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VFW POST GETS NEW LAWN DECORATION

# Attack chopper resides in Statesville

BY DONNA SWICEGOOD  
RECORD & LANDMARK

After flying countless missions in the Vietnam, a Cobra attack helicopter made a trip to Statesville recently to its permanent new home.

The machine made its last trip not in the air but on the back of a tractor-trailer and was lowered to its final resting spot by a crane.

The helicopter will be on permanent display at the VFW Post on Salisbury Road.

Members of the post and its Auxiliary gathered outside the post home to watch the helicopter make its final trip. "This is really exciting," said Bob Evans, a World War II veteran and a member of the post.

Getting it here involved about two years of phone calls and planning, said Leon Clem, commander of the post. The journey to get the helicopter started when Clem called contacts with the military in an attempt to get new rifles for the post's honor guard.

While he was on the phone, Clem asked the representative a question. "I asked if they had a tank or a helicopter we could have," he said.

"We have a helicopter," was the reply.

Clem said he began the efforts to get the chopper at that point. But first the machine had to be demilitarized, and all of the paperwork had to be completed. That took some time.

Also, the post had to construct a concrete pad that met military specifications. "We had to send pictures. It had to be eight inches thick and a certain size," Clem said.

With the pad in place and all of the red tape out of the way, the post claimed the chopper on Tuesday.

The chopper was at U.S. Army Tank and Automotive in Warren, Mich., and had to be transported via truck to Statesville.

The journey to get the helicopter involved more than just the VFW, Clem

said. His employer, G.L. Wilson donated the trailer and the crane and crew members to operate it. Hager Trucking Co. provided the tractor and drivers to get the helicopter, and Metromont Concrete donated the concrete for the pad.

"Everybody really helped out a lot," he said.

And getting the truck and trailer into the post home also required traffic to be stopped along Salisbury Road, Clem said. Deputies from the Iredell County Sheriff's Office helped in that effort, he said.

Now, the post members will be re-assembling the helicopter, and fixing it up to look much as it did when it first flew in 1969, Clem said. "It's going to be set up as if it were together and running," he said.

A dedication ceremony will be held at a later date. The chopper will be a part of a permanent display.

"It will be out here on display for all to see," he said. "I think it's going to be a big boost for the Statesville area."

## VFW history dates back to World War I

BY DONNA SWICEGOOD  
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The Statesville VFW Post can trace its roots back to World War I.

And for years, it remained an active chapter, said Bob Evans, a World War II veteran and a member of the post.

But a number of years ago, interest in the group waned. For many years, Evans was its only member.

The building that houses the post home sat empty for 20 years, falling into

disrepair, Evans said.

A few local veterans decided that situation needed to be fixed. About five years ago, Evans set out to revitalized the group. He sent out letters, and six people showed up at that first meeting.

A small group, but it was an important step, Evans said. At that meeting, Donald Webber, another local veteran, took it upon himself to get the group reorganized, Evans said.

"Everything started coming together when Don came in," Evans said.

Webber talked about the organization, sent out letters, made phone calls. Now, five years later, he has more than 200 members in the organization.

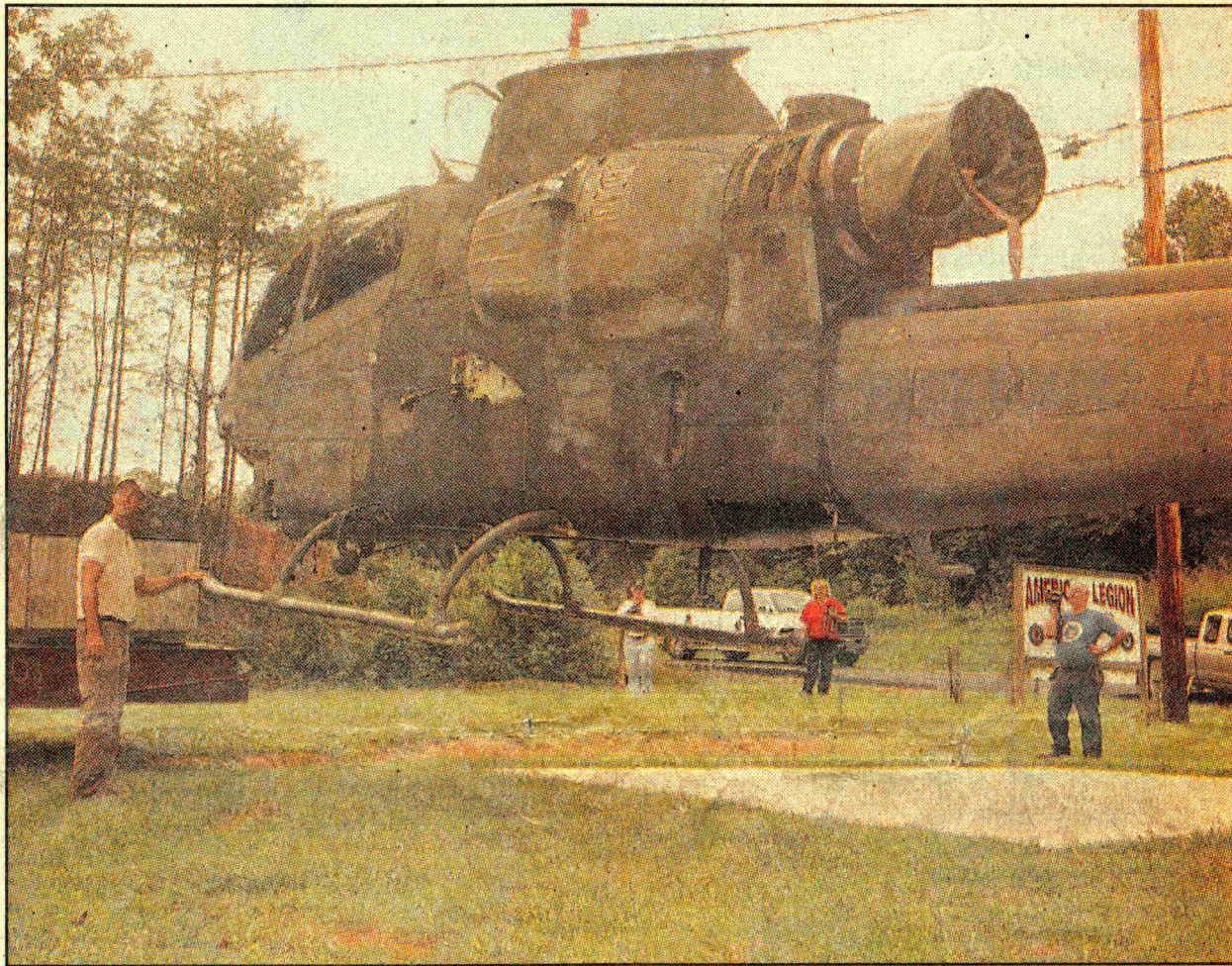
The group also now has an active ladies' auxiliary as well, said Leon Clem, commander of the post. The auxiliary holds weekly yard sales on Saturday to raise funds for refurbishing the post's home.

Clem said the come back of the post is the result of a team effort, and that's what it is all about. "It's about veterans helping veterans," he said.



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## COBRA HELICOPTER FINDS NEW HOME IN STATESVILLE



TYRONE SUMMERS / RECORD & LANDMARK

**Easy does it:** Bill Beckham (left) of G.L.Wilson Construction communicates with the crane operator as they guide a Vietnam-era Cobra attack helicopter onto the concrete slab it will rest on. The chopper will be on permanent display at the entrance to the VFW post off Salisbury Road.

**GET THE WHOLE STORY ON PAGE 12A.**