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Veteran Reflects On 9/11 At Rotors Over Mentone

Jackie Gorski, Lifestyles Editor

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People inspect a helicopter Saturday on display at Rotors over Mentone at the Lawrence D. Bell Aircraft Museum. Photo by Jackie Gorski, Times-Union.

MENTONE – On the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, Rotors Over Mentone honored first responders, frontline workers and the military at the Lawrence D. Bell Aircraft Museum, 210 S. Oak St., Mentone, Saturday.

Keynote speaker Phil Smith, a U.S. Marine veteran, remembers exactly where he was when he first heard the news about the Sept. 11 attacks. He said he was on his way to work in North Manchester and just turned southbound on Packerton Road from CR 400S.

“Yes, I remember exactly where I was,” he said.

Two radio hosts came on to announce the first news of the terrorist attacks that “rocked the foundation of this country.” One of the hosts made it very clear not to expect levity for quite some time, Smith said.

“A core of evil would be undoers set out to bring this country to its knees. They coordinated strikes that ultimately killed 2,977 people. In their short-sighted lunacy, they hit multiple targets and set out to destroy this country, to destroy us,” Smith said.

He said the idea of destroying America was ridiculous. The U.S. is the country that centuries ago gave Great Britain, the most powerful country at the time, the proverbial boot.

“Take us down. I don’t think so. This country even fought itself to improve its moral compass,” Smith said. “We’re like a couple of constantly feuding brothers who constantly fight each other, sometimes over the smallest things.”

The squabbling brothers would stop fighting if anyone would attack them or someone in their family, he said. If the terrorists on Sept. 11 had tried to attack the U.S. in July 1863 in Gettysburg, Pa., both the Union and Confederate army would have stopped fighting each other and fought against the

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terrorists.

Smith said when "folks from somewhere else" attacks the U.S., "we unite, we serve."

That type of service was strong on Sept. 11, 2001, Smith said. "Among the thousands killed on Sept. 11, 2001, 344 were firefighters. Seventy-two were cops. Fifty-five were active duty military killed in the Pentagon. We also lost 44 heroes who gave their lives to take back the plane of flight 93, less it crash into the White House as planned."

In the theme of honoring first responders, frontline workers and the military, museum board member Tim Croy asked if any first responders, frontline workers or military members were in attendance to stand and be honored. He thanked them for their service.

"And then I would say as we reflect back on 9/11, just don't reflect on 9/11, let's also reflect on 9/12. 9/12 we all became Americans. Americans, one nation under God. That would be amazing if that could come back," Croy said.

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