

**THE FORTNIGHTLY CLUB**  
**OF REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA**

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REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

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4:00 P.M.

**“Charles Lindbergh’s Final Flight”**

**John M. Tincher**

**Assembly Room, A.K. Smiley Public Library**

## **Background of the Author**

John Tincher was born in Hollywood California. Living in the family of a Methodist minister meant that he was raised in several different towns in Southern California before graduating from Van Nuys High School in the San Fernando Valley in 1960. He received his BA from the University of Redlands in 1964 and a Master of Divinity degree from Drew University, Madison, New Jersey in 1969. Following seminary graduation, he was ordained into the United Methodist ministry and served several churches in Northern California prior to his final pastoral appointment as senior pastor of 800 member First United Methodist Church, Turlock California. He spent a second career in educational fundraising beginning with a position on the development team at the University of Redlands. The last 15 years of his working life were spent as a self-employed consultant in non-profit development deferred giving programs.

In addition to these full-time careers, he spent 22 years as a chaplain in the United States Air Force Reserve retiring at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He holds a lifetime Community College Teaching Credential and taught, part time, at three different Community Colleges and at the University of California, Riverside Campus, Extension Division. He holds a California State License as a Marriage Family and Child Counselor as well as a California Real Estate Brokers' License. His brief political career was comprised of one 4-year term on the City Council of the City of Big Bear Lake where he also served one term as Mayor.

His first wife, Cora, passed away in 2002. He and his second wife, Karen, were married in 2007. Between them they have 4 children and enjoy occasionally spoiling 13 grandchildren.

His interest in the topic of this paper is centered on the experience he had officiating, as pastor, for the burial and memorial services of Charles A Lindbergh in Hana, Maui, Hawaii.

## **A Brief Summary of the Paper**

Although August 1974, will always be remembered as the month and year of the resignation of US President, Richard Nixon, this paper attempts to examine another significant American event occurring the same month and year.

Charles A Lindbergh, famous aviator, lived a unique life as a celebrity. As most of us are aware he and his wife spent a great deal of their time trying to avoid the public. However, his nationally recognized stand against the US entering World War II established the fact that he was not a complete recluse. This paper examines the continuation of his quest for privacy through the eyes of one who was allowed to be there with the Lindbergh family at a very difficult time in their lives.

The author attempts to share, from personal experience, the period surrounding Lindbergh's final days in the State which he had chosen as the place where he wanted to die – Hawaii. It attempts to show one man's manner of dealing in a simple, but meaningful way with death and dying.

## **Charles Lindbergh's Final Flight**

A paper by John M. Tincher

August 9, 1974 was a beautiful day at the beach in Hana, Maui, Hawaii. Interestingly enough the topic of the day was not how beautiful the beach looked or the wonderful aqua color of the ocean. No, the one unique thing that was on everybody's mind as well as their transistor radios was the news announcing the resignation of US President, Richard Nixon.

This paper will attempt to provide some substance to another event which happened during this same month of August, 1974. My wife, Cora, son Bob (seven years old), daughter Debbie (five years old) and I were residents in the parsonage at Wananalua Congregational Church in Hana, Maui. This month in Hawaii had been anticipated for approximately three years prior to our arrival there. This very small Congregational Church, at that time, was served each month by a different visiting minister from the mainland. Each minister was provided with the use of a Church automobile as well as a three bedroom two bath parsonage. As one might imagine, this particular program was extremely popular. For this reason, in most cases, the waiting period, following acceptance into the program, was approximately three years. Since my duties as the visiting minister were limited to preaching each of the four Sundays of that month, the family accompanied me on this adventure. This schedule allowed us to spend a great deal of time enjoying the sights of that particular Island in the as well as its beaches.

Although the complexion of the church membership was predominantly full-blooded Hawaiian in nature, two exceptions were Dr. and Mrs. Milton Howell. Dr. Howell was the local and only physician at the Hana Medical Center. However, upon our arrival, we discovered that Dr. and Mrs. Howell had taken the month of August, 1974, as their vacation month. In their place they had secured the services of a physician from UC Irvine. He and his wife resided in the Howell;s residence and provided necessary physician services in Dr. Howell's absence.

On August 18, 1974, I received a phone call from this visiting physician indicating that he had heard that Charles Lindbergh was returning to the island to die. This ultimately ended his time in Hana because Dr. Howell returned immediately from his vacation in order to provide medical service for Mr. Lindbergh who was his regular patient whenever the Lindberghs were on the Island. It seems that Charles Lindbergh had been diagnosed, just two months earlier, with advanced lymphatic cancer. And, he decided, at that time, that he wanted to make his final flight to where his final resting place would be – Hana, Maui, Hawaii.

I doubt there was anyone living in the Hana area who did not know that the Lindberghs had a very rustic residence situated along the ocean near Hana, as well as its exact location. I was told that this structure was so rustic that it did not have running water or electricity. Interestingly enough, it was later reputedly purchased by members of the vocal group, the Beach Boys. Given the fact that the Lindberghs had spent their entire lives trying to avoid people and enjoy the privacy which they relished, it came as no surprise that they secretly chose to rent a cottage from the Pechin Family rather than going to their own personal beach house. This beautiful cottage, located at the peak of a small hill, offered a majestic view of the Alenuihaha Channel of the Pacific Ocean which separates the islands of Maui and Hawaii. In fact, on a clear day the Lindbergh's were able to view the Big Island, Hawaii, from this beautiful, but simple, cottage.

On Thursday, August 22 my wife Cora decided that it would be good for me to walk uphill from the parsonage to the Hana Ranch Market to purchase a few provisions which were needed by the family. As I walked around this very small market I noticed a woman dressed in a trench coat with a small shopping cart loaded with groceries of all types and sizes. Since the temperature was a balmy 85° and the humidity a bit higher, her presence in a trench coat seemed rather strange. However, having been informed that the Lindbergh's were to return to the Island, I suddenly realized that this was most likely Anne Morrow Lindbergh. I waited in line while the grocery checker checked all of her groceries and placed them in appropriate sacks. I then watched as she signed her name in full. She was asked, by the checker, but turned down assistance to her car. Since I had only a few items, I was able to pay for them and immediately follow her to a dirty Jeep in the parking lot. As I approached, I introduced myself explaining that I was the pastor of the church just down the hill and that I was aware of why she and her husband had returned to the Island. Following that I simply said, "if you would like to talk to someone or if I can help you in any way please let me know." After writing down my phone number, she thanked me and indicated that she would be in touch with me. I must confess that my history classes did not teach much about the Lindberghs as persons. However, by this time I was aware of the fact that they craved privacy and that further conversation with her, at that time, was probably unwanted and unnecessary.

The following day my family and I made our daily trek to the beautiful beach in Hana. It was during our time on that beach that Mrs. Lindbergh dropped by the parsonage and left a message, which included her phone number, attached to the back door. She asked, specifically, that I call her as soon as possible. We agreed to meet the next morning, Saturday, August 24, at the parsonage.

The next day at approximately 11:30 AM Anne Morrow Lindbergh emerged from the Wananalua Church sanctuary. She explained to me that her stop in the sanctuary was an opportunity to meditate, as she frequently did prior to writing. Since the parsonage was located next door to the sanctuary on the same parcel of land, it was easy to spot her as she walked over to the pastoral residence. She carried two bags which appeared to be larger than she was and which contained flowers which she had cut to take back to the cottage.

During the course of our conversation she shared with me the horror of their first 10 years together – too much publicity, and the tragic kidnapping and murder of their small child. She also told me of their exposure to various religions – Buddhism, Hinduism, as well as the Christian faith via the Catholic Church (especially the Benedictine Order). As a result of this religious diversity she introduced me to readings which she and her husband felt appropriate for his service. I found it interesting that some of the Christian Scriptures which were helpful to them were Scriptures that are normally used in the burial services of most mainline Protestant churches. In fact, I had already included at least one of them in my thoughts for the service.

As the discussion gradually turned back to his impending death, she discussed earlier brushes with death which her husband had experienced: for instance having a Japanese zero after him. But she said that he felt this was different. In the earlier experience there was the opportunity to be lucky and avoid death. Now death was inevitable! But he faced this beautifully, and according to Mrs. Lindbergh. In fact she felt that he had arrived comfortably at a feeling of complete acceptance described by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross as the fifth of the five stages of dying in her book entitled, On Death and Dying.

After approximately two hours of discussion she was ready to return to the cottage to be with her husband. But, before she left she turned to me and said that she was very pleased to find a Protestant minister who might be available to do her husband's service. By this time, she knew our time in Hana and at the Church was coming to an end on Tuesday, August 28. She also indicated that the other thing of comfort to him was the fact that his coffin had been completed by his friend Tevi Kahaleuahi, who was a full-blooded Hawaiian and a person with whom he had fished quite frequently when they were on the Island. By this time friend Tevi and about a dozen Hawaiian men had finished digging the grave, designed by Lindbergh, which was a fourteen-by-fourteen-by- twelve-foot pit lined in lava rock. Later, as I viewed it, I could not believe that it would be possible for men carrying the casket to lower it without doing bodily harm to themselves. She seemed to think that knowing how things were coming together would ease the burden that her husband felt as he anticipated his own death.

After her son picked her up and they were driving away in their dirty, blue Jeep, I couldn't help but realize that I had shared more than an hour with a beautiful, but rather unassuming, talented, and knowledgeable person. I truly was astonished by her interest in theology and willingness to discuss both theology and philosophy. I felt privileged to have shared this time with her. I also felt highly honored that I might be the minister to perform the service depending, of course, on the date of his death. It was truly an honor to look over her plans for the service and to help in preparation for the inevitable. The following day, Sunday, I was preaching and leading morning worship at Wananalua Church. That afternoon I traveled to a satellite church to lead worship there. In the State of Hawaii old churches which are considered to be historic monuments must have worship celebrated in them at least once a month in order to retain their standing as churches. Thus, the individual who is selected to serve the Wananalua Church each month is also asked to preach on Sunday afternoons in one of three different small Hawaiian churches: Keanae, Kipahulu (site of the Lindbergh service) and Kaupo all located on the Hana side of the Island of Maui. No further conversations with the Lindbergh family occurred on this day.

On Monday morning at about 9:15 AM, right in the middle of our rather late breakfast, the phone rang. It was Ann Morrow Lindbergh. She called to tell me that Charles had just passed away. She asked if we could meet as early as 11:30 AM in order to arrange for his burial service. Apparently, the State of Hawaii requires people who are unembalmed to be buried within eight hours after being pronounced dead. Charles had made it clear that he was not to be embalmed. Thus, it was important to make final preparations for a burial service to be held that afternoon. I must confess that I was a bit overwhelmed by the realization that his burial was now a part of my responsibility as a clergy person.

Having been told where the Lindbergh's were staying, I drove out to their cottage. Anne Lindbergh greeted me with open arms. Before we began to examine more closely the graveside service she had already put together, she shared something very beautiful and meaningful to me. She shared a conversation which she had with Charles the previous Saturday evening, August 24th. She told him how we had discussed death as "a new adventure" and how we both felt that he had certainly achieved the fifth stage in the process of dying described by Elizabeth Kubler – Ross. She told me that he turned to her and said "that young man sounds like a nice person. I'd like to meet him." That meeting with Charles Lindbergh did not happen because, as Mrs. Lindbergh indicated to me that day, he felt very self-conscious about how sick he looked. As is usual, he had lost an enormous amount of weight. I would be less than forthright if I did not express what a wonderful, overwhelming, feeling I had knowing that someone about whom I had studied in school, was inviting me to participate in such an important part of his life.

In addition to my clergy leadership, Charles Lindbergh had requested the services of a full-blooded Hawaiian layperson. Thus it was my pleasure to work with a member of the Wananalua Church, who was also the lay leader of that Church. Henry Kahula was not only active in the local church, but was very much a part of the business community in Hana. He was the owner of the only gas station in Hana – a Chevron station. I could not have been assisted by a finer human being than Henry Kahula.

It's now about 2:10 PM in the afternoon, on Monday, and I'm late for the service because at 1:30 PM Cora was still typing the service and I was writing the following words of committal: "*We commit the body of General Charles A Lindbergh to its final resting place, but his spirit we commend to Almighty God knowing that death is but a new adventure in existence and remembering how Jesus said upon the cross into thy hands I commend my spirit*".

After completing the typing of the burial service, I drove to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ho'omau Church in the Kipahulu area, near Hana, where Charles Lindbergh was to be buried. It is located in a forest of tropical trees about a block off the main highway and, at that point the main highway is barely wide enough for two cars. This small church has only 10 pews. Even today there is a peaceful quietness there because the only sound one hears, other than visiting tourists, is that of the ocean and an occasional bird in the trees.

At approximately 2:30 PM on the afternoon of Monday, August 26 Henry Kahula and I led a small group, which included the Lindbergh family and a small group of local friends, in the burial service. As we sat in silence, prior to the beginning of the service, a beautiful thing happened. A Hawaiian woman, Helen Pahuwai, a native of Hana, Maui, spontaneously and quietly walked to the front of the Church. She knelt by the coffin and slowly, lovingly, blossom by blossom covered it with a blanket of plumeria. It seemed that those hands, worn by caring for others for 50 years, had performed a final act for a dear friend. Just as quickly as she had emerged she turned and, barefooted, walked back to her seat

The service, itself, was comprised of several hymns, prayers, and appropriate Scriptures. During this service the casket remained closed. Lindbergh had specified what he wanted draped over his body in the closed casket. No one was to see him in that condition. Following the service, the men who had been selected by his doctor, Milton Howell, carried the extremely heavy casket which was handmade by local Hawaiian men out of what they called "swamp Mahogany" "out to the burial site. . . As someone from California, it appeared to me to be very similar to Eucalyptus both in texture as well as weight. It weighed so much that it was transported by pickup truck from the Kipahulu Church where the service was held to the nearby gravesite. Because of its severe weight, these seven men: good friends of Charles when he was on the Island—a medical aid, a bulldozer operator, a yard man, a ranch manager, a cowboy, his Dr., and his son Land were required to guide it down the ladder into the huge hand dug grave. During this process I read the words of committal. Soon after the coffin was lowered into the grave, Henry Kahula led everyone in the singing of a traditional Hawaiian hymn.

To everyone's surprise, this service was apparently held so soon after his death that inundation by the press was not a problem. Somehow one member of the press did appear and was allowed to be present for this service. But it didn't take long, after the service, for radio and television to pick up on this historic event and to dispatch scores of people from various media sources into the small town of Hana.

The next day, Tuesday morning, we watched as everything from television trucks to carloads of reporters descended upon the small town of Hana. Most seemed to be parked on the highway out in front of the Church where we could see them from the parsonage windows. In retrospect, I guess we were lucky that they didn't all ring the doorbell of the parsonage.

At 8:30 AM the phone rang and it was Anne Lindbergh requesting that we delay our 9 o'clock meeting until 10 AM. Just as had happened yesterday, Mrs. Lindbergh had the service put together quite well using a skeleton order of worship which I had given her on Monday. We read over the readings did a few bits of rearranging in order to keep the themes fairly well together and it was ready to go. I was to have a spontaneous invocation during the service .

We were still working at approximately 11:15 AM when we heard a car door being shut. Land Lindbergh ran to the window, suspecting the press. He slammed the window shut and also the door. Seeing what was happening, I volunteered to go out and ask the individual who was obviously a newsperson to go elsewhere. I was not surprised to discover that the news man had followed me when I stopped at Hasegawa's General Store on my way out to the Pechin cottage. I was a bit uncomfortable when I discovered that the man was not by himself. Two other reporters were in the car with him. He tried to convince me that Dr. Howell had asked him to speak with Land Lindbergh. I told him that I knew that was not true and that he and the other two reporters needed to leave, out of respect for the Lindbergh family. I remained with the Lindbergh family long enough for them to get things together to move to a new waiting place prior to the memorial service which was scheduled for that afternoon.

At 2 o'clock that Tuesday afternoon approximately 30 people gathered at the Kipahulu Church near the Lindbergh gravesite for his memorial service. Sons John and Land accompanied their mother and a good friend of Charles Lindbergh, Sam Pryor ( a lifelong friend and Director for Pan American Airlines), up to the front of the Church. Again, Henry Kahula and I led the congregation in the memorial service for Charles A. Lindbergh. The service was concluded "by the singing of a hymn entitled "Hawaii Aloha". Many people would have been greatly surprised to know that this service was no longer than 30 minutes in length and did not have any kind of eulogy. Throughout his life Charles Lindbergh valued friendships with indigenous people. Perhaps what endeared them to him was the fact that they represented human beings who were uncorrupted by the artificialities which he found prevalent in society. Simplicity of life was truly the hallmark of Lindbergh's life. Perhaps it was for this reason that Charles and Anne Lindbergh were unanimous in their feeling that the service was to be simple and direct with a conspicuous absence of Charles Lindbergh's accomplishments.

Not long after the conclusion of the Service, our family left the Wananalua parsonage and drove to Kahului. It was here that we spent the night in anticipation of our flight back to the mainland the following morning. The next minister, for the month of September, was due to arrive at the Wananalua parsonage that evening.

#### EPILOGUE

Shortly after returning to the mainland I became aware of the fact that my name was mentioned in newspapers from Paris, France to Portland, Oregon as the pastor who had officiated at the Lindbergh services. I must confess that I was a bit astounded at this since many ministers perform burial and memorial services for people of notoriety and their names are never mentioned. I would soon become aware of the fact that some people paid attention to the officiating pastor's name. Somehow letters sent by angry people made their way to my office on the mainland. I suspect that almost all of these were written by Jews who felt that Lindbergh had become a Nazi sympathizer (more about why these thoughts had occurred, later). None of these letters were signed. For this reason, they are long gone.

About a month after arriving home I received a letter from an author by the name of Leonard Mosley. Mr. Mosley indicated that he wanted to write a book of memoirs about Lindbergh. He had seen my name in the newspaper and was inquiring about my role in the final days of Lindbergh's life. I responded to his letter by sharing with him some of the burial service and a few notes from the memorial service. The copy of his book which I possess was sent to me from him as a thank you for sharing information.

Two months after returning from the Island of Maui I received a four-page letter from Anne Lindbergh. The kind words she shared with me about our time together in August 1974, were most appreciated. Later, she sent another letter indicating that she wanted to provide me with autographed copies of her books as well as one of his books, entitled, Of Flight and Life as a "thank you" for having officiated at the services.

Nearly 20 years after the services I received a phone call from a gentleman named Scott Berg. It turned out that Scott had been commissioned by the family to write Lindbergh's official autobiography. Scott Berg's book, included in my bibliography, is clearly the most comprehensive biography of Charles Lindbergh. Lindbergh was the third biographical

work by author A. Scott Berg and soon became a New York Times bestseller. In 1999 A. Scott Berg won the Pulitzer Prize for biographies and autobiographies as a result of this excellent work.

Perhaps it was appropriate that Scott Berg is a Jew. As such, he minced no words in describing Lindbergh's infatuation with Hitler and his leadership prior to Hitler's efforts to exterminate Jews from the face of the earth. As World War II got underway, Lindbergh made it clear that he was in complete agreement with his father who had opposed World War I. Like his father years earlier, he felt that entering World War II was a mistake for America. He would soon join the movement designed to let the British and Jews know that America should not join their war. Ironically, for us, this movement was called America First. In spite of this, Berg is clear about his feelings that the Lindberghs were really not political animals. And in his small work Of Flight and Life, Charles said he felt the most damaging thing facing America in his day was materialism. He felt strongly that neither politics, nor economics, nor logic could save humans in the long run. Weapons were only getting stronger and, in his view, the only salvation lay in the eternal truths of the Divine.

A retired Congregational minister, Dr. Willard Hunter, retired at Pilgrim Place in Claremont, CA was extremely interested in spending time with me to discuss the Lindberghs. He would later write a book, The Spirit of Lindbergh. As the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of these services arrived, he encouraged me to return to Maui. Encouragement also came from Jeanne Pechin whose cottage had been occupied by the Lindberghs. She was so interested in having a 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary service that she made the same cottage where Lindbergh had died available to Cora and me for our return visit. Shortly after Jeanne Pechin's invitation, I received a call from Scott Berg who indicated he would like to meet and interview me. And when he discovered that we were going to be on Maui for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary service he made an extra effort to be there too. This provided us with an opportunity to spend considerable time visiting with him about this last flight of Charles Lindbergh.

The service was, again, very brief with Henry Kahula assisting me just as before. It seemed to be very meaningful to the 50+ people who showed up for the service. The local newspaper picked up the fact that this service was to be held, which encouraged the attendance of people from all over the island. Daughter-in-law, Susie Lindbergh, and daughter Aaron were on Maui and heard of the service and were in attendance. At the conclusion of the formal service those two members of the family gathered quietly at the grave, removed their shoes, and placed small stones on the grave. Souvenir hunters often take stones from the grave. Thus the stones that were placed on the grave after the service actually helped replace stones that had been taken by tourists.

The life of this author, 32 years old at the time, was greatly influenced by the Lindberghs. Both had life principles which I have found meaningful as my life has progressed now 44 years later. I am honored to be able to share this deeply meaningful experience with my brothers of the Fortnightly Club of Redlands.

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