

# Rotors Over Mentone Featured Six Helicopters

---

[inkfreeneews.com/2019/09/16/rotors-over-mentone-featured-six-helicopters](http://inkfreeneews.com/2019/09/16/rotors-over-mentone-featured-six-helicopters)

Dan Spalding

September 16,  
2019



One of the helicopters at the Rotors over Mentone festival Saturday, Sept. 14. Photo provided.

MENTONE — Organizers held the tenth annual Rotors Over Mentone Saturday.

The festival included six helicopters and over 200 people showed up for a day of family fun.

Neil Stickney and Tom Wallin, both retired from the 229th Squadron who piloted the Huey 801 during the Vietnam War, shared their stories. Pastor Kent Jones, Legion Post 49 Color Guard and the Tippecanoe Valley High School Band helped make the program a great success, said Tim Croy, president Bell Museum.

Sponsors included Diesel Power & Machine, Craig Welding, the Terry & Sandra Tucker Family Foundation, Chuck & Lisa Surack, Sweetwater, Midwest Poultry, Mentone Chamber of Commerce, Jahn Luke.

## Vietnam Veterans Speak At Rotors Event

Jackie Gorski, Staff Writer

Sunday, September 15, 2019 7:13 PM



Heidi Orr (R), Lawrence D. Bell Aircraft Museum board member, asked Vietnam veterans Neil Stickney (C) and Tom Wallin (L) about their experiences during the war and their life afterward at the Rotors Over Mentone event Saturday. Photo by Jackie Gorski, Times-Union.

MENTONE – Two retired Vietnam War veterans were the special guests at the Rotors Over Mentone Saturday at the Lawrence D. Bell Aircraft Museum.

Both were part of the 229th First Cavalry Division. Neil Stickney was part of C company and Tom Wallin was part of D Company.

Stickney and Wallin were asked about their military experience and their lives afterward by Museum board member Heidi Orr.

Stickney said he was stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, after he got out of flight school. He then transitioned into flying helicopters.

He was assigned to Vietnam in January 1966, serving in the war from 1966 to 1969. He retired from the military in 1980.

“At the time, the Army rotated pilots in and out on a yearly basis,” he said. He had approximately 18 months between tours.

Wallin stated he dropped out of high school.

"I dropped out of high school in 1971 because I didn't like people in high school telling me what to do. So I dropped out and joined the Army," Wallin said.

Wallin went into the Army in April 1971 at the age of 17.

He said he did his basic training in Fort Lewis, Wash. He did an 18-week course in avionics maintenance out of Fort Wayne, Ga.

Wallin got sent over to Vietnam at 18.

"I think I was the youngest that served with the 229th," he said.

Stickney said he always thought being in the military was something he wanted to do. However, the Air Force didn't let him fly because he didn't have a college degree, so he went to the Army.

Both talked about their experience in Vietnam.

"It was hot. It was dusty, except when it was raining. Then it was muddy," Wallin said.

He did flatline maintenance on a day-to-day basis, doing things such as fixing and replacing parts and pulling black boxes and putting them back in.

Wallin said he would spend two nights working and the third night on guard duty.

Stickney served as an instructor pilot, constantly flying with different pilots.

Stickney said his job was not to teach people how to fly, but remind pilots of their emergency procedures.

Both veterans talked about their lives after they got out of the military.

"I came out with a lack of direction," Wallin said, stating he was 20 when he got out. "I would say it took me a few years to get my feet underneath me."

He also stated he felt some of his friends he came back to his age didn't have a value of how important life was or what was important.

Wallin then used the G.I. Bill to go to college to become an x-ray technician.

"I found it pretty hard to find somewhere I wanted to be," Stickney said, who was 42 or 43 when he retired from the military, saying he applied for jobs, but didn't know where he wanted to go.

A brain tumor took him out of the workforce.

"I feel everyone should do something for this country," Stickney said. "If you can do it in the military, do it."

He stated the military has a lot of benefits people can use, such as the G.I. Bill.

Wallin stated when he was going to college after retiring from the military, he saw some students who didn't know what they wanted to do.

He stated he thought it would be a good thing for people to take some time off to figure out what they want to do before going to college.

Stickney stated he misses the camaraderie of the military and being able to go out and fly all the time.

"The military makes me feel cool and it always has," Stickney said.

There is one big thing Stickney took away from his time in the military.

"You don't have to be John Wayne to contribute to a team," he said.

"I think we all need to be attached to something bigger than ourselves," Wallin said.