

A Sentimental Journey



JASON JOHNSON / THE SOUTHERN

Pilot Bob Blue answers questions in Mount Vernon on Friday in front of the B-17 Bomber affectionately known as the 'Flying Fortress.'

Plane honors those who came back and those who did not

BY BECKY MALKOVICH
THE SOUTHERN

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MOUNT VERNON — A solitary tear gently rolled down the 87-year-old cheek of World War II veteran Art Rowe as he heard the unique pitch of the plane's four cyclone engines.

"It's different than any other sound. Anyone who has ever flown in one would recognize it immediately," Rowe said as the Boeing



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Russ Kozimor of the Commemorative Air Force Arizona Wing looks through a gunner's window and radios the cockpit as the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress circles the Mount Vernon airport Friday.

B-17 Flying Fortress prepared to land at Mount Vernon Outland Airport on Friday.

"But a lot of people who flew in it aren't around to hear it," Rowe said. "We lost an awful lot of good people. It brings back memories — good and bad."

Rowe of Salem, a radio operator who flew 35 missions in B-17s during the war, watched as the aptly named Sentimental Journey

B-17 came in for a landing in front of a crowd at the airport.

The plane was fully restored by the Arizona Wing Commemorative Air Force and flies to about 60 cities a year.

The bomber arrived in Mount Vernon on Friday and will be available for public viewing until

DETAILS

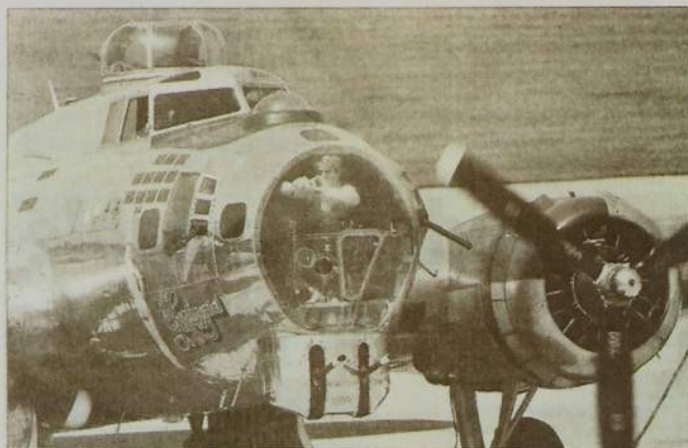
What: Sentimental Journey, a fully restored World War II B-17 bomber

When: 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. today and Sunday; take-off at 9 a.m. Monday

Where: Mount Vernon Outland Airport

For more info: Call 242-7016

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The Sentimental Journey, a fully restored B-17 bomber, was flown into the Mount Vernon airport Friday by the Commemorative Air Force Arizona Wing to give the public an up-close look at the bomber, a mainstay of the World War II Army Air Corps.

JOURNEY: Plane honors World War II soldiers

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Monday morning.

"It's a flying museum that we can bring to the people," pilot Bob Blue said. "It is also a memorial and is dedicated to all those veterans alive or deceased who served in the military."

Blue said the B-17 was the icon of daylight bombing in Germany and World War II.

"Initially in the war, over 70 percent of them were lost. Every time one of these went down, its 10 crew members went down, too," he said.

"It is a great privilege to fly in recognition of those who flew in World War II."

Blue said he enjoys meeting the people who come out to see the bomber, especially those who actually flew missions during the war.

"They immediately want to go to the position they occupied. They are very quiet for a long time, as though they

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EVERETT D. ATKINSON
World War II Fighter Pilot

come out with tears in their eyes," Blue said.

Everett D. Atkinson, 86, didn't even have to go in the B-17 to become overwhelmed by memories of his time as a fighter pilot with the U.S. Army Air Corps.

"The sight of it brings back an overall picture of when hundreds were taking off, 15 seconds apart.

"It wasn't just the Germans

enemy, gravity was also an enemy. They were so loaded down with bombs, ammo, gas to make the trip and the crew of course," Atkinson of Mount Vernon said.

"They would climb through the clouds and up into the sky and sometimes there would be a mid-air collision and we wouldn't have even seen the English Channel yet. We did that every day. It was quite a sight."

Atkinson said the sight of the plane coming in for a landing Friday was a thrill.

"I'm glad to be here to see it because there are thousands upon thousands of B-17 crew members who can't be.

"I consider myself extremely lucky to see one of the very last B-17s. This is in memory of all those good guys that didn't get to come back and stand here on this ramp to watch that old airplane come in," he said.

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