

## A PIECE OF HISTORY



Sentinel Photo/JOSH JONES

The public visited Mount Vernon Outland Airport on Monday as the Yankee Lady B-17 stopped to refuel.

# Yankee Lady stops in Mount Vernon

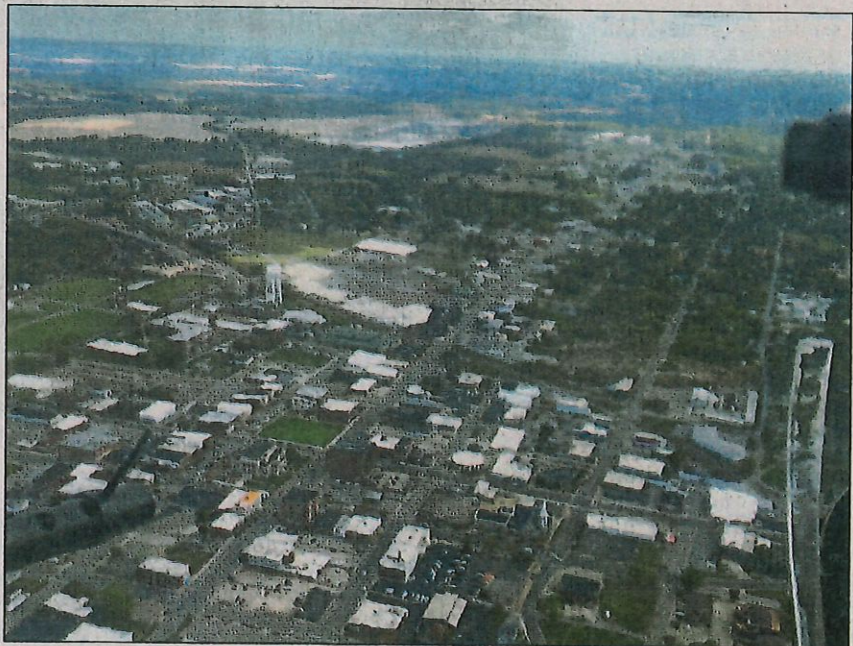
*The Yankee Lady was originally delivered to the U.S. Military in 1945*

**BY JOSH JONES**  
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

**MOUNT VERNON** — History stopped by Mount Vernon Outland Airport on Monday as many enjoyed the Yankee Lady Boeing B-17 while it visited.

According to information provided, the Yankee Lady is a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress, owned by the Yankee Air Museum of Van Buren Township, Michigan. The Yankee Lady and her crew stopped for food and fuel in Mount Vernon on their way home to Michigan from Houston, Texas.

The Yankee Lady was originally delivered to the U.S. Military in 1945. The plane did not see combat action, but it was used by the United States Coast Guard for over a decade. Purchased by the museum in 1986, it has since been



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**HIGH ABOVE MOUNT VERNON** — Pictured is Mount Vernon from the Yankee Lady B-17 that stopped in Mount Vernon on Monday. The Yankee Lady travels to various airshows and other events throughout the country with ticket sales going to the maintenance of the historic aircraft.

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# Yankee:

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restored to World War II configuration and is flown for flight experience rides and airshow appearances.

Yankee Lady Chief Pilot Gene Wedekemper said that he decided to stop at Mount Vernon Outland Airport because he was born and raised northwest of Centralia on a farm.

"We were coming back from Houston, we have been on a 12 day airshow. The first three days we were (in) Greenville/Spartanburg, South Carolina, the next three days we were in Pensacola, Florida, and then we have been in Houston for the last four/five days," Wedekemper said. "Now we are on our way back home and I decided I am going to stop by my home town and give these people something to look at."

Wedekemper said that the Yankee Lady was commissioned in 1945.

"It was the 13th to the last B-17 built, therefore it didn't go to war, it didn't have to go to war," Wedekemper said. "There were actually 12,731 of these built and today there are only four in the world flying, three in the United States, and I have flown all three of them."

Wedekemper said that one thing you can tell about the B-17 is that it was built very rugged.

"If you look in the structure of the wing, you could tell it was built by bridge builders, because that is where the knowledge was back then," Wedekemper said. "It was very well built, but the downside to that is it

makes the aircraft heavier."

World War II Veteran Evertt Atkinson was present Monday and got to fly in the plane with other community members. He enlisted in the United States Air Corps. Atkinson became a Commissioned 2nd Lieutenant on Aug. 30, 1943, and became a Flight Instructor in the Army Air Force. He was honorably discharged on Feb. 15, 1946, as a First Lieutenant. Atkinson gave his thoughts on the aircraft.

"It was the best thing that ever happened in the war until the better ones came along," Atkinson said.

Mount Vernon Airport Director Chris Collins gave his thoughts on the Yankee Lady's visit.

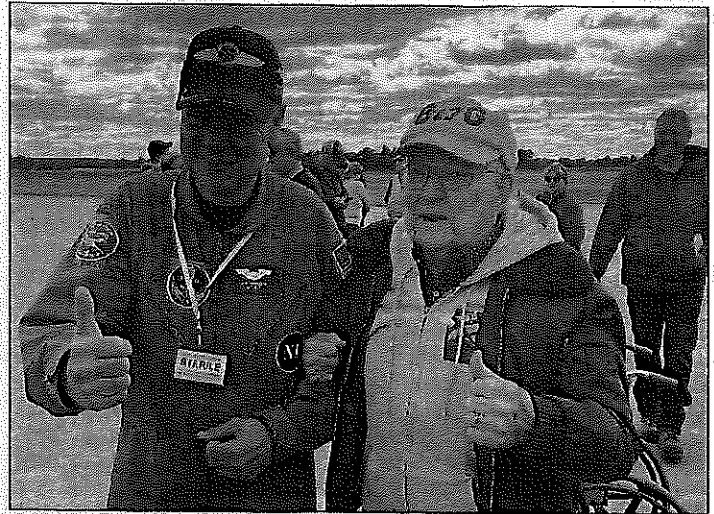
"I am really proud with how many people came out on a chilly Monday at lunchtime to see this," Collins said. "It means we have a lot of people in this area that are appreciative of the Greatest Generation, history and the military. I couldn't be prouder."

Having been on the crew of the Yankee Lady for 21 years, Wedekemper said that it is his way to pay tribute to the Greatest Generation.

"This is my small way of paying tribute to those people that fought for our freedom and it is wonderful to see the children, the grandchildren, come out to see what grandpa and dad flew years ago," Wedekemper said.

For pricing, scheduling and more, people may visit [yankee-airmuseum.org](http://yankee-airmuseum.org). To stay up to date on all the happenings at the airport, people are encouraged to visit the "Mt. Vernon Airport" Facebook page.

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Sentinel Photo/JOSH JONES

**THE GREATEST GENERATION — World War II Veteran Evertt Atkinson, RIGHT, takes a photo with B-17 Yankee Lady Head Pilot Gene Wedekemper Monday as the Yankee Lady visited Mount Vernon Outland Airport.**



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**YANKEE LADY — The Yankee Lady is a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress, owned by the Yankee Air Museum of Van Buren Township, Michigan. The Yankee Lady and her crew stopped for food and fuel in Mount Vernon on their way home to Michigan from Houston, Texas, on Monday at Mount Vernon Outland Airport.**