

IRA C. {IKE} KEPFORD
Flying Ace, Athlete
1919 - 1987

HARBOR SPRINGS, EMMET COUNTY, MICHIGAN

IRA CASSIUS "IKE" KEPFORD
FLYING ACE, ATHLETE DIES IN HARBOR SPRINGS, EMMET COUNTY, MICHIGAN
MAY 29, 1919 – JANUARY 21, 1987

Ira Cassius "Ike" Kepford

Ike Kepford was born to parents **George Raymond** and **Emma McLaughlin Kepford**. He was a star halfback at Northwestern University.

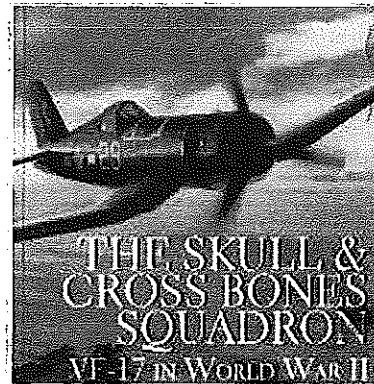
Kepford earned his Wings at Corpus Christi, Texas and Miami, Florida on Nov. 5, 1942 and then was assigned to Fighting Squadron VF-17 {Jolly Rogers} the following January.

During the battle of Solomon Sea, **Kepford** chased enemy fighters thru AAA from his own fleet to down four Jap aircraft and damaged a fifth – receiving the Navy Cross. Then on January 29 he led his wingman "**Teeth**" **Burriss** in an attack on 12 enemy fighters over Rabaul where he and **Burriss** each scored four kills and for which **Kepford** was awarded a Gold Star. In five months of Combat duty, **Ira Kepford** scored a total of 16 confirmed victories and 1 probable. He was awarded the Navy Cross, the Flying Crosses, The Air Medal, Unit Commendation-VF-17 and American Defense Service Medal.

Kepford was returned to the States and assigned to fleet Air Command and eventually Staff Command Fleet Air West Coast.

Burial:

Lakeside Cemetery
Muskegon, Muskegon County, Michigan
Extracted from Find-A-Grave website



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Ira C. Kepford

Ike Kepford, 67

Ira C. "Ike" Kepford, of Harbor Springs, died Jan. 19, 1987, at Little Traverse division, Northern Michigan Hospitals.

Funeral will be 2 p.m. Wed. Jan. 21 at the first United Presbyterian Church, Harbor Springs. The Rev. Ward Conklin will officiate.

Mr. Kepford was born May 29, 1919, in Harvey, Ill. The son of George and Emma Kepford. He attended Northwestern University where he was an All American football player.

On Dec. 7, 1941, (Pearl Harbor Day) he volunteered for the U.S. Navy and his tour of duty ended at the conclusion of World War II in 1945.

He then worked for Rexall Drugs for 20 years and served as its president for several years, retiring in 1967.

On Sept. 8, 1945, he married the former Esther Kraegel in Chula Vista, Calif.

The couple made their home in Santa Monica, Calif. For four years prior to moving to Greenwich, Conn. In 1969, they moved to Wequetonsing.

Mr. Kepford was an avid fisherman. He is survived by his wife; one son, Timothy of Harbor Springs; one daughter, Mrs. Tracy MacDonald of Ann Arbor; three grandchildren, Beth Hales, Nick and Will Kepford; three sisters, Mrs. Ruth Schaefer of Muskegon, Mrs. Grace Sitesema of Muskegon, and Mrs. Betty Rochole of Pontiac; one brother, Harry of Muskegon.

The family suggests memorials to the Petoskey Area Hospice or the First United Presbyterian Church, Harbor Springs. Envelopes for those purposes are available at the Schiller Funeral Chapel, Harbor Springs, where friends may call 7-9 p.m. today.

Extracted Greenwood Cemetery Records Newspaper date Tuesday, January 20, 1987

'Ike' Kepford, flying ace, athlete, dies here

Ira C. Kepford, known to his many friends here as "Ike," died early Monday morning, January 19, at Northern Michigan Hospitals.

Outgoing and cheerful in his manner, Ike Kepford projected always a warm, engaging, humble human spirit. His good humor was infectious. Here was a man that everyone liked.

An All-America college football athlete at Northwestern University, heroic Navy fighter pilot in World War II, later rising in his business career to the presidency of Liggett-Rexall Drug Company, Ike's life history is the stuff of legend.

He was born May 29, 1919 in Harvey, Ill.

He moved to Muskegon, Michigan with his family and graduated from a high school there.

He attended Northwestern University, where he starred as an All-America football player.

On Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1941, Ike Kepford left college to volunteer for the US Navy. He was the first flying Ace fighter pilot in the Navy and fifth highest Naval war pilot ace.

A friend referred to a book about Ike Kepford's wartime experience and noted that he flew with a fighter squadron called "Blackburn's Irregulars," whose flyers accounted for downing 156 Japanese aircraft over the Solomon Islands.

He married the former Esther Kraegel on September 8, 1945 in California. He and "Kraeg" made their home in Santa Monica for some four years and then moved East to Greenwich, Conn.

For 20 years he worked with Liggett-Rexall Drug Company, served as the firm's president for seven years and retired in 1969. The family moved to Harbor Springs in 1971.

He revelled in the out-of-doors; was known here as an avid fisherman, loved to walk in the woods.

"Here was a man who during the war laid his life on the line every day; the type of man who faced up to what had to be done and did it with excellence," a friend recalled. Yet he never lost a sense of modesty despite his achievements.

He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1945.

"The guy was exceptional," another friend added.

"He was a patriot in the very best sense of the word. He felt that this was the greatest country in the world and that he would give all he had to protect and to defend it."

He was always willing to help whenever called upon. He was an artist in working with wood.

He was a person with a great sense of humor, who enjoyed his friends, who was, this friend recalled, "the center of fun."

"I always think of him as laughing or smiling," he added.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by one son, Tim, of Harbor Springs, one daughter, Mrs Tracy MacDonald of Ann Arbor, three grandchildren, one brother, Harry, of Muskegon, and three sisters: Mrs Ruth Schaefer and Mrs Grace Sitesema, both of Muskegon and Mrs Betty Rochole of Pontiac, Michigan.

Funeral services are scheduled for 2 p.m. Wednesday, January 21, at the Presbyterian Church of Harbor Springs, the Rev Dr Ward Conklin officiating.

The family suggests that memorial contributions be made to Petoskey area Hospice or to the First United Presbyterian Church of Harbor Springs.

Extracted
Harbor Light
Newspaper
Week of
Jan. 21-27
1987