

# 'Otter' Gets New Lease On Life

By Cpl. Mark Thiffault  
 DANANG — The furry Sea Otters of North America were threatened with extinction for years, but were saved through the efforts of conscientious conservationists.

Another "Otter," the Marine Corps' amphibious track vehicle, was also threatened with extinction but was given a new lease on life by Leathernecks of FLC's Motor Transport Maintenance Company.

Eleven battered and crippled "Otters" were transported to the FLC site for repair from the 9th Motor Transport Bn.

The M-76 Otters, the last of its type to be used by Marines in Vietnam, required the work of seven Marines for three weeks to repair them. The FLC Leathernecks could not save them all.

However, they did manage to reconstruct five of the amphibious vehicles from salvaged parts taken from the other six.

"The Otter is a marginal terrain track vehicle," stated Marine SSgt. Tommie D. Fender, non-commissioned officer in charge, Maintenance Bn's Fuel and Electronics Shop. "It's capable of going through water and swamps and over rough terrain."

"The design of this vehicle is outstanding," SSgt. Fender stated. "It has a 16 and 3/4 inch ground clearance, so it doesn't get hung up on obstacles protruding from the ground. Its hull is shaped like a boat's and is buoyant in water. The 16 rubber tires help keep it afloat."

SSgt. Fender is the only Marine at the repair facility to

have prior experience on the Otter.

"These vehicles were built at the start of the Korean War," the Leatherneck said, "and parts are not available for them. These five are the last remaining survivors of this particular type of amphibious vehicle."

Once the vehicles were brought into the shop, the Otters with the best hulls were singled out. Most of the machines had been involved in hostile action and were in pretty bad shape.

"The next thing we inspected were the engines," Fender stated. "We discovered that five engines were in servicable condition so we started working."

The vehicles were disassembled and their parts transplanted. The hulls were patched, windows installed, and the Ot-

ters took on a new look.

"The seven workers, all volunteers, had never worked on this type of thing before, so it was a new experience for them," the Leatherneck said.

Using the only instruction manual in Vietnam for the Otters, the Marines put the machines back together piece by piece. "There was a lot of things I didn't know about the maintenance of the Otter," Fender said. "I don't know what we'd have done without a manual."

Three weeks and 1,500 man hours later, five of the 8,813 pound track vehicles were ready to be put through operational maneuvers.

"These monsters are heading for duty with the 4th CAG, near Quang Tri," added Fender. "They are to be used as supply

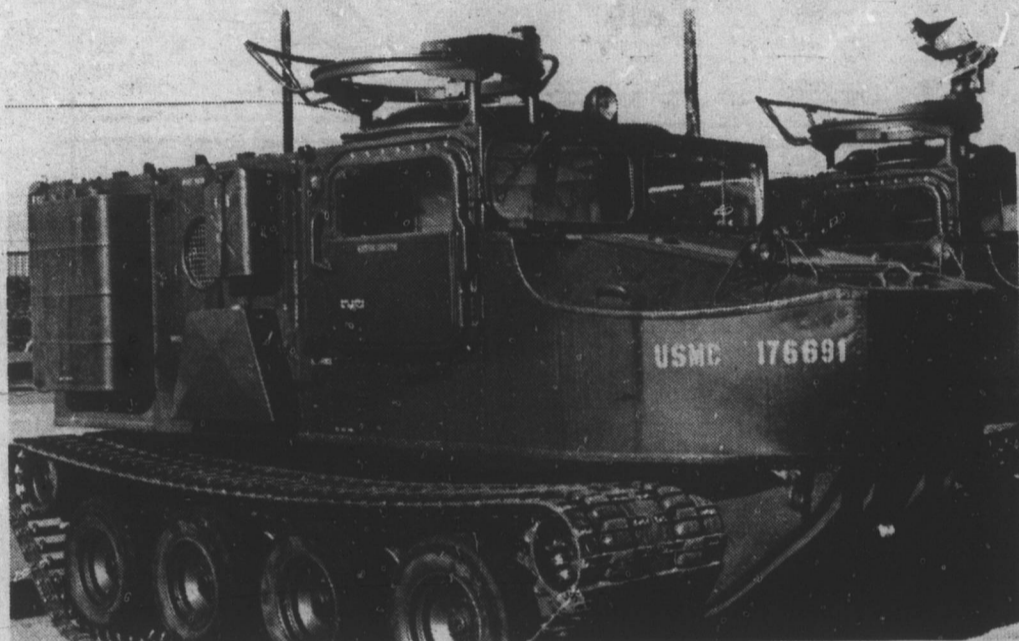
carriers. Each can hold up to 3,000 pounds of food or ammunition."

Otters can also substitute as troop carriers, and can haul 10 fully equipped Marines.

"We have a .50 caliber machinegun on a turret that swings in a 360 degree circle," Fender said, "and that spells trouble for the enemy. It can throw out lots of lead."

In the event that the Otter leaks water, it is equipped with bilge pumps that automatically dispose of any inside water.

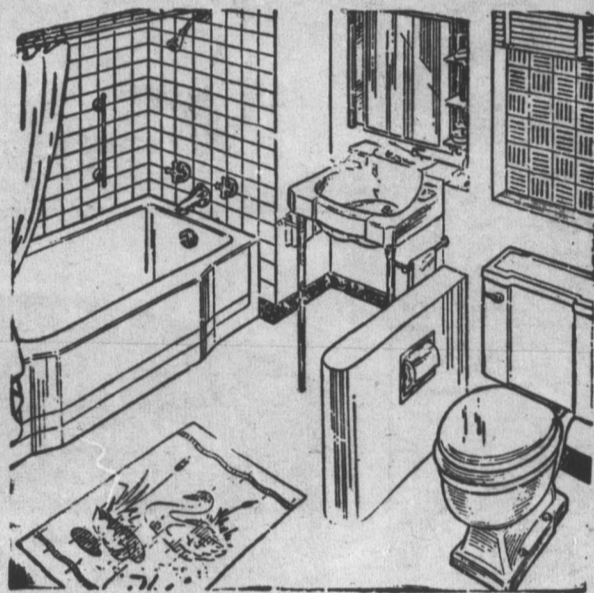
Five Marines from 4th CAG spent four days under the instruction of Fender to learn how to operate the vehicles. "I also taught them how to do minor maintenance on them," he said. "If they are well cared for, they could last for years."



One Of Five Completely Rebuilt M-76 'Otters'



SSgt. Tommie Fender, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ragan Fender, Bee Log, N.C.



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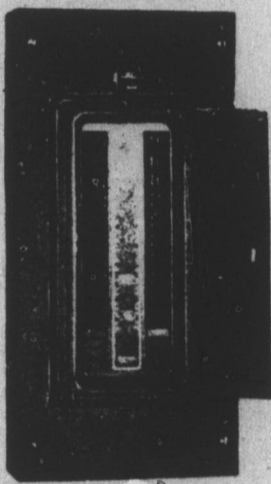
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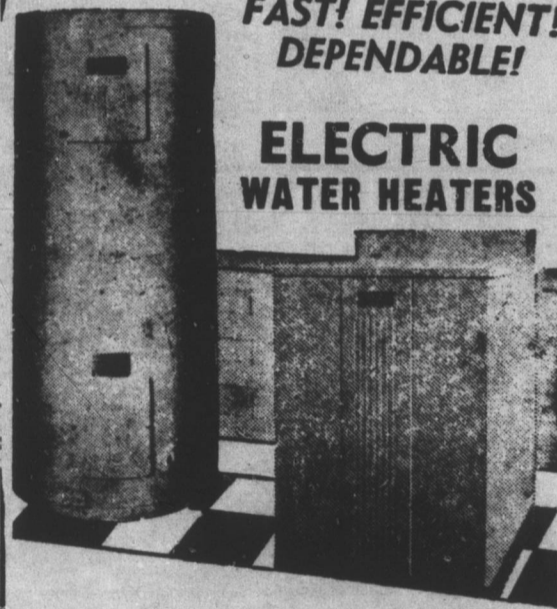
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