

Sturdy Orville May Never Make Major

By JAMES GUNTER
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PARIS, March, 20 (S&S) — Capt. Orville the Otter is ready to mark his 10th birthday anniversary April 2 with a double celebration in France. The dependable little fellow has traveled more than a million miles on missions for the U.S. Army.

Orville, a curious broad-tailed animal who wears a beret and carries the Eiffel Tower tucked under one arm, is the emblem of the Army's 2nd Aviation Co which operates its sturdy planes from three fields in France.

The unit, second of its type ever formed in the Army, flies 16 Model U1A Otters to transport troops, light cargo and to evacuate medical cases. Most of the planes it uses have been with the company since it was activated at Ft. Riley, Kans., April 2, 1956.

The planes, built by the DeHavilland Aircraft Co. of Canada for rugged "bush pilot" opera-

tions in the far north, are the largest single-engine airplanes in the Army with a wing span of 58 feet. Each will carry 10 combat equipped troops or four litter cases and three ambulatory patients. Maximum payload is 3,000 pounds.

Pilots who operate from the company headquarters at Rozelier field near Verdun, from Saran Field near Orleans or from Biard Field near Poitiers, cruise them at 105 knots for a six-hour range to deliver high priority cargo and personnel, drop paratroopers, and supply isolated units.

Saran Field sends a courier plane to Heidelberg, operating between Com Z Hq and US-AREUR Hq, five days a week. Other planes are frequently sent to the Hebrides Islands to haul units from Germany to missile-firing sites.

Some of the planes fly regularly to Istanbul and Athens to

transport technical personnel needed for the calibration of equipment. In an otter the trip involves 36 hours of flying and takes seven days. Medical cases are delivered to hospitals at Orleans or Landstuhl, Germany. One sad duty is to deliver the remains of dead servicemen to

Chateauroux, France, for transport to the United States.

Orville's picture decorates the hubs of all the company's planes. The bewhiskered water animal holds the rank of honorary admiral of the fleet and also has been given officer status in the Army. Through regular promotions signed by "Orville Right" he has reached the rank of captain, but he may not go any higher. Many feel that it would not be seemly for his rank to equal that of the company commander, Maj. Russell N. Pitts.

The 2nd left the States on the carrier Tripoli in May 1957 and went to Germany where it was assigned to the 8th Transport Group at Ludwigsburg. Two years later it moved to France.

The unit has taken part in numerous training exercises. In 1963, it dropped 5,300 paratroopers in 222 flying hours within a

space of 10 days in Germany.

Capt. William Bloemsmma, the platoon leader of the 2nd Platoon at Saran near Orleans, said pilots are trained at Ft. Rucker, Ala., but don't fly the Otter until they reach the unit. Then they are checked out in the Otter by instructor pilots like CWO Aaron Shellenberger of Los Angeles.

About 100 members of the company and their dependents from Saran and Poitiers are gathering April 2 for a lake-side picnic at Cardon, France. Another observance in eastern France is planned by the Verdun contingent.

The Otter frequently lands in snow or on rugged makeshift airstrips in the field, but it seldom has a crackup. The company's last accident involving damage to a plane was in September 1964, and it has never had a fatal accident or had a pilot abandon his craft by parachute.

