

B-17 to take flight at airport

*World War II aircraft will
be on hand for annual
Salute to Freedom*

BY EMILY ROTH

SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — In celebration of our nation's history, the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport will host the B-17G Flying Fortress "Aluminum Overcast" from July 3 through 5.

The aircraft can not only be examined, but those who wish may take flight in the historic plane. Area residents may relive history by standing in the footsteps of a waist gunner or sitting in the bombardier's seat. According to the EAA (Experimental Aircraft Association), "Aluminum Overcast" is one of only 13 Fortresses still flying, and is a symbol of the Allied strategic bombing effort in World War II.

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Sentinel File Photo

AVIATION ENTHUSIASTS — Spectators flock to admire and welcome the Boeing B-17G bomber "Sentimental Journey" to Mt. Vernon Outland Airport in 2010. In July, the B-17 "Aluminum Overcast" will be part of the airport's Salute to Freedom celebration.

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"We have hosted other B-17s at the airport, 'Texas Raiders' in '96 and 'Sentimental Journey' in '99, 2008, and 2010," stated Airport Director Chris Collins. "This is the first time that 'Aluminum Overcast' has been hosted by anyone in Southern Illinois. It's been in the metro east area before, but never in any of our Southern Illinois airports. We're really pleased that we were able to secure a spot on their tour."

"What's really cool about this one is that they had a weekend open, and it was the Fourth of July weekend."

... They said that they had an open weekend, the Fourth of July weekend, when I told them about our Salute to Freedom celebration at the airport they were really excited to come to Mt. Vernon."

The Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress is a World War II bomber used primarily in Europe. Missions often lasted for more than eight hours and struck at targets within enemy territory. Because of their long-range capability, formations of B-17s often flew into battle with no fighter escort, relying on their own defensive capabilities to ensure a successful mission.

"Saturday we'll have something all day for people to see and do," stated Collins about the upcoming Salute to Freedom, "and I personal-

ly am looking forward to taking a picture of 'Aluminum Overcast' with the terminal behind it with Mt. Vernon in the background and fireworks erupting on top of it."

Due to advances in technology, in the years following World War II, most B-17s were cut for scrap, used in research, or sold on the surplus market.

"The airplane is owned by the Experimental Aircraft Association out of Oshkosh [Wis.] and ... it is meticulously maintained and 100 percent authentic because there's people that work on it year round up there," said Collins. "They actually offer B-17 schools for maintenance mechanics and for pilots on this aircraft. It's the most hands-on B-17 type experience that's out there."

eroth@morningsentinel.com

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