When worldwide travel was dramatically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020, it had severe consequences on the movement of goods around the world by air as passenger flights, which carried up to 59% of air cargo globally, disappeared almost overnight.

The Air Canada and Air Canada Cargo teams understood that transporting critical medical and other vital supplies was imperative to combating the COVID-19 crisis, in Canada and globally. As passenger flights were suspended, Air Canada Cargo immediately began operating cargo-only flights in the belly of unscheduled passenger aircraft to meet the urgent demand for cargo transport. Simultaneously, work was being done to reconfigure the passenger cabins of some aircraft and implement a cargo-only flight schedule to keep the economy and the supply chain moving.

July 5, 2021, marks the 10,000th cargo-only flight for Air Canada Cargo, AC7251 from Toronto to Buenos Aires. Those 10,000 flights, including regularly scheduled operations and special on-demand flight, have carried everything from PPE for our healthcare heroes, critical vaccines, food, mail and even pets back home to their loved ones in Australia.

“It is remarkable that Air Canada is marking its 10,000th cargo-only flights since March 2020, a major accomplishment under the difficult circumstances. The pandemic changed our business at unprecedented speed, and the collaboration and creativity across branches and teams has been a defining moment for the Cargo group, and all of Air Canada,” said Jason Berry, Vice
President, Cargo at Air Canada. “The cargo-only flights, which include both scheduled and on-demand flights, have helped provide stability in the global supply chain at a time when distributing essential and vital supplies was critical.”

Air Canada Cargo has been able to achieve this milestone thanks to the hard work of hundreds of dedicated employees across all branches of the company, its supply chain partners and the support of its customers, who came together to find solutions.

“10,000 cargo-only flights is just the beginning and our future is bright. Montreal cargo really worked hard this past year and we are all very proud of that,” said Mamun Ansari, Cargo Service Manager in Montreal.

“Our 10,000th cargo-only flight means we have been resilient during these challenging times. We have been able to adapt, be part of the necessary supply chain moving things such as vaccines,” said Tanith Pinto, Cargo Service Manager in Toronto.

“It is a moment to be proud of and specifically at Air Canada Cargo to see how we have evolved during the course of the pandemic,” said Thomas Getzie, Cargo Service Manager in Vancouver.

“It is just great for the Frankfurt team to know that we have been an important part of the success story. I believe the entire cargo team can really be very proud,” said Leandro De Souza, Area Sales Manager – Cargo – Germany.

“Launching these cargo-only flights during a global pandemic remains, for all of us who were involved, a career highlight. I know I speak for all my colleagues on the Asia-Pacific team when I am proud to represent Air Canada,” said Brayden Zhou, Cargo Manager.

Air Canada set up its network of cargo-only flights using Boeing 787 Dreamliners, Boeing 777 and Airbus A330-300 aircraft on international routes.

Air Canada was also the first airline in the world to go to market with reconfigured widebody passenger aircraft, having removed the seats in the cabin to allow for light freight. Air Canada has converted a total of 11 aircraft, a mix of Boeing 777s and A330-300s.

The evolution at Air Canada Cargo will continue this fall with the arrival of the first of several dedicated freighter aircraft, giving its global customers reliable and predictable capacity.

“As passenger flights pick up, we look forward to continuing to serve our cargo customers and facilitating the movement of goods by air through belly capacity and continued cargo-only flying as we prepare for the arrival of our first Boeing 767-300ER freighters in the fall,” said Jason Berry.

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