact — with these great men and women. But for a fellow like me, who likes to limit

his landings to two miles of smooth concrete, finding a clear stretch of water to land a single engine float plane is almost impossible. What appears to be smooth water on the downwind leg can be a clutter mess of floating trees and debris by the time you make your turn for final approach over the treetops.

Even when a good spot for landing is identified, the pilot wonders if a submerged tree may be floating just below the surface. Planes have landed on what appeared to be smooth water only to be destroyed by logs hidden in the muddy river. The pilot is always looking for some clue — a ripple in the water, a branch sticking up — that signals hidden danger.

The greatest difficulty, though, is not with the river, but with the pilot himself. Invariably, as you turn on final, all lined up for landing, you spot another area of the river that looks better. The inexperienced

jungle pilot — like me — wants to change his mind and go for the more appealing spot. Often he gets close, sees something he doesn't like, and shifts back to the first location.

There is nothing worse than being on final for two points. The results are invariably embarrassing. Sometimes disastrous.

The problem is focus. You have to make a decision and stay with it. Jesus said the Christian should learn to concentrate on one thing. It is not a sin to be a one-talent person. The sin lies in wanting to do 10 things with your one talent (or wanting to land in two places at once) and getting so frustrated you wind up achieving nothing at all.

My jungle pilot friend told me, after we'd taxied up against the bank, that even average pilots can make excellent landings in troubled waters. The secret is landing on only one place at a time.