



B-17 touches down in Southeast Iowa

By Gary Davis, Executive Content Producer [CONNECT](#)
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BURLINGTON, Ia. (WGEM) - People from across the Tri-States made the trip to southeast Iowa Saturday to get up close and personal with a piece of history.

A B-17G bomber from the World War II era stopped at Southeast Iowa Regional Airport in Burlington this weekend. It's part of a nationwide tour put on by the Experimental Aircraft Association.

Visitors get the chance to get up close and touch the historic plane, and even take a ride in it.

"People can experience living history instead of seeing something in a museum and read about it on a card." Pilot Rex Gray said. "You can actually be out here and touch it, feel it, smell it, experience it if you want to take a flight."

This B-17, named *Aluminum Overcast*, was built in May 1945, but because it rolled off the assembly line right at the end of the war in Europe, it never saw action and was sold as military surplus, according to Gray. He said the plane did various jobs after the war, before being sold to a person who wanted to restore it. Gray said the plane went on tour about 20 years ago, and hasn't stopped since.

Gray said their stops often attract veterans, some of whom served when the B-17 was still in service.

"It's a real honor to be able to listen to their stories and talk to them," Gray said. "All these guys were 17, 18, 19 (when they were serving on the B-17). Pilots were often in their 20s. It's incredible to hear the stories of these guys and realize that you get to fly the plane that they flew without being shot at."

While on the flight, you're able to move around to different sections of the plane to see what waist gunners, bombardiers, and navigators saw decades ago.

"I've never seen anybody get off unhappy," Gray said. "I've seen people get off sick, but they were still happy."

Several kids were also at Saturday's event, and that's something that gives Gray hope that these flights will continue.

"It's encouraging to see those people that really have an interest in our history of what made this nation what it is, and a lot of that was the sacrifice that of that whole generation of World War II."

Gray said if you've been thinking about going on a flight, but hesitate spending the money, you should do it now because time is running out.

"One day, this is not going to be a living history exhibit, it's going to be in a museum behind some ropes, and you're not going to be able to touch it, hear it, feel it, smell it, all those things," Gray said. "So, don't wait until next year. Come out and do it now while it's still here."

Tours of the plane are available from 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday for \$10, or \$20 for a family. Children under 8, veterans, and active duty military get a free tour.

Flights start at 10 a.m. Tickets are \$475 dollars and are first come, first serve.

Organizers say revenue from the rides helps cover the high maintenance and operation costs of the plane.

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