

# The B-17 *Aluminum Overcast*

The Experimental Aircraft Association's B-17G-VE, serial number 44-85740 - nicknamed *Aluminum Overcast*, was delivered to the U.S. Army Air Corps on May 18, 1945. Although delivered too late to see action in World War II, the airplane has an interesting history.

## First Owner

Purchased as surplus from the military inventory for a mere \$750 in 1946, the airplane has flown more than 1 million miles. It has served as a cargo hauler, an aerial mapping platform and in pest control and forest dusting applications.

## Return to Military Roots

The airplane's return to its military roots began in 1978, when it was purchased by a group of investors who wished to preserve the heritage of the magnificent B-17. The group, "B-17s Around the World," was headed by Dr. Bill Harrison. Their goal was to return the B-17 to its former glory.

## Donation to EAA

The economic reality of simply maintaining a vintage bomber, let alone the cost of restoration, prompted the group to donate the B-17 to the Experimental Aircraft Association in 1983. Since that time, an extensive program of restoration and preservation was undertaken to insure *Aluminum Overcast* would be a living reminder of World War II aviation for many years to come. The restoration has taken more than 10 years and thousands of hours by dedicated staff and volunteers at EAA Oshkosh, Wisconsin, headquarters.

*Aluminum Overcast* proudly carries the colors of the 398th Bomb Group of World War II, which flew hundreds of missions over Nazi-held territory during the war. *Aluminum Overcast* commemorates B-17G #42-102516 which was shot down on its 34th combat mission over Le Manior, France, on August 13, 1944. Veterans of the 398th helped finance the bomber's restoration.

## The Plane

When the airplane was sold in 1946, most of the original military equipment had been removed. Over the years, these items have been located, restored and returned to *Aluminum Overcast*. These include:

- The Norden bombsight located in the nose of the airplane
- Restoration of the navigator's position also located in the nose of the airplane
- Installation of the waist guns located on each side of the bomber
- Rebuilding the radio compartment, including original communications equipment
- Returning the airplane's floor to its original specifications
- Installation of a complete tail turret assembly
- Installation of a replica top turret just behind the pilot and co-pilot seats

The airplane was on display at the EAA AirVenture Museum in Oshkosh, Wis., until October, 1993 when it was moved to EAA's Kermit Weeks Flight Research Center for maintenance and restoration in preparation for its first national tour in 1994. The B-17 will eventually be housed in the EAA AirVenture Museum's "Eagle Hangar," which features numerous World War II aircraft and exhibits.

When *Aluminum Overcast* is on tour, aviation enthusiasts can actually walk through the airplane. If they wish, they can take a trip back in time and feel the might of this magnificent flying machine through the flight experience program. Half hour flights are available at all tour stops. Proceeds from the tour help keep *Aluminum Overcast* flying and will assist the continuing restoration, maintenance and preservation efforts of EAA.

Even those too young to have lived through World War II can appreciate the history associated with this airplane. The Flying Fortress was one of the airplanes that helped the Allies achieve victory in World

War II.

The B-17 is an important part of both U.S. and aviation history. It can help us understand the technology of the times, the era in which the aircraft was developed and the human sacrifices which make today's freedoms possible.