Dynamic 'Russ' Baker Dies of Heart Attack

VANCOUVER (CP) — Russell Francis Baker, known to everyone as "Russ" Baker, died in his West Vancouver home Saturday, of a heart attack. A 49-year-old president of an expanding airline.

Mr. Baker, who built Pacific Western Airlines from a single-plane northland bush service to Canada's third largest commercial air company — with a fleet of 65 planes — died of a heart attack.

He left behind countless stories of a dynamic career of flying in Canada, from Winnipeg to the west coast and North to the Arctic.

He was equally at home in the cold cockpit of a tiny plane or in his panelled executive office.

Many claimed Russ Baker did the impossible with planes. He



"RUSS BAKER"

flew by the seat of his pants over uncharted and nearly virgin territory, and learned the hard way what it meant to be a bush pilot.

CITED FOR BRAVERY

He won the United States Air Medal, with a citation signed by former president Harry Truman, for "exceptional daring and pilotage ability" in rescuing 24 U.S. air force personnel from a crash involving three aircraft in a tiny valley near Watson Lake in the Yukon.

Mr. Baker was barnstorming the prairies at 16. In 1928, he flew the first airmail out of Winnipeg in an ancient Fokker.

One of Mr. Baker's last acts for his company was to support Canadian Pacific Airlines in its bid for a $13,000,000 transcontinental franchise. He believed there was room for competition in the air transport field.

PWA initially filed an application for continental franchise but later withdrew, leaving CPA as the only potential competitor to Trans-Canada Air Lines.

Grant McConachie, one of Mr. Baker's long - time friends and president of CPA, said: "The passing of Russ Baker is a heavy loss to his many friends in the aviation industry. I've flown and associated with him for 25 years and have always admired his warm personality and unfailing enthusiasm.

"He had the vision and the enterprise to build a thriving airline from a small charter operation."

HAD ONE PLANE

And small it was. One plane was all he had when Central B.C. Airways started at Fort St. James in 1946. Central became Pacific Western in 1953 when Russ took over Queen Charlotte Airlines and built the company in giant strides — helicopters too were among his flying assortment.

Trans - Canada Air Lines president Gordon McGregor said: "Russ was a good personal friend and a great friend of Canadian aviation. He personified its whole spirit."

Pilot, adventurer and far-seeing businessman, Russ Baker was also a family man, sharing with his wife and daughters the great love and enthusiasm he held for his own special world of flight.

Children were born in his planes, murderers were carried to justice, and hundreds of lives were saved through his skill and carefully calculated daring. During his career he piled up a total of more than 15,000 flying hours, completed 700 mercy flights.

Mr. Baker is survived by his wife, two daughters, Noni and Joy, and a sister, Mrs. Robert Hiley of Vancouver.

No funeral arrangements have been announced.

FINALLY GOT JOB

Born in Winnipeg Mr. Baker came to British Columbia in 1929 and spent seven years looking for a flying job.

In 1936 he made it, and was looping his three-passenger Moth to provide thrills for anybody with the money.

MAN AMONG MEN

Many who met him remember him as a man among men rather than a reckless pilot. He once held the wrist - twisting championship in the rugged northern area where men made a hard living with their hands.

His handshake usually left one with a feeling of a brush with injury.

A crack horseman, he won several bucking bronco contests in British Columbia's Cariboo.

Progress was slow for Mr. Baker, and it was only six or seven years ago that he got the break he really needed and landed a rich contract to haul countless tons of supplies for Aluminum Company of Canada's Kitimat project, 500 miles north of here.

MILLION DOLLAR DEAL

His biggest recent move was the absorbing of Queen Charlotte Airlines, long a bitter competitor of PWA. The move, which cost an estimated $1,000,000, increased his span to all of B.C., Alaska and 11 Western United States.



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