

Salute to Veterans set for 2 p.m. Saturday

*Opportunity to take a ride
in a North American P-51
Mustang is one of many
attractions this weekend*

BY DAVID BELCHER

MT. VERNON LIFESTYLES EDITOR

EDITOR'S NOTE: A special section on the Balloons Over Mt. Vernon & Fly-In is scheduled to run in today's Sentinel.

MT. VERNON — Good news for those who have ever dreamed of flying in a World War II-era plane.

The opportunity to take a ride in

a North American P-51 Mustang, the "Red Nose," will be just one of the attractions at Balloons Over Mt. Vernon & Fly-In.

That is not the only event at the airport this weekend related to the nation's military history. A Salute to Veterans is set for 2 p.m. on Saturday.

Also scheduled to be displayed is a WACO, an open-cockpit U.S. Navy plane.

Rides in the P-51 Mustang and the WACO are scheduled for 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday.

To give youngsters a feel for flying the Young Eagles Experimental Aircraft Association will be

Please see **Salute**, Page 6A



Submitted Photo

FM-2 WILDCAT — A Grumman FM-2 Wildcat, a U.S. Navy World War II fighter, will be featured at the Mt. Vernon Airport during Balloons Over Mt. Vernon & Fly-In.

10/15/15

Salute:

Continued From Page 1A

offering free airplane rides for those ages 8 to 17 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday.

Also set to be displayed is the Grumman FM-2 Wildcat, a U.S. Navy World War II plane.

This will be of special significance to Lyle Endicott since he flew this plane in the war.

"In the early years of World War II this plane was on the frontline," according to Chris Collins, Mt. Vernon Outland Airport manager. "By the time it was over it was relegated to number three."

Following his graduation from Mt. Vernon Township High School, Endicott enlisted in the Navy in World War II and was assigned to pilot training.

"It would make a man out of you if you survived it," he said.

He said flight training was very intense. "You are talking taking a 20-year-old kid and putting him in a very powerful machine," Endicott said. "There are an awful lot of things you had to know. The [aircraft] carriers are 475 feet long, but you only had about 200 feet to land on. You need all that training to make the machine do what you wanted it to do."

He flew bombing missions over Luzon, Iwo Jima and Okinawa before they were invaded by American troops.

Endicott said he had to be wary not only of the Japanese but of American forces. He said the Japanese military were launching kamikaze attacks at Ameri-

can carriers and "anything that flew under 4,000 feet got shot at." He said he saw several kamikaze crashes. "The kamikaze pilots had no armaments. They had no way to land," he said.

"I never soloed," he said. "I always flew with the good Lord's help."

After the war he began his business, Endicott Interiors, in Woodlawn and served as Woodlawn's mayor.

The FM-2 Wildcat displayed is painted in the colors of Capt. J.D. McGraw, who was assigned to the carrier USS Gambier Bay, according to a statement from the plane's owner.

In October 1944, the Gambier Bay was involved in the Battle of Leyte Gulf in the South Pacific. On the morning of Oct. 25, 1944, a force of Japanese ships headed for the troop transports at Leyte Gulf. The outnumbered American forces launched all aircraft, most were launched under heavy fire and some had to dodge holes in the carrier deck while taking off. After dodging shells for about 30 minutes the Gambier Bay was dead in the water as three cruisers closed to point-blank range. The ship sank at 9:07 a.m. on Oct. 25, 1944, with the majority of her nearly 800 survivors rescued by landing and patrol craft dispatched by Leyte Gulf.

However, the Gambier Bay and members of the task force stopped the Japanese forces, inflicting great losses, and causing them to turn and retreat.

"This is really significant because it honors the Greatest Generation, the World War II generation," Collins said. "How many years are we going to have to pay homage to these guys?"

A transition will be made from a discussion of the significance of these planes into local military contributions.

At the airport are photographs of honorably discharged U.S. veterans, with their names and a summary of their military service. During the ceremony, there will be a reading of names added to the wall in the last year. As a special tribute, there will be a reading of names of those on the wall who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Mt. Vernon American Legion Post 141's Honor Guard will perform a rifle salute concluding the playing of taps.

Collins said from 1998 to 2012 the Little Egypt Fly-In and Veterans Reunion was held at the airport.

"We saw it as a way to help get kids interested in aviation through the Young Eagles program," Collins said. He said the reunion was set to honor veterans through "different activities including speeches, and we've shown historical movies to honor our veterans. Veterans shared stories with each other to educate the younger generation."

In 2013 the event was transformed into Balloons Over Mt. Vernon. However, he said some people asked about the warbirds and the veterans reunion.

"This is the first year back to what it was," Collins said. "This is the first year we are going back to what people were used to seeing."

Honoring veterans is not a one weekend out of the year proposition at the airport.

In addition to the veterans' photographs, contained in the airport is the Col. R.D. White Veterans Museum, which features a treasure chest of information related to veterans and military history. The museum is open from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday or by appointment.

mtvlife@morningsentinel.com