

Jim Ricklefs

by Martin J. Pociask



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JIM RICKLEFS

PHOTO BY DAVID OSBORNE, HAI

Left: Jim Ricklefs, founder of Rick Helicopters with Bell 47D helicopter, May 1952;
Middle: Rick Helicopters, Inc. hangar at San Francisco Airport, February 1956; Right: Jim Ricklefs, June 2007

The following HAI Heritage Series interview was conducted with Mr. James S. Ricklefs, founder of Rick Helicopters and founder and first president of the California Helicopter Association, which became the Helicopter Association of America and, in 1981, was renamed Helicopter Association International (HAI). The interview was conducted by Martin J. Pociask, HAI's Communications Director and Editor of *ROTOR* magazine. Mr. Pociask was accompanied by David Osborne, HAI's Videographer, who recorded the event. The interview took place on June 12, 2007, at Mr. Ricklefs' office in San Carlos, California and at the Hiller Aviation Museum, also in San Carlos, where over the years, he has been a major contributor and supporter. Mr. Ricklefs has been a key figure and a pioneer in the development of the commercial helicopter industry.

ROTOR: Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview. Let's begin. Can you tell us when and where you were born and a little bit about your childhood?

Ricklefs: Well, I'm an Iowa boy. I was born in Monticello, Iowa, which few people have heard of. It's in eastern Iowa, about halfway between Cedar Rapids and Dubuque. I went through high school there, then I came out here for my college education at Stanford, and I've basically been out here ever since. I had a very good

childhood. My parents ran a grocery store, and we went through the depression there. The people in Iowa hardly felt it because, although money was very scarce, we were in the center of all kinds of produce, so we didn't go hungry as so many people did during the depression.

ROTOR: You learned to fly at Stanford

Ricklefs: Yes, at the time I came out to Stanford, Stanford had an airport right on campus. It was on one of the main highways, just south of the football

stadium. It's hard for people to believe that there was an airport on the Stanford campus but there was. That's where I soloed in 1933. In 1934-1935 the airport was moved near Palo Alto, where it is today.

ROTOR: One of your first jobs after getting out of college was with Northrop. Do you want to talk about that?

Ricklefs: Yes. Well actually, after getting out of college I spent two years working for an investment firm,

Schwabacher and Company, up in San Francisco. I didn't particularly like that business so I went back to school in Southern California, to West Coast University and got a degree in aeronautical engineering. That basically started me on my career in aviation.

ROTOR: How much were you getting paid at Northrop?

Ricklefs: When I applied to Northrop, I had four years at Stanford, two years business experience with an investment company, and then two years getting my degree in aeronautical engineering. They looked at my resume and they said, "Well, that's great, we don't get a man with that education very often," and they said instead of starting me at 50 cents an hour they would start me at 55 cents an hour. So four years in Stanford and two years business experience and two years aeronautical engineering got me five cents an hour more.

ROTOR: You also had a brief career in teaching.

Ricklefs: Yes, after working for Northrop for a while, I went back and taught aeronautical engineering at West Coast University, and one of my students happened to be John Northrop, Jr.



PHOTO BY DAVID OSBORNE, HAI

Jim Ricklefs with Marty Pociask, HAI's Communications Director and Editor of *ROTOR*.

ROTOR: You also had a short musical career.

Ricklefs: Yes, between high school and college I played the sax and clarinet. Between my college years in the Midwest I toured with a band. It was really a circus-type group. In addition to the band, we had some elephants, adagio dancers, magicians, and other circus performers. We would go around to the various county fairs and put on our acts. Generally we would put on an afternoon performance and then an evening performance. Then our agent would book us to play at a

dance in town. If we were in a place for three or four days, it wasn't so bad. But if it was a one-night stand, why, we would finish the dance, get on our bus, drive to the next town, and get there about time to set up for the next day with only a little sleep on the bus. So it was quite an experience, a good experience, a lot of fun, but I'm glad I didn't have to do that for all my life.

ROTOR: You still play though, don't you?

Ricklefs: I still play. I play in a community band, and we have about 70 pieces in the band, all amateurs, but we can make a lot of noise, and we have put out a number of CDs of our performances. As I listen to them, they aren't all that bad, really.

ROTOR: When did you get married?

Ricklefs: I got married in 1936. The biggest feature of my marriage was that my father-in-law gave my wife and myself a brand new airplane as a wedding present. In all my travels through the years, I have never found anybody who got a brand new airplane for a wedding present! Maybe somebody has but I haven't run across anyone.

ROTOR: Well, there's a story behind that plane.

Jim Ricklefs with the Honeymoon Airplane, a wedding gift he and wife Nadine (shown in statue) received in 1936



PHOTO BY DAVID OSBORNE, HAI



HAI Videographer David Osborne inside the Honeymoon Airplane

Ricklefs: You bet. My wife and I flew on our honeymoon in that plane. We didn't keep the plane a real long time, because we bought a newer model. My wife passed away in 1953, and about 25 years ago I found that airplane in a barn in wrecked condition down in the San José area. I would never have found it on my own, but a kind of casual friend of mine from back East had heard about this airplane that was for sale, and he came out and looked at it. There was no paperwork with it whatsoever, but it did have a manufacturer's nameplate on it. So he wrote to the Federal Aviation Agency and he got the microfiche records on this airplane. When he got those, he saw that my wife and I were the first owners of it. Being a nice guy, he called me and said I'll buy this if you don't want it but he says I think you ought to have it. So I bought it and I restored it in Nadine's memory, and then I flew it around to air shows

for a number of years, and then finally retired it to the Hiller Museum.

ROTOR: That's an interesting story. Your father-in-law, was he a pilot?

Ricklefs: No he wasn't. He was executive vice president and chief



PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM RICKLEFS

Jim Ricklefs solos the Landgraf Helicopter Co. model H-2

counsel of the Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company. He used to really delight in the fact that when he had a business trip down in Los Angeles, he would go down to the Palo Alto airport with his daughter, and his daughter would fly him from Palo

Alto up to San Francisco and put him aboard a DC-3 going to Los Angeles. Then of course he would brag to all the other passengers his daughter flew him up to catch this plane.

ROTOR: Where was Nadine from?

Ricklefs: She was a San Francisco girl. She was born in San Francisco, but raised in Los Angeles. She went through the Marlborough Girls School in Los Angeles. I met her on a blind date with one of my fraternity friends, and once we saw each other, why, that was it. We saw each other every day from then on.

ROTOR: Where were you married?

Ricklefs: We were married on my father-in-law's ranch. He had a 260-acre ranch down in the Los Altos area. It was called Toyon Farm at that time. He hired the St. Francis Hotel staff to put on the wedding. They brought down all kinds of statuary, red carpets, flowers in tubs etc. and they brought down all their wine stewards, waiters

and chefs. We really had a very fancy wedding on this ranch. Of course he invited all his friends. After the wedding, Nadine and I went down to Palo Alto airport and got in the airplane and then we flew over the ranch where the dinner was still in progress. They had two tall trees that were not too far apart, and anyway, I put the airplane up on its edge and flew through

those two trees, and I can still see my father-in-law shaking his fist at me for doing that!

ROTOR: When you learned to fly, it was fixed-wing, it was at Stanford University, and it was in a Fleet Model

Two biplane with a tailskid and no brakes. Imagine that, no brakes. Can you tell us about that?

Ricklefs: Sure. That was common in those days. Most airplanes of that era were bi-planes. Typically they had tailskids and no brakes. The Fairchild, by the way, had a tail wheel and brakes. It was a more modern airplane.

ROTOR: What got you interested in helicopters?

Ricklefs: I was working as a teacher and my boss noted that in the newspaper there were a lot of backyard helicopter projects in the Los Angeles area. He wanted me to go around and take a look at all of them and write a report on it, which I did. I think I went to maybe eight or nine backyard projects, and I was impressed with one of them, the Landgraf machine. So much so that I later went to work for the Landgraf Helicopter Company, and later became their Vice-President.

ROTOR: You associated with many helicopter greats such as Igor Sikorsky in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Can you tell us about that?

Ricklefs: Yes, at the Bridgeport plant. This must have been in 1945, 1946, something like that. I had movies with me that we'd taken of the Landgraf machine flying. In an interview with Igor Sikorsky, I told him that I would like to show him and his engineering department the movies of this flying Landgraf machine, so he got his engineering department together and I showed him the pictures. Then



Piasecki HRP-2 helicopter in foreground, Piasecki HRP-1s in the background owned by Rick Helicopters, Inc.

Mr. Sikorsky took me on a tour through his factory, and later arranged for me a ride in one of his helicopters with Jimmy Viner as the pilot. Jimmy did an auto-rotation for me, my first auto-rotation. It was just a delightful day. As we went through the factory, Mr. Sikorsky would tip his Fedora hat to all the workers. He knew most of them by name, and everybody just

Ricklefs: Well, one way that I got to know Frank is that I bought a few of his machines — one of them directly from the factory — but two or three of them on surplus. Frank came out and visited me two or three times at my San Francisco hangar and office, and at that time Frank was listed as one of the world's most successful and notable bachelors. He did get married shortly after that. But anyway we enjoyed each other's company and were friends for a good many years.

ROTOR: You owned and operated four Piasecki HRP-1s and one HRP-2. The HRP 2 you sold back to him.

Ricklefs: My pilot flew

it back to Philadelphia from San Francisco. I'm not sure just what he used it for, probably for a test bed or something like that.

ROTOR: How did you come to meet Arnie Sumarlidason?

Arnie Sumarlidason piloting a Bell 47D with Mike Meger at Landgraf Heliport



PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM RICKLEFS

admired him so much. This was such a great moment for me to be able to spend the day with such a notable man.

ROTOR: Can you tell me about your relationship with Frank Piasecki.

Ricklefs: Arnie was working for Armstrong Flint Helicopters, and I got my helicopter training from Armstrong Flint Helicopters. Strangely I had already soloed a helicopter before I took my training. I had soloed in the Landgraf helicopter. After I took training in the Bell machine, it really frightened me because if I'd gotten into a Bell or Sikorsky and tried to fly it solo with just airplane experience I would have crashed for certain. Because these machines have a lag in the controls that you have to get used to, and the Landgraf machine used blade ailerons for control, which gave you an almost instant control like an airplane, I was able to get away with that one.

ROTOR: You and Arnie partnered in business. Then after a while, after you had started up the business and worked together, you and Arnie parted ways. When was that?

Ricklefs: Well, I started my company in 1948, and about 1951, I think, Arnie and I parted ways. We had a kind of difference of opinion. Arnie wanted to make the company a local company, and he only wanted to do business locally and I could see that we weren't going to make it financially by just doing local business. I started taking contracts in Alaska and other places where we could make money. Strangely enough, Arnie never did set up a local business. Armstrong Flint spun off a few of their helicopters to some of their better pilots, Arnie among them, as independent businesses. Arnie's first year was spent working; I forget whether it was Iceland or somewhere else abroad, which was kind of ironic for the guy who wanted to fly locally. His association with Armstrong Flint made for a very successful business, but not locally. They worked all over

the world. Arnie spent his last years in the Grand Cayman Islands.

ROTOR: You started in business with an investment capital of \$40,000. At the end of the first year you'd lost \$20,000 and in the second year you lost another \$10,000. Were you worried?

Ricklefs: Yes, I was worried all right. Money started coming in at an opportune time. I think the mortality in people starting up was pretty high

PHOTO COURTESY OF JIM RICKLEFS



Cockpit details of 1944 Sikorsky R-4B helicopter owned and restored by Jim Ricklefs.

in those days. I'd say one out of 10 or one out of 20 people that started up actually made a success of the business.

ROTOR: You started making money in the third year, and of course that was just in the nick of time. By the early 1950s, your company had become the largest operator of helicopters in the world. Being one of the most powerful companies in the industry is a hard position to hold on to.

Ricklefs: Yes it was. When you're king of the hill, there is always somebody trying to kick you off. But my company did do very well, and we did a gross business that was higher than any other helicopter company. It was also higher than any of the airline companies' grosses such as New York Airways, Los Angeles Airways, and Chicago Airways. All my business

parameters were much higher than theirs were so we were doing quite well there for a while. At that time I think we had maybe 40 helicopters, and today some of the operators have as many as 400, ten times as many as we had.

ROTOR: Your main business was surveying. At that time Alaska was considered a perimeter defense zone. A lot of territory was unmapped. The military wanted it mapped in a hurry, and surveyors were at that time using donkeys and not getting around very well. Can you describe that kind of work?

Ricklefs: Sure. Basically we were surveying. The surveyors would pick out what they'd call control points, maybe a mountaintop or some other outstanding terrain feature. We would take in the surveyor who would pinpoint that location and get the altitude and latitude and longitude. A high-altitude airplane would take a picture of

this, and then they would take that photograph and point the control points. Then they could draw a map by using a stereographic planograph device. That was a very fast way of mapping territory compared to the earlier methods.

ROTOR: Success allowed you to build a 44,000 square foot hangar and office on four and a half acres of land at the San Francisco International Airport. You also built a smaller installation at Anchorage International Airport. Can you talk about that?

Ricklefs: O.K., well, when you get a surplus of money you find places to put it. I was smart, or lucky maybe I should say, in putting it in real estate because that was a very good place to put money, of course, and has been for some time. So I sold both my Anchorage installations and the San



Rick Helicopters, Inc. and Alaska Helicopters, Inc. join in an eleven-helicopter formation in Anchorage, Alaska just before going out on an Army Map Service surveying contract.

Francisco installations for a real good profit.

ROTOR: Can you describe what it was like to operate in the wilds of Alaska?

Ricklefs: Well, it did present a lot of problems; particularly some of the contracts we had in the winter were north of the Brooks Range and in very cold weather. The problem was heating the machines. You had to drain the oil every night, take the batteries out and put them in a warm place to be able to operate the next day. Also in cold conditions, metal, particularly cast metal becomes very brittle. You cool down a hammer, for example, and hit it with something and the cast iron hammer will shatter. So lubricating parts became a problem, and you would find that you would have to overhaul things prematurely. If you had a component that would go a thousand hours normally, you would probably have to overhaul it every 200 hours or so.

ROTOR: There have been a number of antique helicopters that you have restored.

Ricklefs: Yes, there are quite a few of them that I have restored. The Sikorsky R4B was one of them, and then I had two Sikorsky R6As. Let's see, then I had a couple of Hiller rotorcycles that I restored. I had a

Hiller ramjet that I restored. I think that's about it for helicopters. Then there were airplanes, of course, the most recent was a Fairchild that's in the Hiller museum. Before that I had restored a couple of earlier Fairchilds. The one in the Hiller museum is a three-place Fairchild. I had restored a couple of two-place Fairchilds. Then, of course, there was the Sopwith "Pup" and the Spad. Those would be the main ones that I can think of anyway. I did half restore some other airplanes that I sold before completing the restorations.

ROTOR: You restored and flew a number of antique World War I airplanes. You had a 1916 Sopwith "Pup" Scout. Tell us about it.

Ricklefs: Well, the Sopwith was unique in that it had an 80 horsepower Le Rhone rotary engine. With an engine like that, you bolt a crankshaft to the airplane and then the engine turns around the crankshaft. So the whole engine turns and the propeller is stationary, being fastened to the engine. As the engine turns around, the propeller goes around and makes the airplane fly. It was an ideal engine in World War I because it cooled well and it was light. With these cylinders going around in the wind you didn't need a big tank of water, a radiator, and all that stuff. But what happened as the military demanded more and

more horsepower from these engines, the centrifugal forces get away from you, and the airplane became very hard to manage. So they built these engines up to maybe as big as 400 horsepower but they didn't fly very well due to the centrifugal forces. Then they went to stationary engines because of this centrifugal force problem. With the Sopwith, if you flew it normally, you wouldn't notice the centrifugal forces. But if you pulled back on the stick, it would peel off to the right. You dump the stick and it would peel off to the left. If you spun them, you purposely spun them to the right, not the left, because if you'd been going to the left it would wind up pretty good and be hard to get out of.

ROTOR: Describe the 1916 Spad you restored.

Ricklefs: That was a very interesting project. As a young boy I had read all these war birds magazines and knew all about Spads and Sopwiths and all those World War I airplanes, and I had always wanted to fly one. I knew that the only way I would ever get to fly one would be if I had one of my own, nobody else was going to let me fly theirs. So anyway, I found the remains of one down in a small town, Gaston, North Carolina. I went and bought the remains, and it took about four or five years of work and a lot of money to restore this airplane. It

turned out to be a beauty, and for a long time it was the only Spad flying in the world. It's now in a museum in Richmond, Virginia. While I was flying it, it won grand championships just about wherever I would take it, Merced or Watsonville, or wherever. I never took it long distances; it really wasn't a long-distance airplane.

ROTOR: What was really amazing about that plane is that it was designed just 13 years after the Wright Brothers flew 120 feet.

Ricklefs: Yes, when you consider the 13 years of development since the Wright Brothers flew 120 feet as you say, in effect flying in a kite. Thirteen years later what developed was a sophisticated airplane. This airplane would go 124 miles an hour, it would climb to 18,000 feet, and it was very comparable to a light airplane today. So it was quite remarkable when you looked at the design features on this thing, to think that they had thought that much ahead in 13 years. Of course it took a war to do that, but anyway, it happened.

ROTOR: You have provided leadership for nonprofit associations, including being the founder and first president of the California Helicopter Association, which later became the Helicopter Association of America, which later became HAI, Helicopter Association International. Can you tell us about your role?

Ricklefs: Well, at our organizational meeting in Los Angeles, there were 12 of us around the table, and so it always boggles my mind when I come to one of the HAI annual meetings and see something like 17,000 people there. Out of these 12 founding members, I'm the only living member. All the rest of these good people are deceased, unfortunately.

ROTOR: You've been a member of many aeronautical associations such as Helicopter Club of America,



Jim Ricklefs received the Crystal Eagle Award in 1995.

American Helicopter Society, National Aeronautic Association, the Aero Club of Northern California, Quiet Birdmen, the Early Birds, Air Force Association, Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, Experimental Aircraft Association, OX-5 Aviation Pioneers, Twirly Birds, Whirly Girls, Men's Auxiliary, Western Aerospace Museum, the Hiller Aviation Museum, and the American Aviation Historical Society. Which one of these are you still active in?

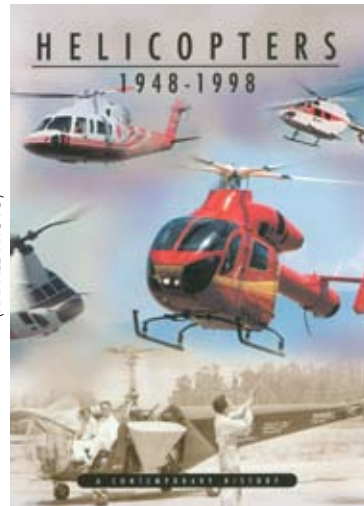
Ricklefs: Well, I'm still active in the Aero Club of Northern California. I'm on their board of directors. Every year they have a big awards banquet and they give out what they call a Crystal Eagle Award to somebody who's made a contribution to aviation. That's turned into quite an affair and I've enjoyed that organization very much. Steve [Sullivan] was a member of this board of directors for a long time. I think he was very instrumental in starting it.

ROTOR: You served on a number of committees and you helped out on projects where you had expertise. The list includes board of directors of the Aero Club of Northern California, which has its annual Crystal Eagle Award banquet on October. You were national president of the OX-5 Aviation Pioneers and you were awarded the Crystal Eagle Award. Can you talk about that?

Ricklefs: Yes, I was awarded the Crystal Eagle in 1995, and it has to be the best award that I've ever gotten. It's a beautiful thing in itself, quite a cut above your usual bowling trophy. The same year, 1995, I was also inducted into the OX-5 Hall of Fame in the San Diego Museum, and

also back in Hammondsport where big boards have a photograph of everybody that's been inducted and then a little blurb about what they did in the aviation industry.

ROTOR: Your writings and photo collections show you've got a remarkable sense of history in each document. You and your camera seem to have been inseparable. You were a major contributor to Helicopter Association International's book, *Helicopters 1948-1998*, covering the history of helicopters. A few years ago you donated several valuable scrapbooks to HAI. When did you realize the importance of preserving helicopter history?



(HAI FILE PHOTO)

Jim Ricklefs was a major contributor to HAI's *Helicopters 1948-1998*.

Ricklefs: I guess all my life I've kind of been somebody that kept things and documented things. I'm glad I did because when I decided to put up those scrapbooks and document the first 25 years of the

Helicopter Association, I wrote around to my contemporaries to try to get some input. I was surprised that I got hardly any input from other people. In other words, other people just plain didn't save things and document things the way I had.

ROTOR: In 2001 I was privileged to work with you for your book, *Looking Back at Helicopter Pioneers and the Birth of an Industry*, the historical book about the beginning of helicopter aviation. Photos that were used in the book are your photos, and it's truly an historical gem. Can you tell us why you feel helicopter history is important?

Ricklefs: Well, I think it's important to know where we've been so we get a good idea of where we are going.

ROTOR: You've also authored many technical articles and wrote a substantial book telling about the Quiet Birdmen. Have you ever considered writing a book about your own experiences?

Ricklefs: No, I never have really considered that. People have asked me about it but I don't know that it would be all that interesting. It would be a documentary but I don't think it would be of enough general interest to make much of a dent anywhere. But the Quiet Birdmen has been a kind of fun organization. Steve [Sullivan] belongs to it as well as me, and it's an organization that's just created to have fun. Every once in a while we get somebody in the organization that wants to organize it like a Rotary Club or Elks Club or something similar, and they get shot down in a hurry because we don't want to be organized. We just want to have good comradeship and fun.

ROTOR: You put out a Quiet Birdmen book. It was a photo history book, right?



Steve Sullivan poses with Jim Ricklefs. Both are members of the Quiet Birdmen organization about which Ricklefs has compiled a photo book.

Ricklefs: Yes. It's kind of a photo history book. Well, I tried to collect as many pictures over a period of years that I could, and then tried to get a little history on the organization and on the men themselves. As you would know, practically every famous airman has at one time or another been a member of the Quiet Birdmen, from Lindberg, Doolittle, right on.

ROTOR: You're a man of many talents and interests, including history, community service, yachting, music, and antique aircraft, to name just a few. Would you comment on some of your restorations for the antique aircraft and the ones that you still have in your possession?

Ricklefs: Well, actually I don't have any in my possession anymore. For a long time I had the Fairchild in the Hiller Museum on loan, and just last year I donated it to the museum along

with a number of antique engines that I had. So I'm currently without airplanes or helicopters.

ROTOR: What was the last one you donated?

Ricklefs: The last was the Fairchild "Honeymoon" airplane.

ROTOR: That was the one you flew around to a number of shows, right?

Ricklefs: Yes, I did. It was also a grand champion at Watsonville.

ROTOR: The first Bell that you bought was priced at \$25,000. What do you think about the prices of helicopters today?

Ricklefs: Oh boy, when Bell was selling their first helicopters at \$25,000, it was interesting that they were so apologetic about the price. They said this is a terribly high price, and as we get into production, why, the price will certainly go down. Well, it never happened. The price kept going up, but they did turn out good machines, which did work all over the world.



PHOTO BY DAVID OSBORNE, HAI

"Flying Platform" display at the Hiller Aviation Museum

ROTOR: There are a lot of issues affecting the industry right now, such as operations, regulatory, economic, and safety. Of course there's also the unit element. Which of those areas interest you?

Ricklefs: Well, you know, as I look back, it's kind of funny that the same

problems that we were working on and trying to correct 50, 60 years ago are the same problems that we're working on now. You know, heliports, insurance, cost of machines, and of course reliability, safety, all those things. Those were things that we worked on in the beginning and here we are still working on them.

ROTOR: Can you tell us about the helicopter that you used to place on the San Carlos lawn at Christmas time?

Ricklefs: Oh yes, for a number of years I would put a helicopter on my front lawn and put a Santa Claus in it with some presents. I did this for at least 10 or 15 years. Whenever the San Carlos Police Department had a rookie policeman, they would routinely tell him there's a helicopter that's landed on Eaton Avenue, go check it out. Well, I happened to be out on my front lawn once when they sent one of these guys around there, and he grinded to a halt in front of the helicopter, got out with his pad, and he came up to me and he said now who is the pilot of this helicopter. I said Santa Claus. He looked, and said oh those damn guys back at the station. They did that almost every year. Of course I didn't happen to be out on the front lawn every time the guy would come up, but I know it was a standing thing for them to do.

ROTOR: In all of your documentation, your historical documentation, rebuilding of the helicopters and some fixed-wing airplanes, what part of your career, when you look back, are you most proud of?

Ricklefs: Well, I tell you, I think the things that I'm proudest of in my lifetime would be number one, my family. I have a wonderful family, a

large family. My wife and I were only children in our families, when we started out, and I have these three daughters, and from them came 11 grandchildren. I have 26 great-grandchildren, and one great-great. So I was able to take a five-generation picture with a great-great, which is kind of fun. So that's the first thing I would put first. Then the second thing, I think, I'm proudest of is being instrumental in the startup of the

PHOTO BY DAVID OSBORNE, HAI



Jim Ricklefs has donated much of his time and materials to the displays at Hiller Aviation Museum.

Helicopter Association. The third thing might be the fact that for a time anyway I was the largest operator of helicopters in the world, and that was kind of fun, too. So those would be my first three priorities.

ROTOR: You have invested your time and energy into the museum. We haven't really talked about the museum. Do you want to say anything about that?

Ricklefs: Well, I've had a good time with the museum and I've really been with the museum long before it opened up. Stan Hiller would get together with me and other people in the formative stages of this thing and I watched the museum develop. He's done a remarkable job in putting this museum together. There's nothing like it anywhere. For one thing, I think he put about \$25 million of his own money into it to get it started. Anytime you put that kind of money into

something it certainly is worthwhile, and worth looking at.

ROTOR: You've invested some time yourself, haven't you?

Ricklefs: Oh yes, yes I have. I've given a lot of my time and a lot of material things to the museum as well.

ROTOR: It must make you proud when you walk through that and see it. Brings back a lot of memories, I'm sure.

Ricklefs: I am so sorry that Stan had to leave us early because I'm sure that the museum would have done even better if he had been around to take care of it.

ROTOR: As we wind down this interview, what advice would you have for anyone who may be considering a career in helicopters,

either as a pilot, mechanic, operator, or in any other capacity?

Ricklefs: Well, I think it's a good career move to be in helicopters, and I would recommend it to people who are thinking about it.

ROTOR: That's great. Let's talk about some of the people coming up in the industry right now. Is there anything that they are doing or not doing that you would like to see change?

Ricklefs: No, I can't think of too much criticism. For one thing, I don't think that I know enough about what is going on currently. It's just like, for example, I have a degree in aeronautical engineering, but when I look at a modern engineering report today, I don't know what's going on there. It's way over my head. I am not a real deep thinker, but maybe the best advice that I can give them is to be a tortoise and not a hare. I've always

kind of considered myself to be the tortoise rather than the hare. I plowed along and plowed along, but I eventually got there. That is just the way I am.

ROTOR: Well, I would say you have done some really great things for this industry, and I wanted to make sure you were properly thanked and recognized because you are one of the great pioneers of this industry. Would you care to give any closing comments?

Ricklefs: I don't know that I really have words of wisdom that would



Helicopter exhibit at the Hiller Aviation Museum


benefit anybody other than to keep plowing along like a tortoise.

ROTOR: Again, thank you Jim for taking the time to meet with us and for sharing all your history with us, and

your contributions to the progress of aviation.

Ricklefs: Thank you. It's very flattering for me to have this happen. You should interview Steve Sullivan somewhere down the line because he has done quite a number of remarkable things in helicopters, too.

ROTOR: We interviewed him last night.

Ricklefs: Good, well thank you very much. 

Martin J. Pociask is Director of Communications for **HAI**.

HNI

HELINETWORK INTERNATIONAL
SPECIALIST SPARE PARTS HELICOPTER

LOGISTIC CENTER **free access**

WWW.helinetwork.com