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LONGMONT -- Even though he served two stints in the United States Air Force and logged about 25,000 flight hours with United Airlines, Preben "P.K." Bonde insists he never got tired of the thrill of being in the air.

Bonde will be inducted today into the Colorado Aviation Hall of Fame. He is one of seven folks, and the sole one from Longmont, to be honored this year.

The hall of fame is an ongoing project that the Colorado Aviation Hall of Fame started in 1969. A photograph and short biography of each member of



Longmont resident P.K. Bonde, a retired vice president of flight operations for United Airlines and U.S. Army Air Corps and U.S. Air Force pilot, will be inducted into the Colorado Aviation Hall of Fame today. (Joshua Buck/Times-Call)

the hall of fame -- there have been 192 inducted so far -- hangs in the historical society's Heritage Hall in the Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum in Denver.

Inductees are Colorado natives or longtime residents who have made significant contributions in aviation in the state, or whose accomplishments "reflect great credit on Colorado," said Colorado Aviation Historical Society vice president Michael McRhodes.

"I just admire him so much because of his ethical standards and the way he treats people. He's the kind of guy that if he has a job to do, he gets it done," said Leeper, who flew for Continental Airlines.

Bonde -- a Danish-born immigrant who became a U.S. citizen in 1938, just one year before graduating from Longmont High School -- enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps in the fall of 1942.

The handsome young man left the family's farm northeast of Longmont to fly B-26 bombers -- And, toward the end of his service, the faster, sleeker A-26 -- against the Germans in World War II.

On one harrowing mission, he vividly recalls, his crew came under a steady stream of anti-aircraft fire, or flak, en route to bombing a German bridge. With soldiers shooting from the end of the bridge, the bombardier posed a simple question: them or the bridge?

"I said 'Get those you-know-whats,'" Bonde said.

By the time his service ended in 1945, Bonde had completed 44 missions.

The military called him out again in 1949 to help with the Berlin Airlift, a humanitarian mission to deliver supplies to 2.5 million people trapped in West Berlin after the Soviets' blockade of the city.

He retired in 1952 as a lieutenant colonel and returned to the career he halted after his first stint in the air force: flying for United Airlines.

During his 35 years with the airline, Bonde trained a number of pilots, most notably in 1959.

United Airlines bought the first jet airliner, the Caravelle, from the French Sud Aviation company. Bonde spent four months in Toulouse, France, training pilots on the new jets.

"The one thing that makes a good pilot is looking ahead and planning ahead. Don't get cut short, whether it involves weather, or fuel or turbulence," he said.

Bonde also flew several V.I.P.s, in both his military and commercial careers, including five-star generals and a former German chancellor. He once flew a chartered plane with Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack. In 1964, he spent three days flying Lady Bird Johnson through several western states.

Bonde retired in 1981 as the vice president of flight operations in San Francisco, a post in which he was responsible for 4,000 pilots from Salt Lake City, Utah, west to Hong Kong, China.

For his final flight, Bonde flew 11 family members to Hawaii in the classic wide-body Boeing 747. Though bittersweet, the moment was one that Bonde said he had been planning for.

"I was ready, prepared," he said.

Still, Bonde said, the last flight was as powerful as the first, when the eager young pilot flew a dinky PT-22 military trainer.

"It's fun. Think about it: You're up in the air at 35,000 feet, going about 600 miles an hour. The scenery is spectacular, especially with all the cloud formations," he said. "And it's all yours. You can't help but feel good about that."

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