



TOM BOYD/The Columbian

Forklift plucks surplus Huey helicopter from a flatbed at Pearson Air Museum.

Vintage copter will become local memorial to veterans

By THOMAS RYLL

The Columbian

A 1964-vintage UH-1B Huey helicopter landed gently at Vancouver's Pearson Air Museum on Thursday, but the chopper's rotor wasn't turning.

For that matter, the ship doesn't have rotor blades or engine, and the "flight" was a short one — from the back of a flatbed truck to the ground, courtesy of a forklift.

The appearance of the helicopter, which had been ferried from Olympia, is the result of a six-month paperwork project. Plans call for the machine to be restored at the museum by members of a Vietnam Veterans of America chapter. Afterward, it is to be displayed, as a memorial to all veterans, atop a yet-to-be-built pedestal at the Salmon Creek American Legion Post 176.

The project was done with the assistance Vancouver city officials, U.S. Rep. Jolene Unsoeld, D-Wash., and John Wulle, a Vancouver-based assistant state

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attorney general.

Little is known about the history of this Huey. It apparently belonged to the Marine Corps at one point, and most recently had been put to work by the state Department of Natural Resources. It was made available to the local organizations after the military declared it surplus.

Its blades and engine have been removed, and they are to be located as part of the restoration. The Huey is to be stripped of its white civilian livery and repainted as a medevac ship, bearing olive

drab paint and a red cross.

When the Huey goes on display, it will contain a small American flag and other mementos that were carried in Vietnam by Wulle's brother-in-law, Bill Conlon. Conlon, who was decorated for his service, died last year at age 45 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Wulle said he took on the lengthy job of obtaining the helicopter in exchange for having Conlon's mementoes enshrined in the display. Now, it appears that more souvenirs may be placed in the Huey in memory of other veterans. "When people learned what I was doing, they began to say, 'Maybe we all should contribute something,'" Wulle said.



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