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Veteran sees B-17 for first time since World War II

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AUBURN — Robert Baugher of Lake Wawasee clenched his cane as he waited to see a World War II-era B-17 bomber plane descend on DeKalb County Airport's runway Friday during dreary, hot weather conditions.

Baugher, 87, had not seen a "Flying Fortress" since his Army Air Corps training days at Camp Perry in Toledo, Ohio, when he was 20 years old.

Baugher's son, Robert, took him to the airport Friday to see "Sentimental Journey," a B-17 owned by the Arizona Wing of the Commemorative Air Force. The organization takes its "flying museum" around the country so people can get a hands-on look at history.

Baugher was hurt during training and medically discharged from the military. The other eight members of his B-17 crew were sent to Europe and to Baugher's knowledge, none of them survived. "I didn't figure it was quite as dangerous," Baugher said about his decision to join the Army Air Corps. "Half of (the people) wouldn't know what it was like."

DeKalb County natives Herb and Carole Leins appreciate the sacrifice people such as a Baugher made.

"During World War II there was a lot of pride in this country," Carole Leins said. "Everybody was 100 percent behind the military. Every time you see something like this, it brings it all back. ... It just triggers it all."

Baugher was trained as a waist gunner. His job required him to man a gun in the center of the plane and fire at enemies. His training missions took about two hours each.

"(The plane) was so gosh-darn noisy and you'd fly so high, you'd freeze if it weren't for the fur suits. They were very cumbersome," Baugher said.

He hurt his leg jumping out of the belly of a B-17 during a training mission in Illinois. He was sent to a hospital in Coral Gables, Fla.

"It made me feel bad," Baugher said. "A friend of mine took my

Images



Robert Baugher of Lake Wawasee, right, served on a B-17 bomber during World War II, and Friday at the DeKalb County Airport he got to see a B-17 for the first time since his time in the military. Baugher stands with his son, Robert Baugher of Cromwell.



A crowd of people gathered Friday morning at the DeKalb County Airport to watch a B-17 World War II bomber descend on the runway.

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place, and I don't imagine he came back."

While in the hospital, Baugher met a man who went through the nose of the plane.

"He lost his arms and legs," Baugher recalled. "That's not living. What was the use of living?"

In 1943, an Army Air Corpsman had a one in three chance of completing his assigned 25 missions, said Rick Senffner, spokesman for the Arizona Wing of the Commemorative Air Force.

Baugher appreciated the efforts of the Commemorative Air Force and was glad that generations after him will have the chance to see history.

For Peggy McCarty of Fort Wayne, the "flying museum" meant she could see where her uncles — Leo Krautmann and Clarke Ash — served during World War II. Krautmann was a waist gunner, and Ash was a pilot.

World War II history buff Jim Suddarth of Fort Wayne had been teaching his grandsons, Jonathan and David Bush, about the B-17, but Friday was the first chance for them to see one in person.

"This is one of my favorite airplanes," Suddarth said, "and the men who flew this are like my knights in shining armor."

The pilots who navigate the B-17 today don't face the danger World War II veterans endured. "Sentimental Journey" co-pilot Patrick Caldwell started flying B-17s after retiring from United Airlines six years ago.

"This is variable and exciting and voluntary," Caldwell said while standing beneath the wing of the B-17. "Don't get me wrong, a 747 400 is the most exotic plane I've flown, but this is the most fun."

Anyone who is interested in taking a flight can call (602) 448-9415. Flights of 45 minutes cost \$425 per person for the waist section and \$600 per person in the nose section.

Ground tours of the plane will cost \$5 for ages 13 to adult and \$3 for children ages 5-12. Children under 5 will be admitted free.

Display dates and times are today and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., with a morning departure Monday.

"I rode pretty cheap," Baugher said with a laugh. "I got paid \$21 a month."

For more information about the Commemorative Air Force, visit azcaf.org.

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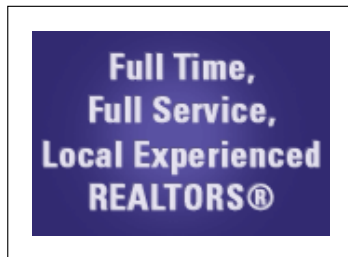
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