

Thursday, January 8, 1970

From biplanes to jets, pioneer knew them all

Donald W. (Don) Saunders, 73, one of the pioneers in civil aviation in eastern Canada, died yesterday in Moncton.

Often referred to as Halifax's Mr. Flying, Mr. Saunders flew aircraft in two world wars, managed the old Halifax Municipal Airport, on Chebucto Road, and taught hundreds of Nova Scotians to fly.

Since his retirement in April, 1962, as regional superintendent of civil aviation with the department of transport, he has been living in Riverview, a suburb of Moncton.

In October, 1966, the city of Halifax honored Mr. Saunders by naming the parkway along Chebucto Road, site of the former airport, as the Saunders Park.

When World War I broke out, he was a student at Dalhousie University. He was the first man in Halifax to train with the Royal Flying Corps at Camp Borden in 1917.

He flew for eight months over the Ypres Salient scene of the hottest parts of the war's battle.

In 1927, the Halifax Flying Club was formed. He became one of its charter members, and its second flying instructor. Two years later, the city purchased land on what is now Chebucto Road, and developed an airport.

Mr. Saunders flew one of the first aircraft from the field on May 1, 1931.

He was in charge of operations at the field when Halifax played host to the trans-Canada air tour in 1931, when the largest mass assembly of

aircraft in the history of Canada was exhibited in flight.

The tour was headed by the then famous RCAF Siskin squadron, and included, among other craft, an autogyro, prototype of the modern helicopter, the Air Force's giant Ford trimotor, and the minute Heath Parasol.

He also was in charge of the airport when the first commercial airline utilized Halifax as a northern base



D. W. SAUNDERS

of operations. Pan-American Airways, then feeling its way gradually toward trans-Atlantic service, operated between Halifax and Boston during the summer season.

In 1936, Mr. Saunders was on almost constant duty at the airport during the Moose River disaster, when charter flights from many points in Canada and the eastern United States, converged on Halifax carrying reporters and cameramen to the scene.

On this occasion, Mr. Saunders' ingenuity permitted the use of the limited runway space at night. He

assembled a large number of motorists and lined the main runway with car lights.

That his effort was successful was borne out by the fact that only one minor accident occurred during the entire operation. One aircraft ran off the runway and sustained damage that was repaired within a few hours.

When the department of transport was formed in 1936, it took over civil aviation. The following year, he moved to Ottawa in the air regulations division.

He received a leave of absence in 1944 and went overseas with the RCAF. After the war, he rejoined the department of transport as superintendent of air regulations and was transferred to Toronto.

Mr. Saunders retired from the RCAF with the rank of wing commander.

He resided in Toronto for 10 years, and in 1958 was appointed regional superintendent of civil aviation in Moncton.

During his tenure as manager of the old airport, Beryl Markham touched down after a trans-Atlantic flight, and former Premier Angus L. Macdonald received his first plane ride from Halifax to Sydney.

Mr. Saunders is survived besides his wife, by two sons, Bernard, Toronto; Donald Jr., Vancouver; and a daughter, Jane, Toronto.

The funeral will be held on Friday, with service at the United Church, Riverview, at 2 p.m. Interment will be at Fairhaven Gardens, Moncton.

Saskatoon Alumni News
March 1970

Donald W. Saunders, one of the pioneers in civil aviation in Eastern Canada, died in Moncton, January 7, at the age of 73. He flew aircraft in the two World Wars, being the first man to train with the Royal Flying Corps at Camp Borden in 1917. As manager of the old Halifax Municipal Airport, he taught hundreds of Nova Scotians to fly. In 1962 he retired as regional superintendent of civil aviation with the department of transport and made his home in Riverview, New Brunswick. He attended Dalhousie in Arts, 1916-17.