



Carl Ben Eielson

1897-1929

Carl Ben Eielson was born at Hatton, ND. He graduated from Hatton High School and attended the University of North Dakota from 1914-16. He enlisted in the Army Air Service during WWI and completed his pilot training. After the Armistice was signed, “Ben” returned home. As a member of the Hatton Aero Club, he barnstormed around eastern North Dakota and western Minnesota in the club “Jenny” and performed at fairs, baseball games and any place a crowd was willing to watch his acrobatic stunts. When the “Jenny” was destroyed in a crash, he returned to the University earning his B.A. in 1921. Eielson attended law school at the University of Wisconsin for a time but left to become a school principal in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Realizing the potential for aviation in Alaska, Eielson soon had a plane shipped up to him. He carried passengers, medical supplies, and performed aerial acrobatics in his open cockpit Curtiss. In 1924, he flew the first Alaskan mail route, establishing the feasibility of air mail service.

In 1928, Eielson and Hubert Wilkins, an English Explorer, made the first successful non-stop flight over the North Pole. That same year, Eielson again piloted Wilkins on an Antarctic expedition which resulted in the discovery of six new islands and a re-mapping of the entire area.

Eielson received world acclaim and many awards as an aviation pioneer. In 1929, President Hoover awarded him the Harmon Trophy, the United State’s highest honor given for aviation.

Later that year, Eielson returned to Alaska and through the merger of several independent air companies, founded Alaska Airways Incorporated. Eielson died November 9, 1929 when his plane went down in bad weather during a rescue mission.