

priateness. The radio telephone, Iglaer discovers, is essential to the West Coast fishermen, but the key to using it is to talk in private code, both about personal affairs and about fishing. Those who use the "Mickey Mouse radio" must learn to be reserved, taciturn, in order not to give away the location of the fish or details of their private lives to people listening in from Vancouver to Alaska. To reflect the patterns of this culture, a business-like logbook provides a good model, mirroring the man whose motto is "The spirit of liberty is the spirit of he who is not too sure that he is right" (13).

The dust jacket anticipates the logbook. It reproduces of a nautical chart framing a small black-and-white snapshot of a ghostly, nearly invisible troller. Map and frame overwhelm boat and subject. What makes the jacket especially fitting is that the chart is pencilled over, in various colours, with John Daly's own notations. The map of the place is personalized by these signs of its being used. So with *Fishing With John* — the book finds its personality in its usefulness.

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*The Accidental Airline: Spilsbury's QCA*, by Howard White and Jim Spilsbury. Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 1988.

The history of commercial aviation in post-Second World War British Columbia has only recently begun to be written. Vancouver-based Pacific Western Airlines (formed in 1945 as Central B.C. Airways) and Queen Charlotte Airlines (formed in 1946) were largely responsible for the retreat or demise of the old coastal shipping companies in the ten years following the war. Jim Spilsbury's *The Accidental Airline* joins John Condit's history of Pacific Western Airlines<sup>1</sup> as part of a popular literature that complements the earlier shipping histories by Robert Turner, W. Kaye Lamb, Norman Hacking, and Gerald Rushton. The book will also be of interest for the light it throws on the wartime economy of British Columbia and on the "solid interlocking of interests" within the province's corporate, legal, and political fraternities in the decade after the Second World War.

Born in 1905, Spilsbury was brought up on Savary Island, where he established a radio business when he was twenty-one years old. Between the wars he toured "Spilsbury's Coast," repairing and supplying radios to

<sup>1</sup> John Condit, *Wings Over The West: Russ Baker and the Rise of Pacific Western Airlines* (Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 1984).

settlers, canneries, and logging and mining camps.<sup>2</sup> In 1941 he formed the Vancouver-based company Spilsbury and Hepburn specifically to manufacture radio equipment for the West Coast war effort.

This book begins in 1943, when Spilsbury and Hepburn bought their first airplane to service their customers. "They wanted our radios," Spilsbury recalls, "but when they saw the plane we brought the radios in, they wanted the plane even more." For a few years Spilsbury ran an airline disguised as a radio business, but in 1946 he formed QCA, which in 1955 was taken over by PWA after a bitter power struggle. At the limit of its expansion QCA was Canada's third-largest airline, providing air service to the west coast of the mainland and Vancouver Island.

The book contains several themes of interest to students of British Columbia history. The first relates to the primacy of the resource industries to the coastal economy, the second to the revolution in modes of transportation on the coast between 1935 and 1955, and the third to the extraordinary power wielded at the time by a handful of institutions and individuals in British Columbia.

Spilsbury's customers were the people and companies engaged in what were known during the war as the "critical industries," namely logging, fishing, mining, and farming (38). Spilsbury understood the needs of this perennial quartet of resource industries, and after 1943 his airplanes supplied them with radio equipment, supplies, and passenger service. He was their lifeline, and they were his. Profits earned from providing air service to the Alcan (1949-1955) and DEW line (1955) megaprojects were considerable, but QCA's prime revenues remained those derived from the logging and fishing industries. "We were there when they were all booming," Spilsbury says of logging camps in the late 1940s, "and we couldn't help but to boom along with them." Spilsbury's airline did not — like a modern airline — unite major urban populations; like the steamship companies, it linked Vancouver with work camps and company towns to the north of it.

Spilsbury was acutely sensitive to the revolution in transportation wrought by air travel. No longer were packtrains and overland expeditions necessary to visit remote timber and mineral prospects: air travel brought capital and resources into closer contact. Seaplanes, for example, could land men and equipment at distant lakes and inlets. Writing of one of his first airborne radio repair trips in 1944, he remarks: "To visit all these places normally took at least a month out of my life. Placing them suddenly

<sup>2</sup> Howard White and Jim Spilsbury, *Spilsbury's Coast: Pioneer Years in the Wet West* (Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 1987).

minutes apart was like travelling in time. It was uncanny." By the early 1950s QCA "had darn near put the old Union Steamship Company on the rocks, destroying the coast's old lifeline. I felt burdened with a deep responsibility over this, deeper than maybe anybody else would have, because I was the guy who knew how essential those steamships had been for coast settlers like my parents."

The book is one of heroes and villains. QCA's early demise, as Spilsbury sees it, was caused by the founder of PWA, Russ Baker, "a rough upstart . . . an impostor, a bullshitting bush flier." Baker's Central BC Airways was prohibited by the federal Air Transport Board from flying on the coast, but after 1949 Baker "poached" and "pirated" his way into Spilsbury's territory, drawing away so much business that Spilsbury was forced to sell out to Baker in 1955.

Baker's strength stemmed from what Spilsbury calls his "extremely powerful friends." The villains, specifically, were Baker's principal backer, the Ontario mining magnate Karl "Daddy" Springer; his hunting friend, the logging magnate H. R. MacMillan; federal Minister of Trade and Commerce C. D. Howe; federal Solicitor-General and Vancouver MP Ralph Campney; the Bank of Montreal; Alcan; and Alcan's American contractors. "They were such a small group in this country then," Spilsbury reflects, "if you got on the wrong side of them, they could cut you off at the bank, they could tie you up with red tape, they could get you coming and going."

For example, in 1953, when Baker applied to the Air Transport Board to extend his routes into QCA territory, he was supported by H. R. MacMillan — a director and shareholder in the ailing Union Steamship Company — who wanted Baker's, not Spilsbury's, airline to inherit Union Steamship's coastal routes and federal mail subsidies. Solicitor-General Campney (whose Vancouver law firm represented Baker, Alcan, and Union Steamships) also supported Baker's successful ATB application. "Being small and independent," Spilsbury realized at the time, "we are defenceless against political and financial groups." A friend in Ottawa at the time suggested to Spilsbury that he construct a family tree of the directors of the Bank of Montreal "and figure out who we should get next to." Stories such as these are, alas, credible, and Spilsbury supports his allegations against Baker and Co. with reference to Condit's remarkably candid history of PWA.

Pushed further into debt by Baker's airline and backroom tactics, Spilsbury sold QCA to him, but only after C. D. Howe persuaded the Bank of Montreal to call its loan to QCA of \$400,000 on twenty-four hours' notice.

Spilsbury called up the local bank manager, but "it had all been done over his head, from back east." Simultaneously, Baker bribed officials in Ottawa to the tune of \$25,000 in unmarked bills. Financed by what Spilsbury calls his "big money boys," Baker bought QCA for \$1.4 million in July 1955, merging it with PWA. "This was not competitive victory," Spilsbury concludes, "it was outright purchase. You can purchase anything your heart desires if Daddy is rich enough."

Something of a professional Englishman, Spilsbury found all this utterly appalling. "I was brought up in the old English style which taught you that if you come from a good family and behaved like a gentleman, that was enough; you could count on the right sort of people to see it and you didn't have to sell yourself." The right sort of people may have helped Spilsbury get from Savary Island to Vancouver, but they could not help him on Parliament Hill. The moral of the story is that a boy from the West Coast can succeed in business as long as he restricts his operations to a modest scale and to his own turf, keeps out of the way of corrupt politicians and big money boys, and spends as little time as possible "on bended knee in that godforsaken outpost called Ottawa."

Altogether the book makes a revealing if an uncomfortable read. The joy and levity of *Spilsbury's Coast* is largely lacking and is replaced with serious political drama and more than a little justified bitterness towards Baker and his backers. The two-page index, however, is execrable; a glossary of aviation acronyms would have been handy; and new material is presented that belonged in the first volume, such as the year his father came to Canada (1889) and the date his family moved to Savary Island (1913).

The book deserves to be where it is, on the best-seller lists. Spilsbury has a raconteur's eye for an anecdote, a keen sense of history, an earthy sense of humour, and, like Captain Walbran, a genuine interest in the people who lived and worked on the coast.

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*Stein: The Way of the River*, by Michael M'Gonigle and Wendy Wickwire. Foreword by David Suzuki. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1988. Pp. 191.

In this book M'Gonigle and Wickwire relate the story of a wilderness conflict which epitomizes the debates over old-growth forest currently proliferating in British Columbia. At the same time, they provide scholarly