

## Bill May



**Born:** 4 December, 1909  
Madawaska, Ontario

**Died:** 24 December, 1981  
Comox B.C.

**Family:** ?

Master Air Pilot

Canadian Aviation Hall of  
Fame

**Queen Charlotte Airlines**

**Pacific Western Airlines**

William Sydney May (Bill), who was not related to 'Wop May', was an aviation pioneer and a Canadian legend. His first job was as an apprentice for Canadian National Railways but in 1928 he had his first flying experience in an Avro Avian and was determined to learn to fly. In 1930 he began flight training in Winnipeg, at the Northwest Aero Marine, and earned his Commercial Pilot's Licence. He was hired by the company, and in 1933 attended the Instructor's course given by the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) at Camp Borden, Ontario. On his return to Winnipeg, he became Manager and Instructor for Northwest Aero Marine until it was taken over by Wings Limited.

In 1935, Bill went to England and was hired as a pilot by Imperial Airways Limited. In 1936 he was assigned as First Officer aboard the airline's new Short Brothers flying boats. In this, the largest aircraft of its type in world service, he flew established routes from England to Palestine, the Persian Gulf, South Africa, Singapore, and Karachi. On the eastern route he was called upon to land on the Sea of Galilee, then fly across five hundred miles of desert. His southward route carried him up the Nile River to Mozambique, and to Durban in South Africa.

Bill flew all of the company's routes as Captain-in-Command and earned Licences for Navigation, Engineering and Wireless Operation; in all skills he was exceptional. British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) absorbed Imperial Airways in 1939 and Bill was placed in charge of pilot training for the new company.

In 1941 Bill was assigned to the Return Service Ferry Command at Montreal, Quebec, an organization operated by BOAC personnel, and administered by the Royal Air Force (RAF). His job was to pilot high priority passengers and cargo to Britain across the North Atlantic Ocean, and return with pilots who had previously ferried operational aircraft to the United Kingdom. By the end of World War II he had completed 280 flights across the Atlantic

A desire to return to Canada along with the possibility of taking early retirement from BOAC prompted Bill to retire in 1951. He returned to Calgary, Alberta, and accepted an invitation from Canadian Pacific Airlines to manage their repairs test flight section. In this role he test flew a number of different aircraft types following repairs. The following year he accepted a position with **Queen Charlotte Airlines** to establish new routes along the coast of British Columbia.

With the amalgamation of **QCA** and several other small airways, **Pacific Western Airlines (PWA)** was formed under the management of Russ Baker. Bill's vast experience was put to good use with **PWA**, flying many types of aircraft. In early 1969 May was qualified as Captain on the Boeing 737. He retired from active flying shortly thereafter, with 41 years of experience and 29,000 flying hours. He remained with **PWA** to take charge of their flight simulator training program at Vancouver, British Columbia. He retired permanently in 1975, and died in Vancouver on July 29, 1981.

