

Retirement won't keep this captain on terra firma

By JOHN CHALLINOR

Gus Bennett's retirement last week as chief pilot of Air Canada's 747 fleet does not mean that the 60-year-old Mississauga resident is permanently grounded.

While Bennett said he has a few options open to him which he will give some serious consideration after Christmas — options he said will satisfy his obsession with flying — he admitted he could not help but reflect on his final flight home last week as a bittersweet moment.

"I couldn't help but reminisce about my career as I flew for the last time from Frankfurt over England, across the Atlantic and particularly when I landed and taxied down at Toronto International Airport," he said. "It's a bittersweet occasion for most of us to retire at 60 and there was a lot of nostalgia attached to that last flight."

Although Bennett, a self-confessed fitness nut, is retiring trim, fit and with a competent record, he is not bitter about having to retire from a job which he admits he would do again if he had to.

"I'm very happy and very lucky to be able to retire and enjoy my good health," he said.

"But, there is a movement afoot to change the retirement age. It will probably be several years before it is changed — if it ever is."

Bennett began flying at the age of 20 at Barker Field on Dufferin St. He completed his licence requirements in a Piper Cub in 1939 — just in time for World War II.

In 1940 he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force as a flight instructor and gradually worked his way across the Atlantic to England where he flew Lockheed Loadstar's and DC-3s until 1946.

Bennett joined Air Canada, formerly Trans Canada Airlines, at the end of the war as a first officer and became a captain in 1952. He spent three years in Moncton after his promotion but has flown out of Toronto ever since.

He later flew Viscounts, DC-9s and DC-8s until joining Air Canada's fleet of seven 747s two years ago. He was appointed chief pilot of the fleet in April. He has been a flight instructor for 13 years.

During his busy career with Air Canada, Gus and his wife Lorri have managed to raise a family of four and are now proud grandparents of three.

Looking back on his career in aviation, Bennett is most impressed with the efficiency and speed of jet aircraft over the 40 years he has flown and the excellent cooperation between pilots and air traffic controllers.



It was a bittersweet moment for Mississaugan Gus Bennett, Air Canada's chief pilot of their 747 fleet, when he made his final flight as a pilot last week. Bennett turned 60 in October and thus is required to retire. Bennett, joined at the controls by wife Lorri, is fit, competent and eager to continue to fly — an activity he has always wanted to do and dreamed of doing when he was a young boy.

(Staff photo by Fred Loek)