

## Dr Reginald Robert Harper 1916–2006

*Turn into wind*

*Flaps 20°*

*Water rudders retracted*

*Full throttle*

*Onto the step*

*Airborne*

*Float spray dissipates into slipstream*

*Flaps up*

*Gentle climbing turn to port*

*Trim and set course*

After a brief combat with malignancy, Reg set forth on his ultimate cross-country flight. Two months short of his 90th birthday, he had left no stones unturned. In the week before being admitted to Surrey Memorial Hospital he had carried out his role as an aviation medical examiner.

Reg began his life adventure in Regina in 1916. The Great Depression was instrumental in his career selection. After earning a monthly stipend of \$40 as a teacher, he returned to the University of Saskatchewan to attain his pre-medical degree. It was there that his lifeline intersected that of Anita Peters. They married in 1942 when he was in medical school at the University of Manitoba and were inseparable until her passing 63 years later. Reg completed his medical degree in 1944 and promptly joined the Canadian Army. As a first lieutenant he was posted to Prince Rupert and Alliford Bay in the Queen Charlottes. During this time he had his first flight in a Canso flying boat and hands-on experience in a Link Trainer—and a lifelong passion with aviation was ignited. At the end of the war he demobilized with the rank of captain.

Reg and Anita migrated west to the Lower Mainland of BC in 1951, where he set up practice in New Westminster and Surrey. Over the next four decades he established a thriving full-time

general practice and worked as a Transport Canada–designated aviation medical examiner. Reg was well respected by his patients and colleagues.

In 1953 Reg attained his private pilot licence, and he acquired his first aircraft, a Piper Clipper, in 1955. It was the first of four. For the rest of his life he would have one hand on the control column and the other on the throttle.

It was fortunate that Anita shared Reg's enthusiasm for aviation. While pregnant with their first child, she also earned her private pilot licence and easily adjusted to the role of co-pilot and navigator. In the air Reg was always the skipper. On the ground the roles were reversed.

As members of the Flying Physicians Association, Reg and Anita acquired invaluable cross-country experience—including trips to all US states except Hawaii, and several trips to Oshkosh, Wisconsin. For 20 consecutive years they winged south to Mexico.

During his 50-year flying career Reg logged over 3800 hours without a major accident—a remarkable feat for a private pilot. On one occasion a temperamental radio with sporadic transmission resulted in the following admonition from a Santa Barbara air traffic controller: “Go away and don't come back until you have got a new radio.” During another flight south Reg inadvertently overflew Vandenberg Air Force Base, resulting in a jet fighter interception. After a quick look the fighters left them in peace. On a Flying Physician's cross-country venture into airfield-rich Anchorage, Reg landed at the wrong airport. Unperturbed he obtained a take-off clearance and joined the flight at the right strip. Reg was soft-spoken, quick of wit, and unassuming.

Reg's passion for aviation and

medicine was eclipsed by his devotion to Anita and their daughters Robin, Dawn, and Jeanine. Early in his career, he acquired waterfront property at Sakinaw Lake on the Sunshine Coast. An initial tent platform was developed into three cabins—a retreat for summer vacations and family reunions. For the first 5 years transportation to Sakinaw was via float-equipped Piper Pacer.

Reg was a zealous outdoorsman and sports enthusiast. He was a proficient downhill skier. With Anita as his constant companion he continued to enjoy this sport into his senior years. They were the ultimate team. Never shy of a challenge, Reg acquired the skills of sailboarding when many of his contemporaries were restricted to armchairs and walkers.

In 2005, at the age of 86, he celebrated his grandson Dave Abercrombie's new private pilot licence with a dual cross-country adventure to the Experimental Aviation Association fly-in at Oshkosh. It was very symbolic and proved to be his last major trip in the family Cessna 182. After Anita's passing in March 2005, Reg continued his work as an aviation medical examiner and an active member of the Boundary Bay Flying Club. In addition he participated in the activities of the Newton Seniors Computer Club and maintained his musical skills with the North Shore Organ Group.

Reg's departure has left a tremendous void in the lives of his family, friends, colleagues, and the aviation community.

—John Albrecht, MD  
Burnaby

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