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Leo M. Sabota

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Services for Leo M. Sabota, 88, of Tyler will be at noon Monday, September 17, 2012, at Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Tyler with Msgr. Joseph Strickland officiating. Entombment will be at Rose Hill Mausoleum.

Dr. Leo Sabota, a carrier-based aviator who was an integral part of the Berlin Airlift before embarking on a second career as university professor, died Thursday after a brief illness.

Lt. Commander Leo M. Sabota was born on Sept. 8, 1924, in Browerville, Minn., to Frank and Mary Sabota. He grew up on a nearby farm and graduated from Browerville High School in 1941 at age 16.

In April 1943, upon reaching age 18, Leo enlisted as an aviation cadet in the U.S. Navy. He was called to active duty in August 1943. Upon completion of flight training, including operational in dive bombers (SBD) and fighters (F6F), he was commissioned an ensign in the U.S. Naval Reserve on May 8, 1945.

His first duty assignment was to an SNJ training squadron at NAAS Barin Field where, as flight instructor, he trained prospective naval aviators in fighter tactics and gunnery. In August 1945, he was accepted for a regular Navy commission. His next flying assignment was an aircraft commander in multi-engine transport aircraft flying routes in the South Pacific and to Japan, China and Korea. In April 1947, Leo was ordered to VR8, an RSD transport squadron at NAS John Rogers, Hawaii. This squadron flew routes to the states, Guam, Kwajalein, Philippines and Japan. In November 1948, the entire squadron moved to Rhein-Main Air Force Base, Germany, to fly in the Berlin Air Lift. As aircraft commander of an R5D aircraft, he was the first Navy pilot to complete 100 missions on the Berlin Air Lift for which he was awarded the Air Medal. He received media recognition for the 100 missions, each which was marked with an "X" on a baseball cap.

He said flying the dangerous missions was a benchmark in his life because "I always loved a challenge."

In April 1949, LTJG Sabota was assigned to VR5 at NAS Seattle, which served the Aleutian chain and Alaska. The squadron moved to NAS Moffett Field in the early 1950s.

On June 27, 1950, the day the Korean War began, found LTJG Sabota the plane commander of an R5D en route to Pusan, Korea. During the next nine months, he was a member of a detachment to Haneda Airport in Tokyo flying R4D aircraft to and from

Korea.

In May 1951, Leo was ordered to shore duty on the staff of the BUAER General representative at Wright Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio. After two years there in the facilities planning branch Leo received orders to VC4, a night/all weather carrier squadron at NAS Atlantic City, N.J. The squadron supplied detachments for all East Coast carriers flying F4U Corsairs, F3Ds and F2H aircraft.

Leo served on a number of aircraft carriers including the USS Leyte, Valley Forge, Antietam, Tarawa, Siboney and Intrepid, completing two Mediterranean deployments, and a number of CVS cruises out of Quonset Point.

The next orders took Leo to the General Line School in Monterey, Calif, in July 1955. Upon completion of Line School in January 1956, Lt. Sabota was sent to the University of Minnesota for duty under instruction in the Five Term Program. He graduated in December 1957 with a bachelor of arts degree.

In May 1960, he was selected for post-graduate study and reported to the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Medford, Mass., for duty under instruction. Upon receiving a master's degree in International Law in June 1961, Leo next received orders to NATTU in Philadelphia as an Executive Officer.

Educational assignments included one year attending the Navy Postgraduate School, two years at the University of Minnesota where he received a bachelor's of arts, summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, and one year attending the Fletcher School of International Law in Minnesota and Diplomacy where he received his master's degree.

In June 1963, LCDR Sabota was ordered to his final duty station at Naval Air Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where he filled the billet of Flight Support Officer. He retired from active duty in 1965 after 22 years of service.

Memories of his military career can be found in Tyler at the Historic Aviation Memorial Museum, where he was a longtime docent.

Upon retirement from the Navy, he began a second career as a university professor, department chairman and dean at Tennessee Wesleyan University in Athens, Tenn., and Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas.

He earned a doctorate of philosophy degree from the University of Tennessee in 1968. He retired a second time in the mid-1990s and later moved to Tyler. There, he served many years with the Tyler Literacy Council.

Survivors include his wife, Cleo of Tyler; son, Michael Sabota and wife Jamie of Tyler; daughter, Marty Sabota Perry and husband, Randall of Fort Worth; and grandchildren, Zachary Sabota and wife, Britt of Tyler, and Lexie Sabota of Madrid, Spain.

The family will receive friends from 4-6 p.m. Sunday at Lloyd James Funeral Home.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Historic Aviation Memorial Museum, 150 Airport Dr., Tyler, 75704.



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