



## Don Braithwaite

Pilots and loggers alike were happy to work with Don Braithwaite. He paid well and treated them all with respect.

Don's family emigrated from New Zealand soon after his birth and he grew up near Victoria, British Columbia, on his family's farm. He could drive a truck and handle farm machinery before he reached his teens and, in 1939, at 12 years old, was hired by the Government and licensed to drive gravel trucks on the highway. He kept his air brake licence for the next 78 years.

After the war ended, trucking for the logging industry on Vancouver Island became Don's career. When the manager at Mead Lake, Cowichan, gave him the whole contract for the operation, he expanded his business until he owned 20 off-highway trucks and was proud to have the largest private fleet in BC. As the range of his operation expanded along the coast and into the inlets of Vancouver Island, he came to realise that, to manage the fleet efficiently, he needed a float plane – and a licence to fly it.

**Born:** February 14, 1928

Auckland New Zealand

**Died:** December 12, 2021

**Family:** Wife Elsie,

4 Children

Trucker and Logger

Pilot

Original Owner **Gulf Air**

**The most likeable guy in  
the air services in BC"**

“(Jim Pearce ‘Rainbows and  
Thunderstorms

Buying his first plane opened a new chapter in Don's life. By this time, he already owned a logging camp on Knight Inlet and needed a place to dock near Campbell River. He found a spot with **Trans Mountain Air** on Tyee Spit, became a partner in Trans Mountain, and eventually took sole ownership. With the growing number of logging camps and isolated communities on the island needing freight haulage, the floatplane business was booming. The Campbell River Spit was the busiest base in North America and, through a series of buyouts and takeovers of other small airlines, Trans Mountain grew to fill the need.

Don changed the name of his airline to **Gulf Air** which, at its busiest ran 25 planes. About that time Jim Pattison was buying up small airlines to form **Air B.C.** and Don accepted an offer from him. He returned to driving logging trucks and started West Coast Hauling, which picked up and delivered equipment all around the Island. This business was soon increased by contracts with the growing number of fish farms for both delivery and cleaning the nets.

Don would say of Vancouver Island:

*“We live in the most beautiful place in the world, enjoy it while you can”*

He continued to do the work he loved until he turned 90.

British Columbia Aviation Museum

