

AVIATION

Mustang fans to honor retiree

By Matt Tullis

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

He isn't a legend, G. Paul McCormick insists.

The P-51 Mustang fighter plane is a legend. Dutch Kindelberger, president of North American Aviation, is a legend.

McCormick just built cowlings for the aircraft, which helped turn the tide in World War II, then became a favorite of aviation collectors.

The 90-year-old, of Worthington, will nevertheless be recognized as a legend during "The Gathering of Mustangs & Legends: The Final Roundup," to take place Thursday through Sunday at Rickenbacker Airport.

About 150 of the 15,868 P-51 Mustangs built are still flying.

More than 100 will be seen at the event, along with 51 men and women who had a hand in Mustang history — including World War II aces, Tuskegee Airmen, crew chiefs and WASPs (Women Airforce Service Pilots).

McCormick grew up in New Jersey. He became obsessed with airplanes as a 12-year-old when the Travel Air "Mystery Ship" flew faster than U.S. military biplanes in a Cleveland race.

A year later, he wrote to

See **MUSTANG** Page **D3** every airplane manufacturer he could find in search of blueprints, photos and

brochures.

Almost every company obliged, possibly thinking it was dealing with a potential customer.

McCormick graduated from high school in 1934, in the midst of the Depression. He couldn't afford to go to college, which was required of U.S. military pilots; instead, he fell back on his airplane literature.

"That's how I learned about airplanes," he said. "This was all part of my education."

He worked for two airplane manufacturers before heading west, where much of the industry was taking flight.

He landed a job at North American Aviation in Ingle-

wood, Calif., and went to work on cowlings (metal covers for aircraft engines).

A few years later, in 1940, North American Aviation launched the Mustang.

"We didn't know how good it was," said McCormick, recalling the days when employees produced a Mustang every 17 minutes.

"The Mustang turned out to be the thing that changed the war."

Despite building thousands of airplanes, McCormick never learned how to fly.

He has handled a plane in the air a couple of times, though.

"It's a funny sensation," he said. "You don't feel any movement at all. It's not really a fun thing for me."

He would rather watch, he said — much as he did in his boyhood, sitting on the roof of his house as the early biplanes flew by.

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G. Paul McCormick with a model of an OV-10A Bronco

