



The Sentinel



162ND YEAR - VOL. CLXII No. 32 • www.morningsentinel.com

SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2025

A very special gift

Bohlen gives helicopter replica to fellow veteran and friend

BY TRAVIS MORSE

tmorse@morningsentinel.com

MOUNT VERNON — Sometimes a gift is more than just a gift.

On Wednesday, Mount Vernon native Gary Bohlen presented a special helicopter replica to his friend and fellow U.S. Army veteran David Ellingsworth, during a special ceremony at

Mount Vernon Outland Airport. The model helicopter is meant to be a nearly exact replica of the gunship that Ellingsworth commanded during his time in the Vietnam War.

But the gift is not just a friend-also token of ship. It is meant to honor the roughly 4,600 U.S. helicopter air crew members who died in Vietnam, Bohlen said.

"It just kind of grew to a point where we want to honor veterans, but it's mainly for this guy," Bohlen said, gesturing to Ellingsworth. He later added, "That's the idea, honor him but let's not forget (all of) our veterans."

Bohlen encouraged the public to get involved with veteran support groups like

Tunnel to Towers and Wounded Warriors to help out veterans in need. During and after the Vietnam era, veterans were not shown the respect that they deserved, but fortunately that has changed



Sentinel Photo/TRAVIS MORSE

TAKING A LOOK — Mount Vernon native and U.S. Army Veteran David Ellingsworth takes a look at the model replica helicopter given to him by his long-time friend and fellow veteran Gary Bohlen. The helicopter is a replica of the one Ellingsworth commanded during the Vietnam War.

in modern times, Bohlen said.

"And if you're anywhere near where you can do something for a veteran, well do it," Bohlen said. "A lot of people say thank you (now), but they didn't say thank you to us when we (got out of the military)."

Bohlen assembled the model helicopter from parts received by the Collector's Showcase organization. Putting it together proved to be a painstaking process and it took him a few tries to get it just right, he said.

"It's made out of metal and it's heavy and it's got the pilots in the seats," Bohlen said of the replica.

Ellingsworth was greatly appreciative of the gift, and plans to display it prominently at home. Ellingsworth currently lives in Dahlgren but grew up in Mount Vernon with his close friend Bohlen.

"It means a heck of a lot," Ellingsworth said. "It's going to be on display at my house."

Please see Gift, Page 3A



Sentinel Photo/TRAVIS MORSE

MANY GIFTS — Gary Bohlen gives a special hat to Vicki Ellingsworth as a gift during a special ceremony held Wednesday at Mount Vernon Outland Airport. During the event, Bohlen presented his friend David Ellingsworth with a model helicopter and also had gifts for David's wife, Vicki.

Gift:

Continued from Page 1A

Bohlen and Ellingsworth describe themselves as lifelong friends. Bohlen was a paratrooper with the 101st and 173rd in Okinawa from 1962 to 1965, but did not experience combat.

"I was in Okinawa, and I was in the jungles training for it but I never got there," Bohlen said. "I got out four months before my outfit went over."

While Ellingsworth was flying in Vietnam in 1966/1967, Bohlen was flying helicopter/fixed wing aircraft at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Later, Bohlen was a chief pilot and flew jets for a large equipment manufacturer for 30 years. Ellingsworth ended up teaching helicopter aerodynamics at SIUC, and also coached the women's softball team at Rend Lake College for many years.

"We were childhood friends and ended up both making our living flying for a while," Ellingsworth said.

Bohlen also pointed out that both he and his friend are "Christ followers."

"And we are grateful to our Heavenly Father that David's with us," Bohlen said. "And we (want to honor) the families that suffer and the friends that suffer because of the loss of flight crew members and soldiers everywhere that paid the ultimate price."

The model helicopter was not the only gift that was presented during Wednesday's ceremony. Ellingsworth's wife of nearly 59 years, Vicki, was also given a special hat, a rose and a plaque as a way to honor their family. Vicki Ellingsworth said that the gifts will be on display in a "special spot"



Sentinel Photo/TRAVIS MORSE

LIFETIME FRIENDS — Gary Bohlen, LEFT, and David Ellingsworth are lifetime friends and veterans who grew up in Mount Vernon. Gary gave a replica helicopter to David as a gift Wednesday at the Mount Vernon Airport.



Sentinel Photo/TRAVIS MORSE

HONORING VETERANS — Mount Vernon Airport Director Chris Collins, RIGHT, shakes the hand of Vietnam veteran David Ellingsworth during an award ceremony Wednesday at the airport.

in their home's family room.

Mount Vernon Airport Director Chris Collins also made a few remarks at the beginning of Wednesday's ceremony, praising David Ellingsworth for his service to his country. Ellingsworth has a tribute on the airport's Jefferson County Hall of Honor display, which shows that he was awarded the Purple Heart, as well as commen-

dations like the Air Medal with Four Oak Leaf Clusters and the Distinguished Flying Cross, among others. However, most people around the community know Ellingsworth as "coach," Collins said.

"So this man's a hero and he's walking the streets of our community, and he taught people at Rend Lake College for years," Collins said. "And so I'm incredibly honored to be part of this."