



## Norm Gold

Norm Gold was an original thinking and successful aviation businessman. Before WW II he worked as a welder at Burrard Shipyards in Vancouver and he returned there after serving in the RCAF as a navigator. He left the shipyards when his grandfather needed help in the family bakery business and became manager of the Powell River bakery. In Powell River he developed a real interest in aviation and took flying lessons to earn a commercial flying licence.

Norm had no plans to get seriously into the aviation business until he met Roy Brett from Chilliwack, who had a licence to run an airline but no planes. Norm bought the licence from Roy and bought two planes – a Piper Clipper and an old Seabee flying boat. At first, business was very slow and he was doing most of the flying himself as well as working in his restaurant. Business picked up when he bought two twin engine Apaches and started a scheduled service between Powell River and Nanaimo. Norm had a theory that the way to success was small airplanes flown at high frequency and it paid off. After a year of operation Norm's biggest competitor, PWA, flying 2 big DC-3's was carrying 2,000 passengers against Norm's 6,500 passengers in his 2 little Apache's under his new company's name 'Powell River Airways'.

Norm had a policy he insisted on for his pilots – 'No tie, No fly'. He did not want a bunch of scruffy bush pilots flying his passengers. He fired Al Campbell for removing his tie and Al stormed out of the office, tieless' and formed his own company in Sechelt under the name Tyee Air, which became one of Norm's biggest competitors and ran for 35 years.

By 1965 Norm was looking to acquire other little airlines and he bought out Don MacGillivray's Nanaimo Airlines, which was flying a little Cessna 170 and a Beaver on floats between Nanaimo and Vancouver. His new maxim was to operate close to the customers, and a seaplane could get closer to downtown than a plane on wheels. The new amalgamated company was named AirWest. By 1969, 4 Beavers and an Otter were dedicated to the Harbour flights. AirWest was a successful venture carrying 40 – 50 passengers a day which Norm attributed to the work of Irene Nerfa, Ed Green and engineers Dave Evans and Malcolm Campbell.

Norm was a demanding employer and as attitudes in the industry changed, problems arose with the main union (CBRT) over his seniority decisions and working conditions which resulted in a strike. In addition to this, one of his Twin Otters crashed into Coal Harbour killing 11 people which, despite being no fault of the airline, had a bad effect on AirWest's reputation. Norm began to lose his enthusiasm for the aviation business and in 1980 sold out to Jim Pattison who was acquiring airlines to amalgamate into Air BC. Norm retired after the sale and moved to Salt Spring Island.

The above information is extracted from the chapter 'No tie, no fly' in Jack Schofield's book 'No Numbered Runways' For more information on Norm's career refer to this book which can be found in the BCAM Resource Centre

