

William (Bill) Cowan

JULY 6, 2022

William C. (Bill) Cowan

In the words of John Gillespie Magee, Bill
“slipped the surly bonds of Earth” July 6, 2022,
in Surrey B.C., aged 79.



Bill was the son of Air Commodore (RCAF)
Sydney G. Cowan and Frances Pittman. His Dad was from Victoria and his Mom
was from Newfoundland which perhaps gave Bill a broad perspective and love for
this country. Bill was born on his parents’ brief wartime posting to Calgary in
1942.

He was predeceased by his wife Halina (Janiga) in 2018 and his sister Wendy
Racine. He leaves his first wife Judy Gauvreau Deslauriers (Roméo) and sons
Grant, Craig and Ellert, sister Patricia Badcock (Bill), brother John (Jon) and
brother-in-law Paul Janiga (Claudette). The loss of Halina was a terrible blow to
Bill from which he never really recovered.

After completing his education at E.O.I.T. (now Algonquin College) in Ottawa, he
joined the RCAF without his father’s knowledge in 1964, training as a pilot in
course 6404 first on the Chipmunk, then on the Harvard and CT-133 Silver Star at
Gimli. He received the trophy as the most outstanding student on his course. His
father presented Bill with his wings upon graduation.

He was posted for OTU training on the Lockheed P2V Neptune and was then
assigned to 407 Squadron at RCAF Station Comox, BC. He qualified as a captain
on the Neptune just as it was being phased out of RCAF service. He asked to
become an instructor on the Harvard replacement, the new Canadair CL41 Tutor

jet trainer. He served at 2-FTS, RCAF Station Moose Jaw, SK beginning in 1968.

When the CAF Golden Centennaires aerobatic team was disbanded an unofficial team was formed at Moose Jaw known as the Tutor Whites. Bill flew with this team developing his taste for aerobatics. And this team became officially the Snowbirds in 1971.

While serving with the 433 Tactical Fighter Squadron Bagotville, Québec, as an Intelligence Officer, Bill and fellow-pilot Don Farion built two kit versions of the Pitts Special high performance bi-plane. They developed an aerobatic act and were soon in demand at airshows performing as the Canadian Reds.

Bill joined CP Air in 1972 based in Vancouver. He first trained as Second Officer on the DC8.

In parallel with his airline job, Bill continued to fly the Pitts Special as an airshow pilot. The Canadian Reds became the Skil Power Tools team, then the Ray-Ban Golds. evolving from two aircraft to four, using new two-seater Pitts Specials. The other team members were Rod Ellis, George Kirbyson, and Al Hauff. The team wowed airshow audiences around North America. Their signature "arrow through the heart" manoeuvre was subsequently adopted by the Snowbirds.

Bill had good negotiating skills he used with the Union at CP Air. He also submitted a contract for the CNE airshow once which specified the team be met on arrival at Toronto's Island Airport with a chilled bottle of Dom Pérignon. Indeed, they were met by CNE representatives wheeling a silver wine cooler which contained ... a bottle of Ontario Baby Duck, with its label featuring flying ducklings. Bill said it tasted pretty good.

In summary, Bill flew airshows for 19 years without an accident, retiring in 1990. Bill's personal aircraft, the Pitts Special S-2A designated C-FAMR flew its last flight in September 2003 arriving in Ottawa for donation to Canada's National

Aviation Museum in Ottawa, where it still resides. The aircraft was noteworthy in that Bill had successfully modified its engine to increase its horsepower from 200 to 260. It was donated by its then owner Dave Gillespie, who said, “flying it is like holding a wildcat by the tail.”

Bill would remain with CP Air and its descendent merged companies, retiring from Air Canada in 2002 as a Boeing 737 captain.

While in Moose Jaw Bill improved his sailing knowledge on Buffalo Pound, like many other famous Saskatchewan sailors. Sailing occupied every year after retirement from airshows and airlines and included destinations in Mexico, Polynesia, Hawaii, and the Canadian west coast for Bill, Halina, family, and friends. His skill with a sextant rivalled his talent for electronics and made up for his cooking. He was in demand to captain several yachts safely across the Atlantic. One couldn't serve under a better Captain in the air, or on the sea.

Bill would not have wanted a formal service but there will be a celebration of this man's life later. Bill had many friends in the military and civil aviation community, blue water boating groups, and was beloved by them for his enthusiasm and charm. He was a highly respected and experienced pilot in military, civil, and airshow aviation. He will be long remembered and greatly missed.

Bill would have appreciated donations in his name made to the Canadian Red Cross or the Peace Arch Hospital Foundation in White Rock.

Messages of Condolence

Thinking of families of Bill and Halina at this sad time, including sons Grant and Craig.

— **Wayne Ralph**

So sorry to hear of Bill's passing. I served with him in Moose Jaw while instructing on T33 and Tutor aircraft. Wonderful memories from those years..

Doug and Carol Black

— **Doug Black**

Je me souviens.

— **Serge L'Hostie**

Just seeing Bill always put a huge smile on my face. My sincere condolences to his family. Rest In Peace Bill

— **Ross Bartlett**

What a wonderful Captain he was to fly with! My sincere condolences to the family.

Marlene Peitch

Retired Purser

— **Marlene Peitch**

I saw Bill flying his Ray Ban Gold Pitts and ended up buying it from him when he retired from the team. I told him at the sale that he and his airplane were a Canadian National Treasures. I flew it for a number of years (left his name on the cockpit) and subsequently had the airplane declared by the Canadian Cultural Property Board ,that indeed, it was a Canadian National Treasure ,and I donated and delivered it to to the National Aviation Museum in Ottawa. It is now the property of Canada, and will be preserved forever as it was when Bill flew it, and inspired people around the globe. God Speed Bill. David Gillespie

— **Dave Gillespie**

It's been a very very long time. I met & worked with Bill & Rod Ellis as the PR guy for Skil Power Tools at Chicago Air & Water Show. Because friends & helped them at shows at Moffet Field, CA & in Buffalo to get publicity & impress Ran-Ban! Put them on Good Morning Buffalo ...then rolled the into Ran Ban offices! 1985?Then they grew to 4 teammates! What a joy. Would enjoy connecting with Rod Ellis. I'm in Los Angeles 310-749-9092..My deepest condolences.

Kenny Bellini

— **Kenny Bellini**



<https://www.myalternatives.ca/obituaries/cowan-william-bill>

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