Helicopters Firm Operates World-Wide

With headquarters in Lafayette, the Petroleum Helicopter Corporation extends its diversified operation from the tropics to the Arctic in an ever-changing field of operations and markets.

With the company since its inception in 1954, are the president, L. Bob Suggs and Maurice M. (Dookle) Bayon, vice president.

Originally, the company was named Bell Aircraft Supply Corp., as it was a subsidiary of Bell Air- craft. The company then operated four Bell 47's in agricultural work in Louisiana in 1947-48. On February 21, 1949, the company again changed names to Bell Helicopter Services, later dropping the “Bell” when Sikorsky S-55's were added to the growing fleet of aircraft.

Fifty-four aircraft are operated today, 51 of which are helicopters (45 Bells, 4 Sikorsky S-62s, 2 Sikorsky S-58's and 1 Sikorsky S-55). The company also operates three fixed wing aircraft which include a converted Beechcraft C-45, an Aero Commander and a deHavilland Beaver.

Most of Petroleum's aircraft are based in Lafayette due to the great amount of oil activity.

The Lafayette office is manned by vice-president and general manager Frank W. Lee, assisted by C. L. Tysdal, vice-president; operations, Stanley Clay, chief pilot; L. W. Byrne, maintenance supervisor; Bill Krebbs, parts and service; Fred Price, office manager; and Jim Bixler, sales; These men and other key personnel start off each day with a staff meeting.

Two basic types of schedules must be met for the use of helicopters by the offshore oil companies. For instance, one company may work their crews seven days on and seven days off with Petroleum Helicopters transporting the crews from land to the offshore rigs or vice versa. Another company works its shifts 10 days on and five days off with half of their crew leaving and coming every five days.

Constant changing of Gulf weather from either excellent to very rough in a relatively short while, is a constant challenge to scheduling.

Offshore transportation constitutes roughly 80 per cent of Petroleum’s domestic flight time and is handled largely by four aircraft - three S-62s and one S-55. These helicopters travel to rigs situated in deep water and even to some beyond the continental shelf. Normally, an offshore crew travelling by boat can expect to reach the average rig in 14 hours. However, the same trip will take a Petroleum Helicopter one hour.

Petroleum Helicopters has done its share of pioneering, and has spread its capabilities into the construction field. Helicopters are used for hauling steel to inaccessible places of construction, as one example. Another helicopter might hoist sections of a steel tower hovering over the site while workers fasten it in place.

Petroleum worked their helicopters in Puerto Rico when a very large transmission line and rural electrification programs was being built there. Petroleum Helicopters helped to speed the job up by three months and saved the country over $132,000.

In the slopes of Mount Stratton near Manchester, Vermont, last winter, Petroleum operated a helicopter on a job where 32 steel ski lift towers were constructed. This job took only eight flying hours. By conventional methods, the job would have taken five weeks.

What's Ahead?

What's ahead? Petroleum recently landed a contract with NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) at Wallops Island, Virginia to retrieve missile nose cones in the Atlantic. The officials of Petroleum believe that a whole new field of operations will open up to them in space operations.

Sales representatives Bixler, ex-Marine Corps pilot, sees many new horizons where Petroleum Helicopters might be used.