



Seventy Years Young

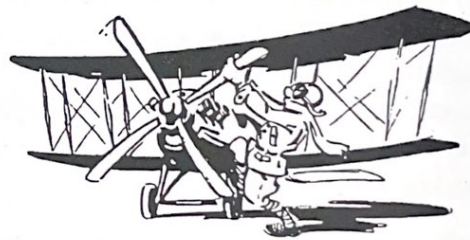
This August marks the Edmonton Flying Club's 70th anniversary. We thought that our members might be interested in how it all started...

Up until the twenties, there was no formal civilian system of licencing or training Canadian pilots. The flyers of the day had either learned to fly in the air force or were self-taught amateurs. In 1927, the Federal Government announced that it was about to inaugurate a scheme modeled on successful 'light aeroplane clubs' in the United Kingdom. Under the plan, the conditions read: "Any community that pledged itself to provide the services of an instructor, an air engineer, a licenced aerodrome and adequate accommodation for the housing and maintenance of the machines, would be issued two light aircraft in the first year." If the club bought other aircraft of an approved type, the government would issue one to match and agreed to pay \$100 for each ab-initio pupil obtaining a private pilot certificate.

Upon hearing this news, wartime ace Captain Wop May and Ken Blatchford, former Edmonton Mayor, called an urgent meeting of everyone they knew with an interest in aviation. Edmonton had the first municipally owned aerodrome in Canada (licenced on June 16, 1926) but no flying club. So, on August 2nd, 1927, approximately 45 people met in room 33 of the Macdonald Hotel. By the end of the meeting the 'Edmonton and Northern Alberta Aero Club' was formed with 32 paid members. Wop May was elected the club's president with Simon Yorke and John Sydie as vice-presidents. James Bill became secretary, and the club's first treasurer was Enoch Loveseth. The start of a great flying club had begun.

Unfortunately, there would be no distribution of aircraft until the spring. Undaunted by this set back, it gave the club time to fulfill all of the government requirements in order to be considered for the machines. A ground school was established on October 14 with a class of 55 enrolled instructed by Simon Yorke. During this time, Wop May was transferred by his company to Calgary. The club continued under the direction of Charles C. Becker as president.

While the interest of the members was being kept alive by the ground school, the Executive entered into negotiations with the city for the use of 'Blatchford Field'. The aerodrome consisted of a rectangular piece of land partly prairie and partly brush, willow and poplar. The city, under guidance of the RCAF, cleared three runways (one of which is present day Taxiway Delta). To further increase the size of the aerodrome suitably for landings, the city entered into agreement with a farmer who was to keep the runways clear for airplanes and



was allowed the use of the remainder of the aerodrome for farming purposes. The city gave the club the use of the aerodrome free in return for the administrative work of checking arrivals and departures. The club also acquired a hangar, 55 feet by 65 feet, from the Imperial Oil Company.

Edmonton was the first to meet the government requirements for a flying club. When news came that the club's first aircraft was ready, Wop May took a leave of absence from his job and returned to Edmonton to instruct. The club's first yellow wooden De Havilland 60X Cirrus Moth, G-CAKJ, arrived in Edmonton on June 23, 1928. Continuous flight instruction started on July 19 with a class of fifteen pupils, three of which were unlicensed ex-pilots. A second Cirrus Moth, G-CALB, arrived at the club in August.

The first four private pilots to graduate from the club were R.F. Brinkman, Alex Clark, R.P. Owen, and Art Rankin. All were tested on September 7 and 8, 1928, by Flight-Lieutenant Walsh from the RCAF station at High River. Along with the government's congratulations, within a few days, as promised, a cheque for \$400 arrived. Among the first students was also Gladys Graves who became the first woman in Alberta to graduate from a flying club as a private pilot.



The club was a huge success. By the end the year, the club had enrolled 125 members. Membership dues were \$5, ground school \$25, and flying lessons \$10 an hour for dual, and \$5 for solo. The club struggled but grew steadily in the midst of the "Wall Street crash" of 1929 and all through the depression of the thirties. By 1931, the club stood first in the land, setting a record in graduating 20 pilots and flying more hours than any other club in the country.

In 1929, Wop May resigned as flight instructor, and arrangements were made to have Captain Moss Burbidge from England to be Wop's replacement. With Moss teaching, the club continued to flourish. By 1938, Moss Burbidge had trained over 1,100 flyers amounting to a statistical count of 1 out of every 12 club-trained pilots in the entire country. In addition to flight instruction, the club also put on some spectacular airshows. The first show, in conjunction with the Ford Reliability tour, was on September 17, 1930, and turned out to be a great success with over 65 aircraft on display and 35,000 people attending.

In January of 1940, the club was contracted by the government to train pilots for the RCAF as No. 16 Elementary Flying Training School. Due to the size of the aerodrome, the club was moved to Bowden, Alberta, as No. 32 EFTS. For the duration of the war the club continued to turn out a steady stream of pilots for the air force. On the resumption of club activities in 1944, the club returned to the City of Edmonton and was renamed the 'Edmonton Flying Club'. After some reorganizational growing pains, it emerged as virtually the same organization as it maintains to the present day. A board of directors is elected from a group of sustaining members and provides direction and policy for the club. A full time manager is in charge of day to day operations.



On February 26, 1967, the club experienced a devastating fire that wiped out the club's facilities, hangar, and fourteen of its aircraft. Despite this hardship the club would not die. Early the next morning after the fire, a Piper Colt on loan from the Calgary Flying Club was flown in. Soon after, while the last ashes of the fire still were smoking, an EFC student lifted the Colt into the air on a training flight. The Edmonton Flying Club was back in business. They secured a trailer for an office and classroom, and a shed for a shop. The club also acquired five Fleet Canucks and two new Cherokees. By December 1967, the club had spent over \$90,000 on new aircraft with a total of twelve in the air. That year, the club flew 13,772 hours, more than a 1,000 hours over the club's average, and graduated 152 private pilots and 26 commercial pilots.

During the mid to late '70s, the club boomed. They flew nearly 28,000 hours annually, and by 1975, had 42 aircraft. The club at one point or another has had almost every type of North American aircraft on the line, just a sampling of which includes: Gypsy Moths, Tiger Moths, Cherokees, Aeros, Archers, Senecas, Apaches, Aztecs, Barons, Fleet Finch, Fleet Canucks, Cessnas, Pipers, Decathlons, Seminoles, and many more. One aircraft that is near and dear to our hearts is also the first Cessna 152 that the club bought. It was purchased brand new in 1978 and has recently flown over 14,000 hours! Happy Birthday to YJJ - the Queen of our fleet!

The Edmonton Flying Club continues to be one of the best flight training schools in the country. The club has contributed to the flight training of thousands of



pilots, some of which can be found in the Aviation Hall of Fame. From a small volunteer group of enthusiasts, two full time employees, and two aircraft, it has developed and grown into a complex organization. Presently, the club employs a staff of 26 and operates 13 aircraft in private pilot, commercial, instructor, multi-engine, and instrument training, as well as, charter, rental and recreational flying. Membership has grown from 32 originals to over 17,000 since 1927, approximately 1000 of which are current members.

A pioneer in aviation flight training, bush flying, and the development of the north, the Edmonton Flying Club is immensely proud of its achievements in the aviation field. Since its formation in 1927, the club continues to strive through the tremendous support and dedication from its staff, directors and members. Here's to another 70 years!

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This article was comprised from the following sources: Edmonton Flying Club Archives; Commerce News, August 1977; Wings, August 1977; Edmonton Journal, August 6, 1977; and "The Greatest Godamn Flying School in the West" by Al Coyne. Photo: Edmonton Aero Club 1928 Cirrus Moth (from May 31, 1929 to July 12, 1938).

New Members

- Brian Anderson
- Rod Andrews
- Michael Ayers
- Autumn Ball
- Fred Ball
- Gerald Breithaupt
- Eunice Buckett-Kennedy
- Ray Buxton
- Dennis Evanishen
- Edwin Gulay
- Uwe Hanelt
- Maroun Kalaany
- Gerald Kazimirowich
- Robin Lamareux
- Greg Lopushinsky
- Darcey Maciborsky
- Andrew Mackenzie
- Marie Mahon
- Ivan Paez
- John Park
- Melvin Peters
- Chris Rankin
- Adam Reeder
- Art Rutledge
- Bob Sarafinchan
- Jeremy Scheetz
- Raj Shanmugan
- Rob Vandermeulen
- Dave Warnock
- Kevin Webber

Multi Engine

- Larry Archibald
- Melvin Peters
- Brad Pridmore
- Steve Whitenect
- Jason Wright
- Mark Yashchysch