

IH Farm Equipment Training Center: Tifton, Georgia

By Wiley Johnson

The Tifton Farm Equipment Training Center opened in 1961, approximately 15 miles north of Tifton, near the community of Waterloo. The main farm and building were located on approximately 1,300 to 1,400 acres leased from P.D. Fullwood Plant Co. It is located on the west Irwin, east Turner, and north Tift county lines. This included about 450 acres of coastal hay, some 700 acres of open farm land, and some wooded acres. The hay acres were in a government set aside program and could be used for demo, but not for production or harvest for sell. It was headed up by Lamar Hartzog as supervisor, William (Bill) Fessler and Jim Brosnahan as instructors. There were several reasons why South Georgia was chosen — availability of land at a reasonable rent, long season for outdoor activity, and the sandy loam soil. In later years, additional acres were rented from neighboring farmers. The mail came to P.O. Box H, Tifton, Ga. 31794.

The Center's main propose was to give IH Company sales personnel first-hand experience with both IH and competitive equipment. There is nothing like the satisfaction of "having done it yourself." Plus, you could operate competitive machines.

In the beginning the classes were two weeks long, made up of twelve students from different parts of the USA. As with any group, there was a friendly competition, someone who is a good story teller (joker), and someone to keep score. When students arrived at The Quality Inn, I-75 and Hwy. 82, on Sunday for their two week tour, the first thing asked of them was to hand over their car keys. This was met with some reservation by some, but generally taken in good spirit. That Sunday night at the "orientation" meeting, students were divided into groups, a group captain was picked, and assignments were made. Assignments included ice and water cooler filled each morning, lunch room duty, and general policing of the building area at noon. A product knowledge pre-test was given to get a base for improvement made during the next two weeks of training.

The days started early. It was a short one block walk up to the Alpine Restaurant for breakfast at 6:30 AM. The Alpine was owned and operated by Sidney Carpenter and his wife. The Alpine also supplied lunch to the farm daily. Tuesday and Thursday was fresh ground hamburgers grilled on a charcoal grill at the farm. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday were cold cuts sandwiches with green salad, potato salad, chips, and trimmings. It was always good and there was always plenty. There was always lots of ice cold sweet tea to drink. Usually



All photographs in this article were supplied by the Wisconsin Historical Society; and photographed by Angus McDougall.

by noon on Tuesday someone in the group had made a blunder (large or small) and was assigned grill duty. There was always good natured ribbing between the cook and the "field hands" about how the burgers were cooked.

After a day in the field and returning to the hotel for a shower, then to the Alpine for dinner, there was a night session. Most night sessions began with a review of the day's events. Errors were always pointed out. Things like having your tractor in reverse when the sign said 2nd gear forward, how many times someone choked the engine down, or maybe that someone had the wrong front tire in the furrow when plowing. Night sessions included a hay baler knotter review where two students working together would disassemble a knotter, and then put it back together. An actual hand cranked knotter was used to show how the knot was made.



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If you had any free time there was a putting green, a shuffle board court, pool, and a ping pong table. And there was almost always a friendly card game. Then it was time to start a new day. If a student got sleepy during the day, the instructor had a 20" disc blade he would drop from about 2 or 3 foot high onto the concrete floor. That would bring you back to class, quickly. On the weekend that students stayed over, a trip to Okefenokee Swamp near Waycross, Ga. could be arranged.

By the time I arrived in June of 1963 things were changing. The school now had four instructors, Jim Brosnahan, Charles (Chuck) Sanders, Walt Mayor, and Leonard DeCamar. Bill Fessler was now the Supervisor, M.L. (Micky) Pettus was in charge of service. Rollie Bozart and myself, Wiley Johnson made up the complete crew. Dale Stivers, national sales training supervisor, was in Chicago in charge of Training.

Although there had been some changes, things were still simple at the Farm: a metal building with four sections, two used for classrooms, one section for shop and one for office. The classrooms only had insulation in the ceiling, no drop ceiling. Two big sliding doors could be opened on one side and there was a window on the other side. There was also a big over-head fan. The office did have a window air conditioner unit to make it useable.

A deep well had been drilled, so there was running water and indoor plumbing (the first year there was outdoor plumbing). The lunch area was a 20x30 foot section on the south end of the building enclosed on three sides by screen wire to keep out the bugs and gnats. Two large overhead fans helped stir up a breeze. A Coke machine stood in one corner,

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a refrigerator and table were along one side, and there were four picnic tables. The grill was in the east end of the room with its own chimney and exhaust fan.

The shop area (same size as one classroom) was very basic. The shop had a large tool box on a work bench which was equipped with a vise on one end and a grinder on the other. There was an air compressor mounted to a #1 implement platform carrier with a one point fast hitch that could be moved about with the Farmall 140. It was powered by a single cylinder Clinton gasoline engine. There were no air wrenches, fork lift, cherry picker, or overhead crane, no welder, and no cutting torch. There was a battery charger, a Black and Decker ½ inch drill, a Walker five ton floor jack and several jack stands. Each instructor had a small tool box and a log chain in their Travelall for field emergencies.

On my first day at work, June 17, 1963, after introductions and a general overview of the compound, I was assigned mowing duty. It seems as though everyone had been busy for the last month or so and mowing was way behind. My charge for the next two or three days was an I-404 with an eight speed transmission and a 210 rotary cutter. I cut the driving range, the area next to the driving range, along the road coming into the Farm, and the area down by the wash pad. I went to work for \$1.00 per hour, 48 hour week. That included Saturday morning.

The wash pad area had a unique and useful job. On the second Thursday of each session it was used to clean all the equipment. By noon of that day, Rollie and I would have the Cub with its Brinkley water pump mounted to the fast hitch, set up and primed. It had a 4" intake and a 3" output to which a 30 foot fire hose was attached.



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With the Cub running at ½ throttle, the volume and pressure coming through the one inch nozzle made a great pressure washer. All the units that had been used in the field over the last two weeks were sent to the wash pad. The students were in charge of clean up and usually the person with the most serious infraction of the two weeks was assigned first hose duty. By the end, everyone was wet and having a great time.

Everyone has heard the phrase “The show must go on.” It was the same at Tifton. When the class schedule was to cut, bale, or plow, it was done. It was never too wet to bale hay, never too dry to plow, and never too hot to go out on the equipment line for class.

Things change, people come and go. H.D. Thornton came to Tifton in 1965 as an Instructor. He was made supervisor in 1966. He remained in that position until it closed in 1975. Then he went to Ottawa, IL to the Resource Development Center. The RDC was located at Hickory Hill Farm, near the Photo Center. It closed in 1982 and H.D. Thornton retired.

In 1969, after two service managers had elected to pursue other options, I was promoted to Service Manager. I also went to Ottawa in 1975 and worked there until 1978. Then I worked out of the Atlanta, Memphis, Montgomery, Valdosta, Memphis (again), and then Racine offices. I retired in 2006.

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left for the day, the crew would hook all plow tractors to their assigned plow). Tuesday AM: field plowing. Tuesday PM: hay equipment classroom and field work. Wednesday AM: classroom planters, combines. Wednesday PM: groups swap from small to large tractors and repeat. On Friday about 3:00 PM, miscellaneous equipment was covered; things like 770 sprayer, grinder mixer and auger cart, and the 56 blower and 151 forage box. The blower was set up beside a power pole with about 70 feet of pipe. A small tractor was used, like a 424, to show not much power was required to operate. A lot of those big IH straw hats went up the pipe and floated across the field.

A “family” garden was planted and harvested by the Training Center family each year - corn, peas, butterbeans, green beans, tomato, okra, potatoes, sweet potatoes, etc. Wild blackberries could be found along the edge of the fields. Watermelons were plentiful. Fish from the pond were fresh caught and cooked on site a couple times a year. Dove and quail hunting were also available.

Special groups and classes were always welcome at Tifton. We had groups from Australia, Africa, Europe, and South America. The 706 and 806 tractors were introduced in August 1963. Special combine classes were held in June and July for several years. The Photo Center and Engineering spent time at Tifton. The 424 introduction movie was made in the hay field just east of the building. The F 656 ran for a month or two under the 706 decal, the I 656, the 150 3pt hitch disc, and the 400 Cyclo planter spent time at Tifton. We ran lots of different sizes and types of plastic twine through the baler testing twine.



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Around 1965 or 1966 the Atlanta, Memphis, Charlotte, and Richmond Regional Offices sent service personnel down to have service training during the months the Sales School was closed. After one or two years, the Tifton Service Training Center was established and ran year round. Extra buildings and classrooms were added to handle service people. A mobile unit was added and based out of Tifton to travel across the south. It would set up at a dealership and cover items on a tractor like Hydro transmission, 3pt hitch, and power steering. The Service Training had a Supervisor and four instructors. It ran until 1971.

In the spring of 1971 we were almost ready to start a new year. About three weeks before class was to start, we were called into the Motel conference room and told that the Training Center would not open. The Instructors were sent to new jobs across the country, and the equipment was transferred out. After a couple of weeks a decision was made to leave a skeleton crew to maintain the facility and try to recoup some of the rent money already spent. So for two years H.D. Thornton, Ray Hickman (service maintenance man) and I farmed.

In 1973 the Training Center opened again with two Instructors and less equipment. The next year, 1974, two more Instructors were added. Then at the end of 1975, Tifton closed for good. Operation moved to Ottawa, IL, Hickory Hill Farm, as the Resource Development Center.

I thought I was done with this story until Friday morning on the way to town. I found a rattlesnake approximately ½ block from my house. That brought back memories of the first summer I worked at Tifton. I killed over twenty rattlers that summer between June 17 and Christmas break, some by accident. I would see them on my next round with a disc of rotary cutter. Some were small, but some were quit large, 4 ½ to 5 feet in length. No one who attended the school at Tifton was ever bitten and no one was ever injured.

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