



Employees of de Havilland rebuilt a de Havilland Moth for Canada's National Aviation Museum in May 1963. George Blanchard is second from the right. The 60th anniversary of de Havilland will be celebrated June 4.

de Havilland retiree looks back as company celebrates 60 years

On June 4, Boeing of Canada, de Havilland Division, celebrates its 60th anniversary. During those 60 years, de Havilland continuously supplied the aircraft that have helped make possible the exploration and development of the far reaches of Canada's north and remote areas around the world.

An aircraft manufacturer for the past half century, de Havilland built the British-designed Tiger Moth and its many variations, the Anson II, and assembled the World War II Mosquito. In the past four decades, the Toronto-based aircraft manufacturer has built aircraft of its own design — the Chipmunk, Beaver, Otter, Caribou, Turbo Beaver, Buffalo, Twin Otter, Dash 7 and Dash 8.

A Boeing company for two years, it is now known as Boeing of Canada, de Havilland Division, and is producing the Dash 8 family of regional airliners.

In celebration of de Havilland's 60-year history of manufacturing some of the world's best-known aircraft, Boeing News will present a continuing series on some of the people who made de Havilland's successes possible.

by Vince Santoro
Boeing of Canada
de Havilland Division

1929 — The Blanchard family, like countless other families at the time, was affected by the Depression.

April 3, 1929 — George Blanchard, age 15, was looking for a job. He visited his aunt in Mount Dennis (now a suburb of North York in Toronto) who told him that she had

learned from her neighbor that de Havilland Canada was hiring apprentices.

After an interview with Arthur Robbins, plant superintendent, Blanchard was hired and stayed with the company for 49 continuous years.

George Blanchard, age 74, retired in 1978 and has a work history that is both rich and colorful. He has known Sir Geoffrey de Havilland, founder of the company, and Phil Garratt, the hard-working managing director. Blanchard admired Garratt and sees similar qualities in Ron Woodard, president of de Havilland Division.

"Ron Woodard is a lot like Garratt was," said Blanchard. "Garratt used to meet with people regularly. He used to know everyone on a personal level. He got the employees to realize that everyone had to work together to make good things happen. Woodard is the same way. I think he's the best thing that has happened to de Havilland."

The early days for Blanchard were challenging ones. As an apprentice he learned everything there was to learn about building an airplane. For \$8 a week, his training began by working on the Moth airplane wing assembly. He then moved on to learn fabric covering operations and how to assemble and install engines.

"The company was small," recalled Blanchard.

"Everybody did everything back then, from sweeping the shop floors to assembling and getting the airplane out the door."

In September, 1929, six months after Blanchard started work, the company moved its location from de Lesseps Field in Mount Dennis to its current site at Downsview near Toronto. It was here that Blanchard went on his first flight.

"I had been with the company only a few months when Phil Garratt asked me if I wanted to go up in a Moth. At that time, Garratt used to deliver the airplanes to the customers."

Flying, for Blanchard, was to become common, even in the most unusual circumstances. On a test flight of the Seafarer II in 1935, Blanchard crawled back and forth in the narrow crawl space of the twin-engined Dragon biplane to test the center of gravity.

The new plane was preparing for a flight from Canada to Baghdad. Unfortunately, taking off from Wasaga Beach on the shores of Georgian Bay about 200 miles north of Toronto did not prove successful, and the attempt was abandoned.

Blanchard's diverse ability and knowledge was utilized where it was needed. In 1936, a Fox Moth belonging to General Airways, had gone through the ice and sunk in the Ottawa River. Blanchard was one of the crew assigned to repair it.

Phil Garratt, managing director, recalled the incident and said, "George Blanchard was our wood-working expert in those days, and he practically lived in that Fox Moth fuselage."

Today, Blanchard is as active as he was 60 years ago.

His interest in sailing goes back to his youth when his father taught him how to build boats. Since then he has been a member of several yacht clubs and served as a sailing official at the 1976 Olympics, the Masters Games, and countless regattas in between.

From an apprentice to product control manager, from rebuilding the damaged de Havilland hydrofoil, to assisting the manager of the materials department, Blanchard has proven that the jack of all trades can be the master.