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MITCHELL COUNTY PRESS-NEWS



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During Elizabeth Strofus' visit, an original WWII airplane, a 1943 Voltee BT-15, flew over northern Mitchell County and circled the skies over St. Ansgar several times. It was piloted by Dan Walker of the Valiant Flying Museum in Rochester, Minnesota. (Press-News photo by David Namanny).

Flying High Again

The last of an era in the Midwest that is still able to travel, 86-year-old World War II WASP (Women's Air Force Service pilot) Elizabeth Strofus of Fairbault, Minn., was at the St. Ansgar American Legion Saturday, signing copies of her book, "Flying High" for local residents.

In 1943 and 1944, Strofus trained Army Air Corps Gunners on engaging targets, and proper instrument use at training base in Las Vegas, Nevada. She was also one of the country's rare women pilots, able to maneuver a B-17, B-26 Marauder, P-39 Fighter, Stearman Double Wing, AT-6, BT-13, Low Wing Fairchild and the L-5 Recon air plane.

During Strofus' visit, an original WWII airplane, a 1943 Voltee BT-15, flew over northern Mitchell County and circled the skies over St. Ansgar several times. It was piloted by Dan Walker of the Valiant Flying Museum in Rochester, Minnesota. The airplane was the primary training machine for all pilots during WWII. It is one of only 15 BT-15s still in operation.



Liz Strofus

"It was a beautiful airplane," said Strofus with a smile. "It's nice that we could enjoy this flyover today despite the cold and clouds. It's also nice to

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see the young people here. Teaching them about our history is an important thing to do."

Strofus, who also provided a special slide show presentation during her visit to St. Ansgar, has been invited to 18 different states to do the same.

Still going strong, Strofus said she loves to speak to young people about her experiences being a pilot in WWII. She also reminded those present that WASPs were not considered veterans until the G.I. Improvement Act of 1977.

With most of the male pilots serving in combat by early in 1943, the military started using female flyers as pilots and instructors in the Army Air Corps.

These women aviators, more than 1,000, started flying as civilians until the Women's Airforce Service Pilots unit was formed in August 1943. Their service opened the door for female USAF pilots that would follow.

"There are not many of these World War II women pilots left," said Phil Fleischer, organizer of Saturday's "WASP Appreciation Day," at the St. Ansgar Legion.

"Liz is a very interesting person filled with experience and knowledge from that time," he said. "She's spoken all over the Midwest."

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