

An Alaskan's assault on the Mackinac Bridge Recalled

By Danny K. Shepherd

A Man's man - That's how those who knew Captain John Lappo back in the 50's referred to the pilot made infamous by his aerial assault on the Mackinac Bridge that connects the upper peninsula of Michigan with the lower.

The story made headlines across the Midwest, and indeed the country, when news leaked out about the former Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, Executive Officer, flying a 2 ½ million dollar reconnaissance configured bomber, a RB-47E Stratojet, under the world's longest suspension bridge.

It wasn't one of Captain Lappo's 28 bombing runs north of the 38th parallel during the Korean War, or the stealth and skill used to fly and navigate the Soviet Union just to isolate the location of enemy radar's, or his tour of duty in Vietnam that made him infamous, but rather, it was a daredevil feat of gigantic proportions that brought John Lappo to the attention of all the world, or at least to the attention of everyone who lived in the United States, and unquestionably to all who were currently assigned to the Strategic Air Command (SAC).

On 24 April 1959, the brash, confident, daring, highly respected and highly decorated 39-year-old Reconnaissance Aircraft Commander, with 15 years and 5700 hours of flying experience under his belt, wanted to add one more conquest to his long list of accomplishments. He had an inspiration - one that would be fulfilled, and one that would forever change his life as he and his family then knew it.

Born in Muskegon, Michigan in 1920, John grew up dreaming of men and their flying machines. He joined the military from Muskegon in 1943, and completed eight months of pilot training while assigned to the Army-Air Force Flying School in 1944. Upon successful completion of the school, John was awarded his 'Flight Officer' status and was ordered to Clark AFB, Philippines where he eventually transported troops throughout the Pacific to far fetched places like Shanghai, China; Guam, Hawaii, and Japan.

At first Lappo wondered if he'd ever get to fly outside of flying school. He and a few other Flight Officers were initially assigned to the depot at Clark awaiting further assignment to a squadron. Fearful that his flight currency status ran the risk of expiring, he convinced the sergeant-in-charge of

the depot to check out a couple of planes to him and his buddies so they could remain flight status qualified. The sergeant insisted on a hand receipt, but John got his planes.

He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in January 1945 while still in the Philippines and was assigned to the 13th Troop Carrier Squadron (TCS), later renamed the 22nd TCS where he flew C-46's, C-54's, and DC-3's in support of troop movements. Promoted to First Lieutenant in July 1946, John continued flying troops throughout the Pacific and later, the European Theater of Operations.

Lappo got out of the service in 1948 and returned to Muskegon, Michigan where he had hoped to fit back into the mainstream, perhaps find a nice girl and raise a family.

His love for flying never waned so it wasn't surprising that John remained in the Active Reserve and retained his Class 'A' reserve flying status following clean-up operations from WWII.

In 1951 however, First Lieutenant Lappo was recalled to active duty with the outbreak of the Korea War.

His first of 28 bombing missions into North Korea originated from the very base where he would spend the next several months of his life, Naha, Okinawa. Now, 'Captain' Lappo, he opened the bomb bay doors of his B-29 and recounted "bombs away" on strategic as well as tactical targets throughout the war zone, only missing his target on one occasion when controllers failed to vector him onto a target and his fuel ran short causing him to land at Suwon, South Korea, which was then called K-13 and was located approximately 20 miles south of Yongsan Army Base in Seoul.

In fact, Tony Queeno, Lappo's right gunner, fondly recalls the event and associates it with the day baseball great Ted Williams was shot down. He remembers they dispatched helicopters from Suwon sometime after they had landed and all the scuttlebutt recounting the successful rescue that followed. Although his plane was never directly hit by enemy anti-aircraft artillery, stress fractures abounded and shrapnel from the exploding artillery left its mark on the plane on more than one occasion. According to Queeno, the shrapnel from one such onslaught "penetrated through our right wing just missing our wing tank."

During the course of the war, the 'Command Decision' dropped 2.5 million pounds of bombs on North Korean targets, and became the world's only bomber 'jet ace', having shot down five Soviet built MIG-15's during her Korean War Service.

In addition to the Korean Service Medal, John was awarded the United Nations Service Medal, the Air Commendation Medal, and the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal among numerous other decorations and commendations.

Following the Korean War, Capt. Lappo received orders to attend the Officer Squadron School in Montgomery, Alabama. He was granted three days leave and transient time from El Paso, Texas to get there, but John had one very important stop to make along the way. He took a detour via Muskegon, Michigan where he anxiously and excitedly asked his sweetheart, Kay Robinson, to marry him. She accepted his proposal and with special permission from the church, they were married the following day. And on the very next day she accompanied him to Montgomery.

John was subsequently transferred to Lockbourne AFB, Ohio as a member of the Eighth Air Force's 10th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron of the 26th Wing, later renamed the 352nd Bomb Squadron of the 301st Bomb Wing, Medium, Strategic Air Command.

It was during this tour of duty that Lappo received the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for his intelligence (PHOTINT and ELINT) gathering role against the Soviet Union.

Although information available from that time indicates that he received his medal for services other than intelligence gathering activities, cover stories such as 'risky' and 'highly sensitive' polar weather reconnaissance missions were used to divert attention from the 'Spy In The Sky' operations that he and his fellow reconnaissance pilots were flying deep into Soviet air space. These missions were so covert, that at times some believe that not even President Dwight D. Eisenhower, or his closest aide, General Andrew Goodpaster were knowledgeable of their existence.

In fact, Eisenhower had forbidden any flights over Soviet airspace at that time, saying they "amounted to acts of war!" At least that was what the public and the rest of the president's staff and cabinet were led to believe. But Ike and his head of the Strategic Air Command, General Curtis E. LeMay, and the Secretary's of Defense and State, all four knew differently.

Early on the morning of 8 May 1954, three RB-47's took off from Fairford, RAFB in Great Britain and flew around Norway to Murmansk. Two of the aircraft returned the way they came, the third, piloted by Capt. Hal Austin, flew south deep into Soviet territory - their objective: to conduct photo intelligence operations against nine different airbases in hopes of isolating Russian long-range bombers. And as an added bonus, possibly detecting for the first time, the operational deployment of Soviet MIG-17 Fresco's. Early into the overflight several MIG-15 Fagot's attempted to identify the

intruders as friendly or foe, but because of the RB-47's altitude the 15's were no match for the lofty medium bombers. Just a few minutes later however, before Austin, his Co-Pilot, Carl Holt, and their navigator, Vance Heavilin, knew what hit them, several MIG-17's had engaged them in a hail of cannon fire they likened to hell's fury. They never expected the MIG-17's. The SAC Intel Officers who briefed them prior to departing England knew the possibility existed, but never bothered to tell Austin or his crew. That was the way back then, as it is now, 'the need to know'. The MIG-15's had obviously determined that the SAC bomber was unfriendly. The reconnaissance-configured bomber was shelled, ripping a gashing hole in its skin, and tracers continued to flash by on all sides. Austin, calling upon his training as an aircraft commander, miraculously maneuvered his bomber out of harm's way and back to Fairford.

Austin and his crew were the first to receive General LeMay's explanation why he was giving them the DFC vice a Silver Star, "...You've got to explain that to congress and everyone else in Washington so I'll give you guys a couple of DFC's instead!" What LeMay really feared was global exposure of his 'Spy in the Sky' operations and any possible embarrassment the Commander-in-Chief would suffer should the Soviets be able to confirm their accusations of overflights - acts of aggression!

General LeMay was more determined than ever to expand his network of bases where SAC subordinated reconnaissance bombers, RB-47E'S, could strike an intelligence gathering offensive against the Soviets and their iron curtain strongholds, without fear of retaliation. Greenland offered such a place and squadrons from as far as Lockbourne AFB, where Lappo was stationed, began arriving en masse. Air bases, radar telemetry, and other order-of-battle information was the target of these 'Spies in the Sky' - all gathered for the highly classified, and extremely sensitive operation known only as 'Home Run!'

Shortly after Capt. Austin survived the onslaught of those MIG-17's, Capt. John Lappo and 26 other aircraft commanders were divided into three groups and were tasked to fly three similar, yet very different missions. Each mission consisted of nine aircraft and their crews, and all were flown over the polar ice cap from Thule, Greenland deep into the Soviet Union. Their goal, to conduct a unified broadbrush intrusion into the Soviet Union in an attempt to light up Soviet radar's throughout the northern hemisphere and to conduct photo reconnaissance and ELINT collection operations against Russia's nuclear testing facilities at Novaya Zemlya and other tactical and strategic military facilities in the area. They were further responsible for locating naval bases, airfields, new construction facilities,

and other military and industrial targets in the Northern, Baltic and Pacific Fleet areas of operation and evaluating Russia's Electronic Counter Measures (ECM), capabilities.

Sergei G. Gorshkov, 'Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union,' was primarily responsible for the huge buildup of the Soviet Navy and it was General LeMay's objective to know all he could about Russia's order-of-battle, the location of its war machines, and their electronic nomenclature, including the offensive and defensive capabilities of each.

All three missions were a huge success, but only 26 of the 27 aircraft returned to Thule as prescribed. Major Lappo's experience would be different. Launching 900 miles from the North Pole and only five hours from Russia's industrial hub, Lappo refueled his RB-47E over the vast wastelands of the arctic, but could not zero in on his primary target once he penetrated Soviet airspace because of thick cloud cover. As the aircraft commander, he had to make a critical decision between aborting the mission or doing the dangerous and time-consuming 360-degree circuit to accomplish his objective. During a recent account of that mission in a documentary film, titled "Spies in the Sky" and aired on the History Channel, Lappo said, "We went in there about 30 miles, and solid undercast, and I looked over to the left about 15 miles and there was our target. So, I asked the crew if they were with me on making that 360-degree and they told me, well, the general told us not to make the 360, and I told them, well, hey, if we don't get that target he's going to have to send another airplane after it." When Lappo and his crew finally returned to Thule, the general approached him and said, "John we told you not to make that 360." Lappo explained why he did what he did and the general exclaimed, "Yup, you shouldn't have, but I wished I had a squadron of (aircraft commanders just like) you!" 'Major' Lappo had just won the Distinguished Flying Cross!

Lappo and his crew would fly many more missions to exploit Russian radar's, and order-of-battle targets, but unlike Austin, Major Lappo was engaged but never fired upon by the MIG's reacting to his overflights, in all likelihood because they were probable Fagots and unable to maintain the altitude and speed of the reconnaissance configured Stratojet.

Kay didn't know where her husband even was. All she knew is that her and the kids were stuck in Canal Winchester, Ohio and Major Lappo was off on some mission - weather related as far as she knew. But not in her wildest dreams did she imagine he was busy flying spy missions over Russia. She was so frustrated by the lengthy periods of TDY, her pregnancy at the time, and the secrecy of his service that the thought of returning to Muskegon, Michigan crossed her mind on more than one occasion. Five children, Suzette, John III, Leo Edward, Michael, and Helena all wondered with their

mother when their father would return home. Was he in Labrador or perhaps Keflavik participating in yet another 'Operation Weather Stop'? Possibly it was another special operation like 'Project Monticello' with Lockheed in Marietta, Georgia, or 'Project Snow Flurry'. It could have even been another photo intelligence mission against the bases in the Soviet Far East along the Kamchatka Peninsula that ultimately had Lappo and his fellow aircraft commanders landing at Eilson AFB, Alaska. In fact, it could have been one of dozens of secret missions John has flown over the years, and she would have never known. Lappo's loyalty and trustworthiness to his country, to his service, was unquestionable. But her love for John never wavered, and soon, although not in the way she would have hoped for it to have happened, she would see John a lot more than she had been accustomed to.

Lappo was promoted to captain five times! Back in the 50's, an incentive program referred to as 'spot promotions,' more of a mathematical nightmare according to some, caught Lappo in a roller coaster ride between Captain and Major that wouldn't end until January 1961 when he was permanently promoted to Major. In most cases, squadron commanders were given a quota of 'spot promotion' slots. One month Lappo may have deserved the promotion, but there was no guarantee it was his to keep. If he failed to maintain minimum proficiency standards he was demoted and in some instances, the pilot had no control over meeting those standards. Following one such demotion Lappo recalls stopping by his favorite Hardware Store in the small Columbus suburb of Canal Winchester and the clerk saying, "Are you a Captain, again, Lappo? Did you screw up again?" It was a running joke between the two of them and the merchant meant no disrespect to John, as he fully understood the inherent quirks of the spot promotion system.

In one case however, he credited his demotion to his dear friend and otherwise 'Ace' navigator, Harry B. Wolfe. While simulating bombing runs out of his home airfield at Lockbourne, Wolfe failed to accurately steer his pilot to the initial aiming point and when all was said and done, the crew was amazed that they had missed the target by nearly 14,000 feet. Until now, no one ever really knew why. In Wolfe's own words he recently offered this account, "It was an offset bomb run and I put the information in backwards. Unfortunately it was a competition run and my radar photography sent the wheels into ecstasy. Then the results came in. The thud of my stomach falling was heard round the world." According to Lappo, "the navigator could make you, or break you back in those days." How prophetic those words were to become.

According to historical weather data available for 24 April 1959, it was clear and mild that Friday as Capt. Lappo and his crew were returning from a routine nighttime simulated bombing run and

celestial navigation mission. It was early afternoon when their flight home neared the Mackinac Straits over Lake Michigan.

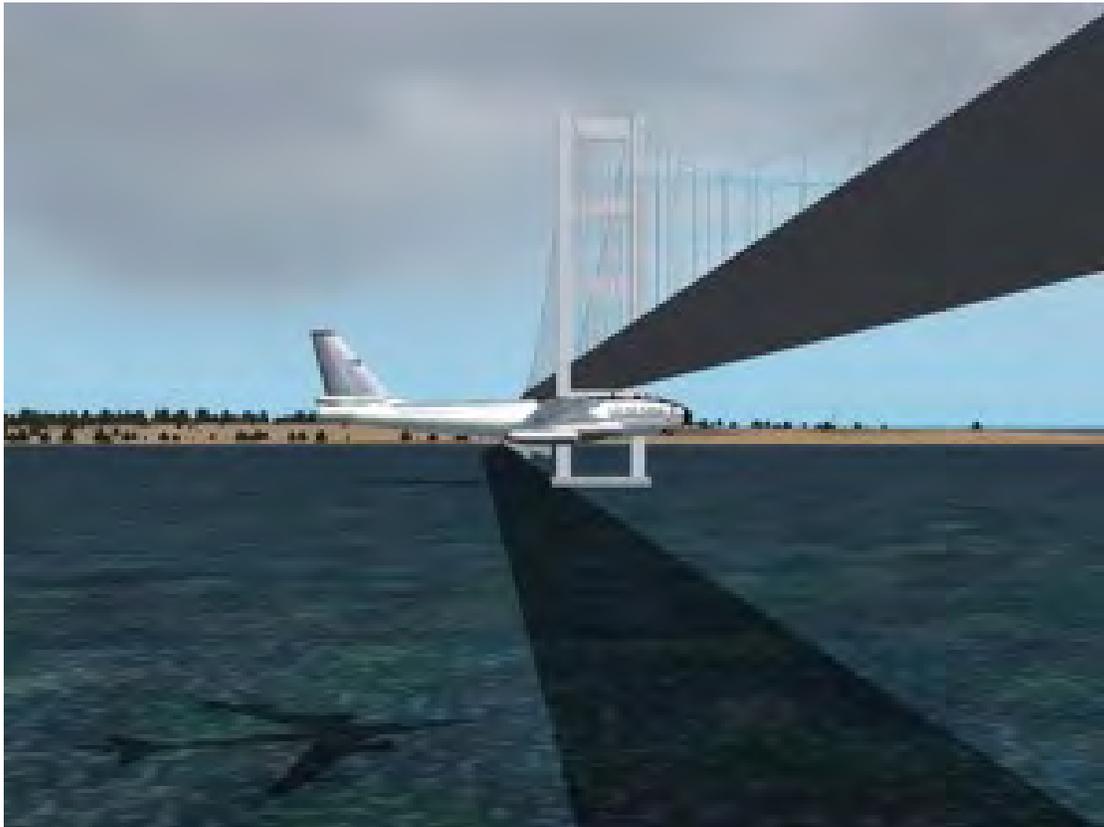
The sun glistened off the occasional mild whitecaps of the great lake below, almost a mirror reflection of the sky that held Capt. Lappo's RB-47E aloft, like a glider gently floating, lifting slightly with every burst of air. The roar of the bomber's six engines seemed silent in contrast to the serenity of the moment. After all, the world's first swept-wing Stratojet should perform no less gracefully than it was at that very moment in time.

This was precisely the reason Capt. Lappo joined the Army-Air Corps. Where else could a man retreat and see all the mountain tops at a single glance, borderless land masses of green pastures, deep blue lakes, and flowering meadows, and forget the hustle and bustle of the asphalt jungle below? The world's longest suspension bridge was located in Michigan and connected Mackinaw City in the south with St. Ignace in the north. It appeared no larger than a one-lane country road from high aloft in Lappo's cockpit. He observed that only two vehicles were on the bridge, a car and a truck, both heading north. The bridge's dual towers looked like stairways to heaven and climbed more than 500 feet into the sky; and her wire cables spanned the strait for more than a mile and a half, linking the sandy shores in the south with those in the north.

Then, quicker than the sun's rays could cast the bomber's shadow onto the waters beneath it, the silence was broken. The Strategic Air Command bomber headed nose first toward the blue surf below, its wings stretched like a majestic eagle, defiantly making its descent toward the mighty 'Big Mac.' The thrusts of its engines were deafening, but everyone aboard heard Capt. Lappo exclaim, "I'm taking her under!"

The crew was filled with excitement, save one. On this day his trusted friend and usual navigator, Harry B. Wolfe, wasn't onboard. He had transferred and a new navigator, not yet brought into the fold, had augmented the crew instead.

The RB-47 continued to descend and came within 75 feet of reaching the deck when Lappo, heading east with the afternoon sun at his back, leveled her out and raced his way above the whitecaps at speeds that seemed to leave the plane's shadow in its jet stream.



Flying under the Bridge

Then at the blink of an eye it was all over, he had shot through the 199-foot clearance beneath the bridge's deck and flew the plane up in a trajectory ascent reminiscent of an Apollo take-off from Cape Kennedy. The crew gave out a reverent, yet subtle hoorah knowing that they had just participated in one of the most beautiful pieces of flying ever undertaken by an Air Force pilot.

When asked whether there were any objections to him doing it, Lappo repeated what he had said during one of many newspaper interviews that followed, "Yeah, the navigator recommended against it. Of course, I had no idea at the time that he was the general's son and that he was going to go rat on me once we got back to Lockbourne."

This wasn't Lappo's first demonstration of flying bravado. A few years earlier he gave a booming salute to his old community back in Muskegon when he swooped down over the town's airfield in another Stratojet just to say hello. The switchboard at the police station stayed lit up for nearly an hour after that stunt.

When asked why he did it, he said, "why do men climb mountains? Or what motivates them to go into space? It's just a sense of adventure that some men have and some don't." He added, "I've always wanted to fly under a big bridge. I thought it would be the Golden Gate. When I was flying missions to

the Far East, I was a co-pilot, and I wanted to fly under the Golden Gate at night. But I couldn't induce the pilot to do it."

That triumphant ascent up from the 'Big Mac', like an eagle returning to its perch high upon a mountain top, would be ingrained in John's memory forever. When asked to describe the 'sheer exhilaration' he said he had experienced after the conquest he offered this, "How can you describe all the feelings a man experiences when he first sees a beautiful woman and falls in love? How can anyone understand what it's like on your first solo flight when first learning to fly without ever having experienced it for themselves; or the relief one feels after penetrating enemy lines, avoiding anti-aircraft-artillery while delivering your payload of bombs, and then making it back to your home base alive time after time? Some feelings are too difficult to describe or to put into words, but I can tell you this, it was exhilarating to say the least!" These thrills, this quest for exhilaration, would be the last Lappo would experience as a pilot in the United States Air Force.

On August 10, 1959 it was preordained that he would be found guilty as charged at a general court-martial. He was accused of violating Article 92 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, disobeying a lawful order.

Specifically, Air Force regulation 60-16 at that time stated, "Except during take-off and landing, aircraft will not be flown at less than 500 feet above the ground or water."

Lappo, representative of his honesty and trustworthiness, was quick to take full responsibility for his actions, and immediately pleaded guilty to the charges against him. Accordingly, it was not necessary for the prosecution to present witnesses substantiating guilt. John Lappo's character and integrity were above reproach, and this wasn't a court-martial about aerobatics or unsafe flying practices; his skills were superior and, for him, this feat was no more difficult or risky than taking his boots off at night. He was forthright in owning up to his actions - he was and remains a man of his word and believes that a man's word is his bond.

Character witness after character witness took the stand on Lappo's behalf, and to an officer and a gentleman, the comments echoed the same praise over and over again.

When asked whether or not he would go out of his way to recruit Capt. Lappo into his command if he were not, Colonel Finlay F. Ross, Jr., Headquarters 301st Bomb Wing stated, "I most certainly would...Captain Lappo is a man's man...he can serve with me any time, any place."

And when his squadron commander took the stand the defense asked, "Colonel Rees, how long have you known Captain Lappo?" "Approximately 6 years," he responded. Once again, the defense, "As his commander, and as a colleague, as an aircraft commander, will you please describe to this court your observations of Captain Lappo's abilities as a pilot and aircraft commander?" The Colonel obliged, "To make a statement, or to speak of Captain Lappo, is extremely difficult, to the extent that it's hard to find a place to start. His reliability is outstanding, and I've always known it to be so. Throughout this time I have watched wing commanders select him repeatedly for difficult missions, special assignments, classified projects of all types, difficult reconnaissance missions performed out of Iceland...the nature of the mission(s) necessitates that I say no more...(he) received the Distinguished Flying Cross." He continued, "On one occasion, fuel cell repair was going on...one of the airmen passed out...Lappo took matters in his own hands, and, in fact, was directly responsible for saving the boy's life.

During this particular operation (out of Greenland) Captain Lappo's wife was expecting a child, and, operating under extremely difficult circumstances, never once (did he ask) to be with his wife (in Ohio) through this period. This is the type approach that he takes to his duties. I don't think that I can say that he puts his duties before his family, in fact, I know I couldn't, but I could say that he never lets his personal problems, his family problems interfere." Colonel Rees made this remark knowing that shortly after they returned from this particular operation, Kay had the child she had been carrying, but unlike the other five, this baby lived to be only two weeks old.

Colonel Rees' testimony continued on for sometime, but in the final analysis it boiled down to these few comments of admiration, the sort of comments only a true leader of men can make about one of his own. He said, "Go back to the front gate, and it says 'Peace Is Our Profession,' and this requires a strong force. We're all familiar with that mission. General Powers has been nailed down as to what is an adequate deterrent for us. He says no one knows. Sure, this is true. If some day SAC's mission would be boiled down to one aircraft and one crew and one weapon, I think that Lappo would qualify without a doubt to be the aircraft commander..."

Major John W. Burkhart, 352nd Bomb Squadron, preferred the charges against Lappo in his capacity as the squadron's temporary commander in the absence of Colonel Rees. However, when asked to comment on Lappo's ability as an aircraft commander Burkhart said, "...I have been with him for 5 ½ years...I've never flown with a stronger pilot." During cross-examination when asked if he felt this was

a serious violation, he responded, "I believe it's a serious violation. But in regards to the general court recommendation, I disagreed with it. But I was informed to sign these charge sheets as a matter of formality." The prosecutor probed further, wondering aloud, "Why did you prefer charges if you disagreed with this court?" Surely considering a response reflective of the majority of his peers throughout the Strategic Air Command, and wanting to express the feelings of not only the personnel in his squadron, but those of aircrews and aircraft commanders stationed worldwide, Burkhart responded, "I agreed on punishment of a lesser extent," This incident does not effect my evaluation of Captain Lappo "whatsoever."

"Sir, the defense would like to call as its next witness, Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Bachtell," Squadron Commander of the 99th Air Refueling Squadron at Westover Air Force Base, Massachusetts. "Sir, how long have you known Captain Lappo?" asked the defense counsel. The Colonel replied, "Approximately three years...I was in the 26th Wing...as an aircraft commander (with him) ...(then) as squadron commander which is now the 353rd Bomb Squadron, (and then) I became squadron commander of the 352nd Bomb Squadron..." The defense followed up, "Would you please tell the court what your observations have been of Captain Lappo as an aircraft commander and as a pilot?" Bachtell began, "First of all, I will refer to an operation which I commanded at Goose Air Base in Labrador in 1957. I had the B-47s up there...in support of SAC USEM...I had an airplane that was damaged...we cut off the wing tip, to rid it of the torn metal. At this time, I had most of the un-highly qualified crews with me. So, the Wing Commander (back at Lockbourne) had to select somebody to come and get the airplane. He selected Captain Lappo to do this, because of his professional ability as a pilot. He flew the airplane back without incident. Second I refer you to Operation Home Run...the third instance...Operation Weather Stop...and the fourth and last item...was a proposed trip around the world...over the poles...with approximately 5 or 6 air refuelings, nonstop. And I had planned to send 3 crews. I had chosen Captain Lappo, Major Burkhart, and Major Comerford..." The defense continued, "...did you have any occasion to question his reliability?" Bachtell, as though he sensed Lappo would one day join other pilots only of the elite kind, those enshrined in air museums around the country, said this in response: "As far as I'm concerned I would like to make a real strong statement in regards to ability and, particularly, in Captain Lappo's case, because of his ability which I feel is a bit unique over and above the rest of us, he has been able to maintain our careers and our proficiency line by averageability. I have followed, I don't know whether you Gentlemen are familiar with it or not, I followed the career of General Doolittle; lots of people called him lots of names; but he, by far, contributed more to aviation, and the Air Force, from the cockpit, than any man that I know, and I personally compare Captain Lappo's type of flying ability with this man."

It was a few minutes after 5p.m. (1709 hours to be precise), on that Monday afternoon when the jury returned their findings and the President of the court-martial, Col. Clyde B. Kelsay, read the sentence:

"Captain Lappo, it is my duty as president of this court to inform you that the court in closed session and upon secret written ballot, two-thirds of the members present at the time the vote was taken concurring, sentences you to be reprimanded and to forfeit \$50.00 per month for six months."

With the trial at his back, Lappo wasn't thinking about what Kay was preparing for dinner that night, although she weighed very heavily on his mind. His honor, his reputation and the reputation of his loving wife and five children had also been on trial, or so he had thought.

Kay greeted him with loving arms when he returned home that evening, reassuring him that he was still her knight in shining armor. But he wouldn't sleep well that night, or the next, or the next. He was a pilot, but he was not allowed to fly.

He had to get the okay of a flight review board before he could ever fly for the Air Force again, but the harsh written reprimand handed down to him from the Commanding General of the Eighth Air Force, Lt. General W.C. Sweeney, Jr., although only a mere formality resulting from the court-martial, was sufficiently damaging for an independent review board to deny his request. Who was going to defy the reprimand of a General, the man who approves officer promotions? Crushed, but not broken, Lappo appealed to the hierarchy of the Air Force year after year in hopes of being reinstated as a pilot, to once again serve his nation aloft rather than on the ground.

But in the end, it was that urge of adventure that some men have, and some don't, to climb mountains, mush dogs to the north pole, and fly airplanes under bridges that caused John Lappo's serenity in the sky, at least while flying for the United States Air Force, to come to an abrupt halt.

Colonel Lappo and Kay continued to live in Eagle River, Alaska. And over the many years here, John has taken several planes aloft, most fondly his Cessna 185 and his trusty Super Cub. Up above where the eagles fly, above the mountains high, over the open tundra and beyond Mt. McKinley, just him, his plane and the serenity that only pilots have come to know. From aloft he's watched the caribou roam, the Orcas and Belugas swim the Pacific Ocean, up Cook Inlet and into Resurrection Bay. He's seen the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) up close and personal from time to time, but it's this one thing he dreams more than any other - "will I ever get the chance to fly under the Golden Gate Bridge at night, or the 'Big Mac' - just one more Stratojet flight?"

It is with regret I tell you of the passing of Col. John Lappo, USAF Retired, John Lappo passed away in his sleep on Nov. 15, 2003 following a long illness. His Memorial service was held at the VFW Hall in Eagle River, Alaska on Saturday, Nov. 22, 2003. Another hero has been called back to duty...

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