Mel Knox was a true aviation pioneer.

By Andrew Geider, CP Air corporate archives.

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Mel Knox was a man of firsts. At his induction into Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame it was mentioned, "he was responsible in great measure for this nation's first commercial air link with Asia., a service of outstanding benefit to Canadian aviation."

Another of his firsts was achieved on his last flight as a commercial pilot in 1971.

He made the first flight by a Canadian carrier without a navigator, using the then-new technology known as the inertial navigation system to make his way to Hawaii and back.

At retirement he was chief overseas pilot for CP Air.

With CP Air he flew all the airline's routes to five continents and, in 1949, was captain of a Canadair 4 on the first North Pacific proving flight, which led to today's successful Vancouver-Tokyo-Hong Kong route.

The flight was the first and only landing of a Canadian carrier in Shanghai.

Mao Tse Tung's Red Army was pushing through the outskirts of the city when the flight left Shanghai. The challenges of that 14 day flight, in an unpressurized aircraft along the fog-shrouded, storm-beaten coasts of B.C., Alaska and the Aleutian Islands are non-existent today.

His role in that historic flight and his subsequent CP Air duties made him one of the people who gave the airline international status in 1964, when the Federal government names the airline Canada's official flag carrier in the South Pacific, South America, southeast Europe and northwest Europe via polar routes CP Air had developed.

Knox was born March 12, 1911, in Howick, Ontario, and moved to Tuxford, Saskatchewan as a youngster. He gained his pilot's licence in 1929 at the Moose Jaw Flying Club.

The first plane he captained was a one-passenger Gypsy Moth; its sole navigational equipment was a compass. The last aircraft he piloted, 42 years later, was a 240-passenger DC-8 with the Carousel IV inertial navigation system.

In 1937 Prairie Airways hired Knox and, at the start of the Second World War, the Royal Canadian Air Force enlisted him as a civilian trainer of student pilots. He returned to Prairie Airways in 1942, the same year Canadian Pacific Railway folded it and nine other bush air carriers into Canadian Pacific Airlines. He first flew out of Vancouver in the war years.

Between 1929 and 1971, he flew 23,500 hours and more than 11 million kms in 28 types of aircraft. He made 204 flights across the Pacific, 84 across the Atlantic, and 56 over the Arctic Ocean.