

B-17 BRINGS BACK MEMORIES



ZACH TUGGLE/TELEGRAPH-FORUM

Don and Erika Rich visited the B-17 on Saturday in Marion.

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REPORTER

MARION - The first time Erika Rich saw a B-17 bomber, she ran for her life. The Americans were coming to bomb her hometown of Frankfurt, Germany.

"I grew up over there when the war was going on," she said. "They flew over us and it was scary."

Erika visited the Wings and Wheels fly-in and drive-in with her husband, Don, on Saturday at Marion's airport. They didn't know there was going to be a World War II bomber in town until that morning.

"About 10:30 this morning, that thing flew directly over our house," Don said.

The sight brought back a lot of memories for Erika.

"In those days, there weren't a lot of airplanes, so it was really noisy and loud," she said. "But it

was war, so what do you expect — it's just one of those things."

Erika and other children from her school in Frankfurt had to escape the city because of the Allied bombing raids.

"It was too dangerous," she recalled.

The children were placed on a train bound for the German countryside. That's when an American fighter plane found them.

"They thought that we were soldiers in the train," Erika said.

Although the pilot shot at the train, none of the children were killed.

"They stopped the train in the woods and they told us to run," Erika said.

It wasn't her only brush with danger.

"I got shot at in a potato field, too," she said.

After the war, Don was shipped to Germany to guard a base. One day after work, he and a friend

took a street car to Frankfurt.

"It was a cool day, too cold to swim, but I had been out working," he said. "She was the only one out there in a bathing suit, so I told my buddy, 'I think I'll go get acquainted with that girl.'"

It wasn't long until the two were married. Don's time in Germany ended, and he paid to fly Erika back to America. They ended up settling in Marion in 1963 after Don found a job there as a welder. It's been home to both of them ever since.

Seeing the B-17 bomber again was startling for Erika, but she understands the plane needed to exist. Her sister now lives in Lexington, Kentucky.

"We were lucky to get through it," Erika said. "It's just a part of life, I guess."

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