

B-25s ran suicide mission over Tokyo

World War II veterans to
be honored during
ceremony today at airport

BY RICK HAYES

SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — Veterans and plane enthusiasts will have a rare opportunity to share their passions simultaneously today when the EEA Fly-In and Veterans Reunion will be held at Mt. Vernon Airport.

"With the Hall of Honor that we have here, along with the museum, those of us who have been working on this for a long time have really become passionate about the World War II generation — the greatest generation and what that generation did for this country," explained Airport Manager Chris Collins. "Thousands of those guys are dying every day and the time is coming when we're not go have any of those greatest generation guys with us anymore, and we thought this might be the last chance we might get to honor them. We aggressively pursued the B-25. Because we got it here, we wanted to do something special so we thought it would be great to get a photograph of all the remaining World War II veterans we have remaining in front of this airplane."

The photograph will be taken at 10 a.m. today, preceded by a brief ceremony, featuring retired Air Force Lt. Col. Ted Buck, also a member of the Jefferson County Board.

Please see **B-25s**, Page 3A

B-25s:

Continued From Page 1A

"He's probably the greatest speaker we have in our community on behalf of veterans. It would be well worth everybody's time to see what he has to say," Collins said. "After he speaks, we'll have American Legion Post 141 rifle salute squad that will provide a rifle salute and taps."

The B-25 is a medium bomber that is returning to Mt. Vernon after a six-year absence. It has about a 4,000- to 5,000-pound load capacity and could fly about 1,200 miles round trip, according to volunteer Don Lewis.

"You could take a bomb load out and get back. It couldn't carry a big load, but it could carry a load a distance and come back," he said.

The plane is widely known as conducting a raid on Tokyo on April 18, 1942, with pilot Jimmy Doolittle at the controls.

"That was the plane they loaded on carriers a few months after Pearl Harbor. Doolittle and 24 other aircraft took off, flew over Japan and bombed Tokyo. Strategically, it didn't do a whole lot, but emotional on our side, it was a strike back at the

Japanese after Pearl Harbor and for the Japanese it showed they weren't as invulnerable as they were told they were," Lewis said.

Volunteer Don Advise pointed out there are pictures of the B-25 from when it took off from the carrier Hornet, and other information about the Doolittle raid at the airport museum, noting the co-

pilot with Doolittle, 96-year-old Richard Cole, is still alive.

"They had to take out all the munitions-out of this aircraft to just make sure their bomb load would reach Japan and it would never come home. This was a suicide mission. All these men knew it. They replaced everything they took out of aircraft with cans and barrels for

fuel, and that's how they made the distance. Some of them didn't make it, dropping off in the ocean after the raid, and some of them got to China. They all went down because there was no place to land the planes," Advise said.

A crew of eight, based out of St. Charles County, Mo., landed at the airport shortly before noon on Friday. Crew members say they enjoy coming to events like the one in Mt. Vernon this week to share information about the popular war bombers, particularly the B-25, appropriately named "Show Me," after the trademark of Show Me Missouri.

"In the world, there's only about 30 of these planes that still fly," according to crew member Bob Moore. "We do about 15 to 20 events per year, depending on the year and the economy."

Moore said it's important to preserve American history, especially during war times.

"They don't teach World War II anymore. It's faded in history like Korea. I've got a grandson who is 13. If it wasn't for me, he wouldn't know there was a World War II so you've got to keep it [the memory] alive. We've still got sons and grandsons that were in the war and they come out and it's very emotional when they come out and see this thing. You've got to keep the history alive," said Moore.

"Coming to Mt. Vernon has always been neat. It always has been a neat airport," Moore said. "We're glad they asked us back here."

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Sentinel Photo/RICK HAYES

VOLUNTEERS WITH BOMBER — Don Davis and Don Lewis, Mt. Vernon Airport volunteers, stand in front of the B-25 Mitchell bomber that was used during the bombing of Tokyo. Eight crew members landed at the airport around 11:30 a.m. Friday and will be on hand to explain the plane's functions and capabilities during the EEA Fly-In that continues through today.

10-20-12