

INCREDIBLE JOURNEY BROUGHT BOMBER TO OREGON:

THE ORIGINAL FAMILY STORY OF THE BOMBER, NOW BEING RESTORED BY : B-17 ALLIANCE FOUNDATION.



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The Bomber story is almost like a “fairy tale”, maintains Milwaukie’s Art Lacey, who owned and operated a 48-pump gas station, housed beneath the “Lacey Lady” a WWII B-17G Bomber.

As a young pilot and gasoline station owner, Art had a vision of a novel combination of both. His subsequent quest for a retired war plane took him to the Altus Air Base in Oklahoma. The stranger from Oregon told them he wanted to buy the plane to be used as an advertising gimmick back home, over his gas station. They questioned his sanity but sold him a B-17 anyway.



Art rounded up a crew of local farmhands to help him prepare the bird for flight. “We got it UN-pickled and got the thing running.” Lacey was inexperienced behind the controls, but, was determined to fly the war plane. Base regulations however, required a co-pilot on every flight. So one of his helpers gave him an old mannequin. Lacey stuck it on the seat beside him, plopped a cap on its head and took off for a test run. “I was scared as hell, he admits in retrospect, and that’s no lie!” That practice flight was nearly Lacey’s last. It ended up in what Air Force officials have termed “a spectacular wheels-up crash landing.”

Considering Lacey’s entire bomber saga it was just par for the course. “I got her flying,” Lacey said and then I couldn’t get her landing gear to go down. “He remembers talking to and even slapping the lifeless mannequin on the knee during those tense air borne moments. “I was talking to everything trying to get that gear down-I even had the ‘old man upstairs’ involved in that one.” The Milwaukie native crash-landed the stubborn bird on its belly, crashing into a parked bomber in the process. Lacey never even received so much as a scratch. “They wrote both those planes off as wind damage”, Lacey said of the aircraft he unintentionally destroyed. Lacey said he lives by the proverb, “you stick and stay and make it pay”. The same day as the crash, he and a farm boy started to depickle another plane, tail number 4585790. It became the famous “Gas Station Bomber on Highway 99E from 1947 until Dec. 2014.

Two of Lacey’s friends, pilots from Portland, joined the determined man for what turned out to be a perilous flight to faraway Oregon.

Before we left, I took my parachute and put it in a box. I nailed it shut. I’d ride her all the way to the ground if something happened. I was broke, all my money was in that plane. (He bought the bomber for \$13,750 in 1947.) “I followed the Sierra Nevada’s until we hit a blinding snow storm,” he remembers, “the other guys were asleep I kept dropping in altitude, trying to get below the storm. I was flying her by the seat of my pants.” He just missed crashing the plane broadside into a mountain. He and his crew had no idea of where they were. During a break in the clouds they finally spotted a tiny town. “We buzzed that town pretty closely.” Lacey shrugs. “People were running out of their houses in night gowns. They were afraid we were going to land on Main street, But, we were just trying to read the road signs. After some frightening sweeps they spotted a building with Fall River Mills painted on its top. They located it on their map and found they were almost 100 miles off their course.

“You know, that’s the damnedest airplane,” Lacey teased, gesturing towards old number 485790 perched outside his house. We picked up a railroad track and I said, “Well, hell, lets follow it all the way to Klamath Falls under the storm-I’ll ride in the nose and if I see a tunnel coming up I’ll bang you on the toe!

Over Monmouth, Lacey made two swoops over his father & mother in-law’s house to let them know he and the B-17

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were home. They landed at Troutdale Airport. Getting the plane across town to Milwaukie almost proved to be a tougher chore than flying it cross-county. The authorities weren't going to let Lacey do it. It went clear through to the State Highway Dept. to then Governor Snell. "I never did get a permit," Lacey said, "I finally just loaded it up on our four trucks and moved it anyway."

His only penalty for the illegal early Saturday morning haul was a \$10. fine in Milwaukie for an overwide load. "We took up the whole road," Lacey admits "we came upon a bus on Powell and he had to run up on the curb so we could get by."

Since 1947, Art's B- 17G has stood as a symbol of the courage of the men and women who served so valiantly during WWII and as a salute to the era of the propeller driven airplanes.

Art Lacey took his last "flight" on December 27, 2000. His determination to bring this B-17G to Milwaukie in 1947 inspires us to continue on our journey to return the "Lacey Lady" to her Original flying glory. **Learn more at: www.B17Alliance.com**



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