

# Pilot completes 1000th Sable Island run

by John Merrick

If you were asked to make innumerable trips over a 240 kilometre course that has virtually no scenery or notable distinguishing features, you might be inclined to turn down the request.

Not so for Bob Laidler. In 1971 Bob began flying a specially-equipped twin-engine plane known as a Britten-Norman Islander, on the Halifax-Sable Island route. The company he flew for, IMP Aviation of Halifax, was beginning a long and distinguished association with the AES, Coast Guard, Maritime Telephone & Telegraph (MT & T), CWS; the agencies which maintain a recognized presence on the Island. Bob Laidler's role in this association has been to serve as the lifeline between the Sable Island residents and their mainland sources of food, health services, entertainment and social contact.

Bob's flying career spans the period from Spitfire to high performance jet, but since 1971, the Islander, as it is affectionately known, has served as Bob's primary conveyance. People and cargo are the payloads, of course, and both have displayed a remarkable tendency to be fascinating companions on each 2½ — 3 hour round-trip flight.

People have provided conversation, companionship and knowledge on these flights, while cargo has provided color, drama and sometimes a sense of danger. Bob's passengers have included corporation presidents, ADM's, high riggers, veterinarians, satellite antennae specialists, in addition to all the staff and support persons required to operate the weather and upper air station. His cargo is routinely fresh food and sustenance items, but it is not unusual to be required to carry items such as a Sable Island horse, Christmas trees, emergency supplies of disposable diapers, and bags of fresh horse manure. (The manure is analyzed to yield information on the horses' health and dietary habits.)

Bob Laidler's most significant contribution over this period has not only been in his dedication to a flying career, but in his commitment, on a personal level, to the people who live and work on

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*Robert Laidler (left) receives his award from Dick Nelis, Atlantic Region head of weather services.*

Sable Island. On his own initiative, he has collected and distributed mail going to and from the Island. On several occasions, he acted as "nanny" for the wife of an AES' OIC who was travelling with two small children and twin infants. (Quite a handful — even for a pilot!) In the days prior to satellite TV, he went out of his way to acquire taped entertainment for island viewers. He has responded cheerfully to late-night, weekend and early morning calls in order to provide flights of an emergency, unscheduled life-support nature, and has fulfilled all these requests in a safe, reliable and conscientious manner.

On 16 April, 1985, in recognition of his 1 000th flight to Sable Island, Bob was the honoured guest at a commemorative ceremony held at the Halifax Airport Inn. In addition to other guests from his company, Coast Guard and MT & T, Bob was honoured by a strong AES presence.

On behalf of the Assistant Deputy Minister, Atmospheric Environment Service, Mr. R. Nelis, A/MAED, presented Bob with a certificate of appreciation and a personal letter, both signed by Mr. Bruce.

This 1 000th flight was one milestone in Bob Laidler's flying career. He was wished a safe and happy future by all his colleagues, as well as by all those whose existence on Sable Island is enhanced by his contribution. On April 17, Bob was once again in the pilot's seat headed for Sable Island, and flight number 2 000.

*Mr. Merrick is acting OIC Halifax weather office.*