



Meet Alexander Lilly:

Left: In the thirties, in remote areas of Saskatchewan, RCMP officers chose their transportation depending on the destination and the weather. They could: (1) mount a horse; (2) hitch two horses to the buggy or sleigh; (3) use the detachment's car – which in the winter was mounted on runners; (4) use the team of sled dogs; (5) use a canoe.

As a young RCMP officer, Alex Lilly pointed out the advantages of using ski or float equipped planes in place of sled dogs and canoes.

Alexander Lilly was a ten year old living in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan when he became Canada's youngest driving instructor. His father owned *Harold Lilly and Sons*, a farm equipment and motor car business. In 1920 most of the people buying Model A's from Alex's dad were quite adept at driving a team of horses, but had no experience driving motor cars. "So I taught them," Alex recalls. He adds, "And then there was the farmer who drove all the way home just fine but when he got there he drove right through the fence. Instead of braking, he yelled, 'Woaa Thunder, woaa Lightning.'"

Alex's father, a widower, married his second wife when Alex was a pre-med student at the University of Manitoba. Alex's mom had passed away when the lad was in high school. When she was alive, his mother had loaned him money for flying lessons and helped him plan for his future. But with her passing and her father's re-marriage, things changed. His new stepmother promptly pulled the plug on his educational funding.

Alex dropped out of University, submitted an application to the RCMP and hit the streets selling magazine subscriptions. He needed to earn a living, after all. Having developed a passion for aviation, he also needed a way to pay for his flying lessons. Alex was fairly successful as a salesman but in the early '30's there were hundreds of sales people in the streets; he was happy, indeed, when the RCMP called him up.

Alex's RCMP training took place in Regina. "We were taught equitation, and we had lectures in criminology. And we learned that our real role was 'peace keeping'."

These were the "dirty thirties" of course. In cities and towns across North America, jobs had disappeared into thin air. Drought on the prairies meant farmers were suffering and food was scarce. In the 1933 Saskatoon riot, prairie protestors were joined by colleagues from as far away as Vancouver. Alex, on hand to help 'keep the peace,' broke a tooth during the event.

As a young RCMP officer Alex Lilly was posted first to North Battleford, then to Meadow Lake, then to Makaw, Saskatchewan. He recalls a day – a very wintry day – when

he was given the task of going into the bush to apprehend a trapper who had attempted to take his own life. Alex chose a dog sled for transportation and took along his own dog, a German Shepherd named Prince, for companionship.

Alex was successful in locating the trapper and convincing him to come along to the detachment, but as they headed back, there was a blizzard. The markings that he had left on trees were hard to find and neither the sled dogs, nor Alex, were certain which way to head.

Knowing that Prince had quite a homing instinct Alex encouraged his German Shepherd to jump down off the sleigh. "Let's go home, boy," he shouted. Prince bounded through the blinding snow and Alex urged the sled dogs to follow. Prince led them to a shack in the middle of nowhere, a one-room shack with smoke billowing from the chimney. Alex, the trapper, Prince and the sled dogs spent the night with a family of Ukrainian homesteaders.

In Regina, when they read the report that Alex wrote up, the RCMP were impressed with the role Prince played. In Europe, the police, at this time, were routinely using dogs for tracking and search and rescue. And there was an Alberta Provincial Police Sergeant that patrolled with a remarkable dog named Dale. Perhaps it was time for the RCMP to introduce service dogs into their work.

In 1935 Alex was sent to Alberta to a German dog trainer where he learned how to work with and train search and rescue dogs. He returned to Saskatchewan with a dog sired by Dale – a German Shepherd named Black Lux.

Black Lux quickly proved his worth and it became obvious that dogs could be of use to the RCMP across Canada. In fact, the purchase of Black Lux on the 25th of May, 1935 marked the official beginning of RCMP dog service.

When Alex was posted to Fredericton, New Brunswick, his job was to show RCMP officers in the Maritimes the role dogs could play in search and rescue work. While posted to Atlantic Canada, Alex was sent to Rushville, Indiana to purchase more dogs for the RCMP.

Alex was delighted to be living in New Brunswick. He had continued his flight training in Saskatchewan but there had been a shortage of Department of Transport Inspectors

Moncton's 'Heritage Minute' Man

Spend an hour or two in the company of 94 year-old Alexander Lilly, and you will have 'heritage minutes' flashing before your eyes ...

In 1920 Alexander Lilly (unofficially) became Canada's youngest driving instructor. The ten year old gave driving lessons to people who bought Model A Fords from his father's Automotive and Farm Equipment dealership.

In 1935, as a young RCMP officer, Alex was sent to Alberta for training with a dog handler. He returned to Saskatchewan with a German Shepherd named Black Lux. This event marked the official beginning of the use of dogs by the RCMP.

1939 was an eventful year for Alex Lilly. He earned his pilot's license, left the RCMP for a position with Imperial Airlines in Britain and married his sweetheart, Genevieve. When war was declared he was offered a position as a squadron leader by the British. A week after this offer he was summoned home to Canada by Prime Minister Mackenzie King and appointed Chief Flight Instructor in Moncton, New Brunswick.

In 1940 Alex Lilly received a commendation from the King of England for ferrying six Hudson aircraft to Prestwick England. During the war years he would transport more than 100 aircraft across the Atlantic and be appointed Chief Test Pilot for Ferry Command by ATFFERO.

in that province. Being in N.B. meant the young man could bring in Inspector Stuart Graham from Montreal and take the tests required for his next level of flight certification. Alex rented a plane, flew it to a hangar in Moncton, and began to make plans for his testing.

Moncton Flying Club, founded in 1929 had been inactive during the 'dirty thirties'. The fact that there was now a plane in Moncton meant the Moncton Flying Club could open once again.

It was also in Moncton that Alexander Lilly met a young woman, Genevieve Parsons, who was destined to become his wife. (... But not too soon. In these days RCMP officers were required to serve at least six and a half years before marrying.)

The year 1939 was a momentous one for Alexander Lilly. He had earned his commercial pilot's license in '38 and early in '39 he was offered a position by Imperial Airways. Alex accepted the offer. No longer a RCMP officer, he and Genevieve were free to marry. The young couple did just

that and their first home was in Croydon, southeast of London, England. Alex flew small planes in these days, generally on routes within Britain, and occasionally to Paris. But it wouldn't be long before he would "spread his wings".

On September 3, 1939, Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declared war on Germany. Alex was immediately invited by the RAF to become a squadron leader. A week later, on September 10, Canada declared war and all Canadian pilots were summoned by Mackenzie King to become a part of British Commonwealth Air Training. Alex's first posting was to Moncton where he was appointed Chief Flight Instructor. His role was to teach both new pilots and flight instructors.

Over the next year, it became increasingly evident that aviation would play a huge role in WWII, and the allies would need many more planes. In North America, production of aircraft increased dramatically and the Atlantic Ferry Organization (ATFFERO) was created. ATFFERO's mandate was to transport both planes and equipment across the Atlantic. Of course, they needed skilled pilots to make the trans-Atlantic flight. Again, Alexander Lilly was called up. He and Genevieve moved to Montreal.

Alex recalls, "In the very early days of WWII American isolationists didn't want any part of the war. So planes made in U.S. plants were flown close to the U.S./Canadian border by civilians and Canadian farmers towed them over the border with a team of horses. Once on Canadian soil, ATFFERO pilots transported them to Montreal, to Gander and then flew them over the Atlantic.

The isolationist situation in the U.S. changed, of course, as aircraft production became increasingly important to that country's economy. (By 1943, more than a million Americans were employed in the production of aircraft for the war effort).

For delivering the first six Hudson twin engine bombers to Britain, Alex Lilly received a commendation from the King of England. "We would fly daytime to Gander. Good weather was needed to complete the second leg of the flight because the planes were grossly overloaded. We had to carry extra fuel tanks in the cabin in order to make the trip. It was a 10 to 12 hour flight to Prestwick."

Alex Lilly was also among the first to fly supplies to Canadian troops in North Africa in a stripped down B24 Liberator. The route took him from Florida, across the South Atlantic, from Brazil to Liberia, south to Accra, then north across thousands of miles of unmapped desert to Cairo.



Alexander Lilly, 1950.



When the war ended, Alex and some like-minded Canadian pilots purchased 'about thirty' Stranraer flying boats and set up an air cargo company.

During the war years Alexander Lilly flew more than 100 planes across the Atlantic, and was appointed Chief Test Pilot for Ferry Command by ATFFERO. As well as ferrying aircraft, he was sometimes called upon to transport 'important people' from place to place. While flying Canadian General Carara and Assistant General Montague to Britain, his plane was fired on by the Royal Navy. "They assumed we were Germans," he recalls. Fortunately Alex's training included skills in avoiding airfare and disaster was avoided. "I went into a climbing turn, then flew to Belfast and waited for a few hours before flying back.

He also recalls flying Holland's Prince Bernhard (the husband of Princess Beatrix). "He was a pilot himself and he often asked to fly – but I'd never let him land the plane" And then there was the day Alex was told he had Winston Churchill on board. "At the end I learned we were flying a look-alike, a 'decoy'. Churchill was actually on a ship, not an airplane."

These war years were also the baby years for Alexander and Genevieve Lilly. The couple became parents of Patricia in September 1941 and Joan in September 1943. "I wasn't working every day," adds Alex. I loved flying and I was lucky to be doing something I loved. I was also lucky to have a family life."

When the war ended, Alex and some like-minded Canadian pilots purchased about thirty Stranraer flying boats and set up an air cargo com-

pany. "We got them licensed and certified for carrying freight ... We flew baby chicks to Puerto Rico ... transported beautiful tropical fish from the Amazon to Tampa, Florida. But with used airplanes readily available at cheap prices, it was difficult to compete in this business.

Fortunately, Alex Lilly never had to worry about landing a job. Canadair – the Canadian aircraft manufacturer founded in 1944 – hired him as their Chief Test Pilot in June of 1946. He captained their North Star on its inaugural flight with C.D. Howe, President and founder of Trans Canada Air Lines aboard. Over the next thirty years, Alex Lilly played a key role in the development and marketing of Canadair aircraft.

It was in 1950 that his face found its way onto the front pages of newspapers across the country – when he became the first Canadian pilot to

Alex Lilly's

'Heritage Minutes' *continued*

In 1945 Alex was recruited by the new aircraft company, Canadair. As their chief test pilot he introduced their planes, including the North Star, to prospective clients in the U.K., Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Holland and Denmark. Purchases of Canadair planes demonstrated by Alex Lilly resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars for Canadair. In 1950, flying a F86 built by Canadair, Alex Lilly became the first Canadian to break the sound barrier.

In 1980 Alex Lilly was named a member of the Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame.

In February 2005 it was announced Alex would be a member of the Order of Canada. He will formally receive the award in June 2005.



The purchase of Black Lux on the 25th of May, 1935 marked the official beginning of RCMP dog service.

break the sound barrier. Alex was piloting an F86 Sabre Jet at the time. In the ensuing years he trained pilots in Columbia, South Africa and West Germany in the operation of this Canadair jet.

Prior to retirement, Alex was promoted from Chief Test Pilot to Assistant to the President of Canadair. Post-retirement, he continued to work as a consultant with the company. And then, in 1976, Alexander Lilly entered 'full retirement.' He and Genevieve returned to her hometown of Moncton, New Brunswick. Of course, he visited the Moncton Flying Club right away.

Today, at age 94, Alex Lilly is no longer a licensed pilot, but his passion for flight has not diminished. He still occasionally takes to the air in light aircraft piloted by his friend, Andrew Ellsworth. And in June, Alex will be boarding a larger aircraft bound for our nation's capital. There, in recognition of his lifetime achievements in the field of aviation, Alex Lilly will be recognized as a Member of the Order of Canada. For most of his 'aviation years' Genevieve Lilly has been by his side. Of the sixty-six years she has been his partner she says, with a smile: "It's been like riding on the tail of a kite – in a high wind."

– Jeanne Whitehead