

Ralph Leslie flew planes for CP Air

Ralph Leslie, an illustrious pilot and former Kitchener resident, died in Vancouver last week.

Leslie, 81, who died of cancer, was well-known in the airline industry.

Obituary

He served with Canadian Pacific Air Lines for 25 years and flew close to 10 million kilometres, the equivalent of 240 trips around the globe, during his career.

In 1955 he flew CP Air's inaugural polar route from Vancouver to Amsterdam. He was appointed chief pilot in 1960 and went on to become director of flight operations before retiring in 1970.

"He was my hero," said Waterloo resident Peter Wolfhard, a nephew of Leslie. "He was a real pioneer. He was definitely one of the best Canadian pilots of his time."

Leslie, who was born in Owen Sound but grew up in Kitchener, learned to fly while still a teenager, his sister, Duretta Wolfhard, 93, of Waterloo, said.

He was awarded his pilot's licence in 1927 after working at the Kitchener Flying Club in exchange for flying lessons.

His father, John B. Leslie, who feared for his son's safety, promised him a Roadster if he would give up flying, but her brother refused, Wolfhard said.

"Flying was his life," she said.

In the winter of 1937 Leslie delivered the Record by plane to rural areas when roads became blocked by snow.

He later worked as a bush pilot with Dominion Skyways in Northern Ontario and Quebec before serving as a trans-Atlantic ferry pilot, transporting war materials, during the Second World War.

In addition to numerous nieces and nephews, Leslie is survived by his son, Brian, a chemical engineer who lives in Washington, D.C., and brothers in St. Catharines and California.