



CAPTAIN ROBIN MACKIE



In the spring of 1956, Robin Mackie was killing time at the airport in Patricia Bay. For the past year, **he'd been flying as a first officer for Trans-Canada Air Lines**, having joined them after a short-service commission with the RCAF. In passing the time, he struck up a conversation with a PWA flight attendant (Deirdre 'Tiny' Bacon), also there on a turn-around. She suggested he apply to PWA, as **Russ Baker was looking for captains to fly on his DC-3s** supplying the construction of [the DEW Line](#). Intrigued, Mackie went on to interview with Jack Crosby, and was shortly thereafter hired on. **He spent the next 35 years flying for PWA (and then CAI).**

For the first year, Mackie was based at Hall Beach (Sanirajak) and Frobisher Bay (Iqaluit) - and forever after empathised with John Cleese when he said, *"I only have one thing on my bucket list: never to be cold again."* When PWA took over the prairie service from Canadian Pacific, Mackie was transferred to that route, and then later added to the McKenzie service as well.

Mackie was laid off in 1963, and **spent about three months flying to Europe for Wardair**. But soon Jack Miles brought him back as Check Pilot for PWA's Northern Region. Mackie spent the late sixties in that position, then moved on to serve as Chief Pilot for that region well into the 1970s.

In this position he enjoyed one of the highlights of his career: **captaining 'Pacific Western Royal Flight One'** when HM [Elizabeth II, as Queen of Canada, visited the Northwest Territories](#) with her family during the summer of 1970 (though the Prince of Wales, as heir apparent, was required to travel on a separate flight – just in case!). His loyalty to HM, which began as an RCAF officer, remained with him throughout his days: when asked some years ago if he had any advice for someone younger seeking to live happily and purposefully, he offered, *"In the struggle of life, be gracious to those you vanquish, and accept failure without complaint; be courteous to all, repay your debts, serve your sovereign and, in short, be a gentleman."*

Pictured on the next page is Mackie presenting the 'Royal Flight One' crew to HM The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

From 1975 to 1982, he served as Director of Flight Operations. It was during his service as DFO that he was appointed as technical advisor to the inquiry into the [Panarctic crash at Rea Point in 1974](#). In appointing Mackie, the Commissioner noted he was, “a pilot with experience both in the Arctic and with high performance aircraft”, and acknowledged his service to the inquiry by writing, “*Captain Mackie provided invaluable assistance and clearly enjoyed the confidence and respect of his professional peers.*”

Through the seventies and most of the eighties, Mackie flew the B737-200. His last year with the airline he spent as line-training captain on the B767, flying routes to Europe. Rhys Eaton asked him to be Chief Pilot for that aircraft, but Mackie declined: **he was happy flying the line**, and didn't feel much like returning to management.

Mackie **joked that for about five months in 1990 he was the most senior pilot in the airline** as Gordon Moul had retired earlier that year. Photographed below in the cockpit of a B767, Mackie appears a little weary toward the end of a 10-hour flight to Germany in the summer of 1990.



He captained his last flight later that year, a couple weeks after his 60th birthday, having **logged 18,304 flying hours**.

Mackie also arranged things so that his last flight would be a charter to Las Vegas that arrived back in Canada in the wee hours of the morning. He did this so as to quietly side-step the tradition of being greeted at the terminal by pilots and staff who would wish him well (and also promptly scratch his name off the seniority list!).

Despite these efforts, and landing at almost three in the morning, Mackie was still greeted at YVR by his old friends and colleagues, Jack Miles and Russ Revel. Jack later said that

Mackie was, “*the only person I admire and respect for not only his dedication but, more importantly, his extreme efficiency. He was dependably correct at all times.*”

Mackie wrote that, “*When I retired from the airline after 35 years I jokingly suggested I would be remembered by my former associates for at least thirty minutes. That is likely close to the truth!*” But we trust he was wrong. In 1997, [the Governor General's office honoured Mackie](#) with a family crest of a scarlet cougar clutching a sword, for his military service; and bearing sky-blue wings, for his aviation career. This crest will be inherited by his two surviving and adoring children, Rebecca and Christopher, and his six grandchildren.



Some time ago, when asked about his thoughts on death, Mackie replied, "*Death is an event that must occur, and each day brings it closer. My particular sun is now low in the western sky and it must soon set, not to rise again.*" The thought of a pilot ultimately 'flying west' to some unknowable destination very much appealed to him.

His mother, Mabel, wrote a poem many years ago, 'The Flight of Youth'. One of the last lines has a touching significance when applied to her now-deceased, aviator son (though she has him flying east, not west):

*Fly to the dawn whose beam will guide your way
Into a path where rising sun dispatch the gray;*

Finally, Mackie felt that the nicest compliment he ever received was from Ilse Buffy, another PWA flight attendant, who told him, "***You are my image of the ideal captain.***"



CAPTAIN ROBIN BRUCE MACKIE
called of Carrickbraith
Caiptean Roban Bruis Mac Aoidh na carraige Bhreatannach
1930 ~ 2020

A memorial is planned for Mackie in Victoria, B.C, for next year, in the hopes that people may travel more freely by then. Anyone who might wish to be kept apprised of details of the event can e-mail Mackie's second son, Christopher, at rbmackie@representative.com

Christopher is also editing a revision of his father's memoir, which Mackie wrote a few years ago, and which details his time with PWA. **Christopher would love to hear from any former colleagues** who might wish to share anecdotes, memories, or impressions of Mackie that he might use to flesh out the book. For those who might be interested, [the current version is online](#).