

October 15, 2020 CAHS Toronto Chapter Introductory Zoom Meeting - 1

Topic: Leonard John Tripp: Aviator Par Excellence

Speaker: Geoff Pyne, Chapter 2nd Vice-President & Acting Secretary

Reporter: Robert (Bob) Winson

October 15th was both a night of excitement and expectation as the Toronto Chapter launched its very first “Zoom” Meeting. Conducting the meeting at “Master Control” was Chapter 1st Vice-President John Bertram who introduced his colleague and Chapter 2nd Vice-President Geoff Pyne as the evening speaker. Geoff previously spoke to the Chapter on December 7, 2019 about the phenomenal career of Robert (Bob) Fowler, as a test pilot for deHavilland Aircraft Canada.

In a well documented presentation, Geoff spoke about a gentleman born in Cornwall, England in 1896, who survived WWI, was involved in the establishment of flying training schools, trained more aviators than anybody else on record, contributed to the World War 2 effort and was inducted into the Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame. That gentleman was of course, Leonard John Tripp. Geoff, then acknowledged the support of Len’s grandson, Bryan Tripp, who supplied additional information, including Len’s Medal Card, WWI campaign medals and flying awards, which enhanced Geoff’s presentation. Leonard John Tripp was born on May 21, 1896 at St. Keverne, Cornwall, England to Francis (Frank) Tripp and Jemima (Rogers) Tripp “Millers and Farmers” (Ref: 1891 Census). Also, please see the map and photos. Len worked on the family farm until war broke out in 1914 and then he enlisted with the Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry (DCLI) at just 18 years of age. He trained at Curragh Camp in Ireland before being shipped out to France and was introduced to trench warfare. After over a year in the trenches, he was shipped back to England in 1915 for rest and recuperation. He took his officer’s exam and after 6 weeks of training, was sent back to his regiment at the front and the second battle of Ypres. Not surprisingly, he contracted “trench foot”, had difficulty walking and was returned to England.



Speaker -Geoff Pyne
Courtesy Gusair.com



During his recovery, an officer visited the hospital looking for volunteers for the newly formed Royal Flying Corps (RFC). Having been assured that “walking was not a prerequisite” for joining the RFC, Len Tripp signed up! Following full recovery Tripp passed the medical tests and then learned to fly at Hounslow, Middlesex, England flying Avro 504K aircraft. After completing his flying training, he was posted back to France, where

he was assigned to flying hazardous reconnaissance flights. In 1916 the average survival rates for RFC pilots was just 10 hours (about 10 – 12 flights). In November 1917, while over enemy lines, he was shot at by ground fire, causing his engine to overheat and seize. He and his Observer crashed into a shell hole in “No Man’s Land”. They both survived and after two days they reached the Allied lines and were hospitalized, the second time for Len. Following recovery, he was back in the air once more, but damaged another aircraft on landing. He was diagnosed with “extreme battle fatigue” and sent back to England – never to see action again. On recovery he was assigned to flight instruction duties back at Hounslow, until the war ended in 1918.



Len Tripp with his parents and siblings at St. Keverne. Len is in the centre.

After demobilizing, Len returned to Cornwall by late 1919 and lived with his mother and farmed for 2 years. But the adventures of the war and the pull of aviation influenced his decision to emigrate to Canada in 1923, where 2 of his brothers already lived in N. Ontario. Experienced pilots were in high demand in the fledgling aviation industry in Canada. After arriving in Canada, he was employed by the Ontario Provincial Air Service flying Curtiss HS-2L flying boats on forest fire patrol and aerial mapping of Northern Ontario all done in open cockpits! Life was hard in the north in the Sudbury and Sioux Lookout areas, often living under canvas in the depths of winter. Tripp and family moved south to near Hamilton in 1927, where he helped to found the first civilian flying school in Canada. That school was the Jack V. Elliot school at Ghent Crossing, near Hamilton, where he became the Chief Instructor. He trained many pilots, on surplus Curtiss JN-4 “Jenny” aircraft, who later joined developing airlines. Of special interest was his training of Canada’s first female to qualify as a pilot, Eileen Vollick, who was awarded Private Pilot Certificate No. 77 on 22 March 1928. During the period between the wars, to supplement his income, he and his colleagues did some “barnstorming” during the summer months. They landed in fields, offering trips in the aircraft to locals for 15 cents. Also performing at festivals and fall fairs, offering rides and performing daring aerobatics! Geoff also mentioned that he found a reference that suggested that Len returned to the UK briefly to fly for Imperial Airways! In June 1929, he and his family moved to St. Catharines to found that city’s flying club, one of the oldest in Canada (picture and stories found in “Wings Over Niagara” 1980).

Tripp’s outstanding skills as a flight instructor were recognized by Leavens Brothers Air Services, which hired him in 1936 as an instructor at Barker Field, Toronto, Ontario. Barker Field was on the northwest corner of Dufferin Street and Lawrence Avenue West, a stone’s throw away from Toronto’s Downsview Airport. At the outbreak of World War II, he became the Chief Instructor and General Manager. He later administered Leavens Brothers contract to train pilots as instructors for the Elementary Flying Training Schools, a highly successful program for the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) during

WW2. Tripp opened his own flying training school at Barker Field in 1944. By this time in the war he had instructed more students to licence standards than any other pilot in Canada. Len Tripp remained the dean of Canadian flight instructors until his retirement from active flying in 1962. Barker Field closed in 1953 and Len then joined Leggatt Aircraft at Buttonville Airport, Ontario, in sales and service until he retired in 1968. In a ceremony held in Edmonton in 1974, Leonard John (Len) Tripp was inducted as a Member of Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame. The citation read in part "The application of his superlative skills as a flight instructor to two generations of Canadians for nearly a half century, despite adversity, has been of outstanding benefit to Canadian Aviation" Len Tripp's flying licence is in the archives of the Hall of Fame – And it was signed by Orville Wright – a name familiar in aviation history! Leonard John Tripp died at Newcastle, Ontario on February 28, 1985.



Trench Warfare



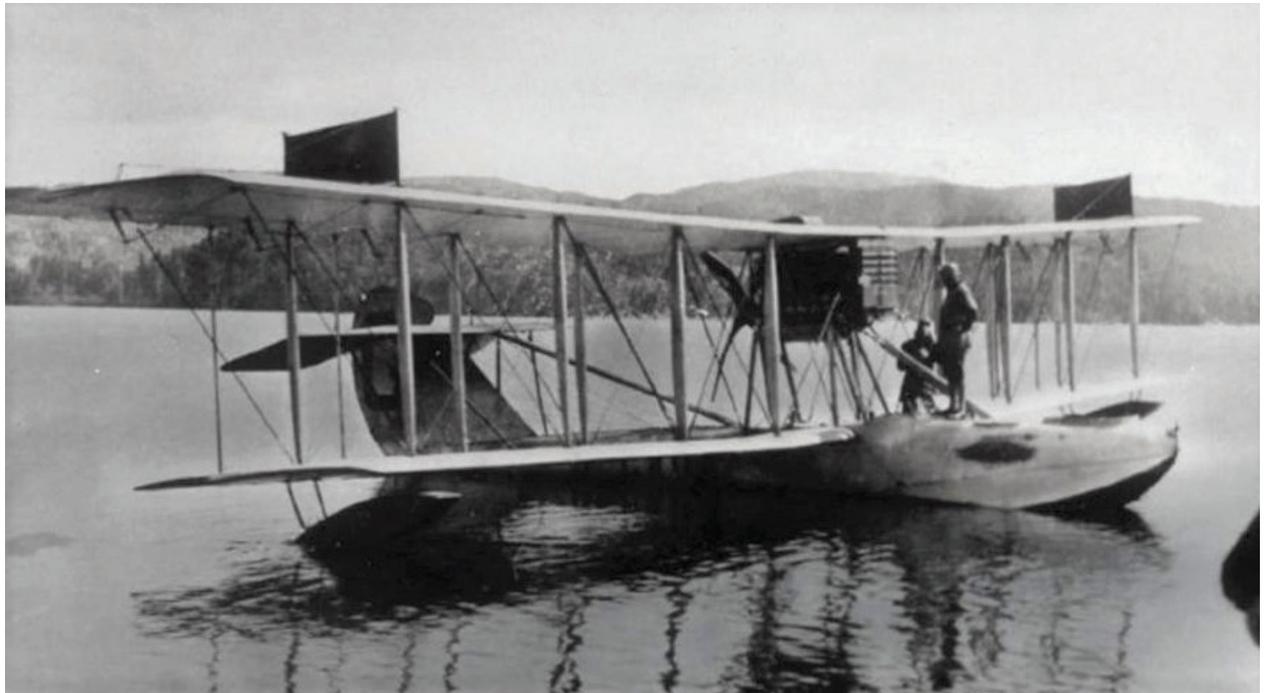


Avro 504K

After graduation (1917), he was posted back to France, assigned to No. 6 squadron, flying 2 seat RE-8 reconnaissance aircraft, scouting German artillery positions and mapping trench locations positions.



Later transferred to No. 48 squadron, flying Bristol fighters.



OPAS Curtiss H2SL Aircraft Flying Boat



Leonard John Tripp

May 21 1896 - February 28, 1985

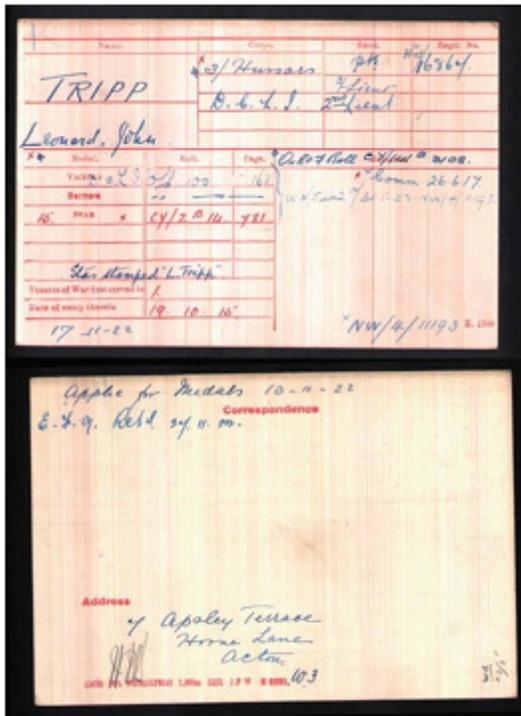
Leonard John (Len) Tripp was inducted as a Member of Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame in 1974 at a ceremony held at Edmonton, Alberta.

"The application of his superlative skills as a flight instructor to two generations of Canadians for nearly a half century, despite adversity, has been of outstanding benefit to Canadian aviation." - Induction citation, 1974

Leonard John Tripp, inducted into Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame in 1974, has a remarkable piece of history in the artifact collection he donated to The Hall. I found this item in his display panel in the Aviation Hangar recently, and decided it should be moved to CAHF's archives area where it will be kept safely in better conditions, and would not continue to fade in the harsh artificial light.

This is Leonard Tripp's original flying licence, called a "sporting licence" at the time. It is signed by Orville Wright who was Chairman of the NAA Contest Committee in 1929. The NAA (National Aeronautics Association) is the oldest organization devoted to the art, sport and science of aviation in the U.S. It became a member of the FAI (Federation Aeronautique Internationale), an international standard-setting and record-keeping body for aeronautics and astronautics, with the goal of promoting and encouraging aeronautical activities worldwide.

The Hall is proud to have this historic artifact donated by Leonard Tripp and his family. It is this kind of history we want to preserve, and encourage members and families to consider donating any items to The Hall's collection.



Leonard John Tripp died at Newcastle, Ontario, on February 28, 1985.