



Bill Sylvester

Bill Sylvester was very hardworking, very funny and he created the largest floatplane company in the world. His father died when he was young and when he left school he became the wage earner for the family. What he knew best was the bush, and he earned a living cutting and selling wood. His first paid job was manager of a U-drive (car rental) operation which he could do simultaneously with his wood business, working day and night. The owner of the business defaulted on his debts to his millionaire backer and the backer gave Bill the chance to buy the business at very favourable rates.

In 1935, Bill became interested in Terry Finney's flying school in Esquimault. He took flying lessons from Terry and became an enthusiastic private pilot, so much so that he considered combining his U-Drive business with an air service. He bought two Luscombe 8A's but starting an airline was put on hold by the outbreak of war and, instead, he took over his only competitor in the car rental business and began to prosper, benefiting from his years of hard work.

After the war, despite opposition from the owner of CPAir, Bill was granted a licence for an airline and started hiring pilots. Chief instructor for the flying school was **Bill McLeod**. In 1945 BC Airlines started operating, adding a Waco ZKQC6 to his fleet. When the Luscombes proved too small for the company's growing charter business, Bill leased a Fairchild 72 and bought 3 Seabees, one of which crashed, the first accident for BC Airlines, killing, young pilot **Al Beach**.

In 1956, BC Airlines had grown from its humble beginnings to a network of bases throughout BC and an impressive fleet of aircraft. Bill, weary of dealing with government officials and bureaucracy, accepted an offer to buy his airline. He drove a hard bargain and emerged a wealthy man. In 1959, bored in retirement, he got a class 4 licence, purchased 3 new planes, a Cessna 150, a 170 and an amphibian 180, and started Victoria Flying Services. Among the pilots hired was **Bill Cove**. Tragedy struck Sylvester in 1968 when his son, a pilot, crashed and was killed on take-off.

Bill was a regular at Mary's Restaurant, still by Victoria Airport, where whenever he heard of the passing of a friend or colleague, he would vow to give up whiskey, cigars and climbing stairs. In 1976 he was left speechless by a stroke and on July 19 he gave up whiskey, cigars and stairs forever.

His nickname 'Pussy Cat' is from the cartoon cat 'Sylvester'.

Born: 1st February, 1911
Victoria B.C.

Died: 19 July, 1976
Victoria BC

Family: Wife Joan
2 ex wives
1 Son, Brian (1st wife)

Owner **BC Airlines**

Victoria Flying Services

Pilot

Known as: "**Pussy Cat**"

More can be read about Bill Sylvester in 'No Numbered Runways' by Jack Schofield or in 'BC Aviator' Sep/Oct 1992 and Dec/Jan 1993

