

R.D. White passes away

By TESA CULLI

tesa.culli@register-news.com

WOODLAWN — The community has lost one of its Senior Saints who spent his life being dedicated to veterans and the field of aviation.

White, a retired lieutenant colonel of the U.S. Army Air Corps, died at his home Sunday evening, one day before his 90th birthday. He was born in West Frankfort, but married his love, Ellen Louise (Modert) in Mt. Vernon on June 30, 1946; she preceded him in death on Sept. 6, 2000.

White is credited with being one of the founding members of the Mt. Vernon Experimental Aircraft Association, the Woodlawn Veterans Memorial Committee, the Civil Air Patrol 338 Composite Squadron, the Jefferson County Flying Club and the Jefferson

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County Hall of Honor and Museum at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport. He was inducted into the Senior Saint Hall of Fame in 2008. As a Christian, he was one of those who helped form a successful food pantry for the Woodlawn community, served as a deacon at the First Baptist Church of Woodlawn, served as a Sunday school teacher for many years and helped re-open the Baker Street Baptist Church in Walnut Hill and attended the church while assisting in its re-opening.

A veteran himself, White was an outspoken advocate of veterans and the military, which started at an early age. White said in a 2000 interview that he could remember listening to the stories told by Civil War veterans while sitting on his grandfather's front porch as a child. He entered the Army Air Corps in July 1942 and served during World War II in Iwo Jima and Guam. He was a glider pilot and instructor during the war and later completed officer's school to eventually command the 1100 Missile Company in Germany. Among his many stations, White served as company commander of the 4th Ordi-

nance Company at Fort Bliss, Texas, and the Tuslog 67 classified unit in Istanbul, Turkey and was Battalion Commander of the 71st Maintenance Battalion in Germany.

After retiring from the U.S. Army White became the manager of the Benton Airport and the Salem Airport. He retired as general manager of the Salem Airport but continued to spread his love of aviation by helping organizing and serving as commanding officer of the 338 Composite Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol, based at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport and established in 2001. The group includes about 17 senior members and nine pilots from Jefferson County, Salem, McLeansboro, Fairfield and surrounding areas. The squadron also has a cadet program for youth.

He also helped form the local EAA organization, and was responsible for joining his love of aviation with a veterans reunion during the

annual Little Egypt Fly-In and Veterans Reunion, sponsored by the EAA.

"Twenty-eight years in the military made me a veteran for life," White once said. "The welfare of veterans is very important to me."

White became one of the founding members of the Woodlawn Veterans Memorial, located across from the Woodlawn Grade School. He was joined in the committee by Derwood Baker, Bill Moore, Billy Waller, Glen "Blue" Troutt, Kenneth McKinzie, Jerry A. Young, James Burk, Lyle Endicott, Clarence Duckworth, Arthur W. Shewmake Jr., Tom Mears, Tom Gaither, J.D. Smith, Ted Buck and Clifford Christensen. Work by the Woodlawn Veterans Memorial Committee started in 2001 before the bombing of the Twin Towers, and the committee became a registered non-profit on June 13, 2002.

White also organized the community commemorations for Veterans Day and

Memorial Day in Woodlawn, and stated honoring the country and its flag were close to his heart.

"This flag of our nation has been bloodied, battered and torn in battle, trampled and burned by traitors who hate the freedom that it represents," White once said. "But it will always fly high in the hearts and minds of people who love liberty."

He was inducted into the Senior Saint Hall of Fame in 2008, and was described as "a true leader in accomplishing projects."

White took on two more projects shortly after his induction, with a sports aircraft training center at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport, to help pilots obtain a sport aircraft license and the Hall of Honor and Museum.

In 2010, he and the core group of veterans who worked on various memorial projects in the county, the EAA and the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport Board began the Hall of Honor at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport.

The memorial wall grew to include a museum with items donated by local veterans, including White.

"I do veterans things for the airport during the (EAA Little Egypt) Fly-In," White said. "I thought I'd put up a few pictures of the veterans."

The museum has been visited by school children, adults, veterans and political figures since its opening.

Visitation for White will

be held from 4 to 7 p.m. at Newell Funeral Home in Mt. Vernon; funeral services will be at 11 a.m. Wednesday. He will be laid to rest at Tower Heights Cemetery in his native West Frankfort, with full military rites accorded by Mt. Vernon American Legion Post 141. Memorials may be given to the Jefferson County Veterans Hall of Honor at Mt. Vernon Outland Airport.