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NEWSDAY PHOTOS / ALEJANDRA VILLA

The 75th anniversary party at Republic Airport included a demonstration of the only operational DC-3 in the tristate area.

Historic plane honored

- Museum marks 75th anniversary of DC-3
- WWII veteran recalls missions over France

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Bob Reynolds hadn't been aboard a DC-3 since Harry S. Truman was president, but once the historic aircraft owned by the American Airpower Museum began taxiing around Republic Airport on Friday, memories of flying a similar plane in World War II and beyond came flooding back.

Friday was the 75th anniversary of the first flight by a DC-3, a plane that revolutionized air travel. So the museum threw a birthday party, complete with champagne toast, as its military version of the DC-3 and Reynolds, 88, of Plainview, shared top billing.

The museum's plane — the only operational DC-3 in the tristate area — was one of nearly 11,000 created by Douglas Aircraft Co. and other manufacturers licensed to build it.

"You simply cannot overstate the role of the DC-3 in

how it changed air travel from a precarious, death-defying experience to a safe and reliable means of getting from here to there," Republic Airport director Michael Geiger said.

Joshua Stoff, curator of the Cradle of Aviation Museum in East Garden City, said Douglas began work on "one of the greatest airliners ever built" in 1934 in Santa Monica, Calif. It made its debut there the following year.

Before embarking on a five-minute taxiing ride down and back the runway, Reynolds called the twin-engine DC-3 "a very stable plane to fly. It's very forgiving. It was made to last."

He enlisted after Pearl Harbor and the Army Air Force sent him to school to learn to fly the C-47, the Army designation for the DC-3.

The newly minted second lieutenant shipped out to England where his first mission was ferrying paratroopers to France early on the morning of D-Day in 1944. Later, he flew four missions to drop supplies



Bob Reynolds of Plainview relives his piloting days on a DC-3.

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to surrounded American paratroopers during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944.

"I came back from Bastogne with 100 holes in the airplane and an oil leak, but the airplane kept me alive," Reynolds said.

He went to work as a pilot for Pan American in 1950 flying DC-3s, which carried up to 28 passengers. By the time he retired in 1982, he was at the controls of Boeing 747 jumbo jets.

Reynolds sat behind the cockpit as museum pilot Jim Vocell taxied the plane away

from the museum. Over the roar of the engines, Reynolds said "it feels familiar."

Vocell, a museum vice president who began being flying DC-3s commercially in 1978, said the facility's aircraft was built in 1945 and flew with the British, French, Belgian and Israeli air forces before it was retired in the late 1990s and sold to the museum eight years ago.

Before he disembarked, Reynolds said "it brought back a lot of memories. The airplane gets under your skin."