

CIVIL FLYING SERVICES (WA) PTY LTD

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All photos by the author unless specified.



Photo via Barry Tate.

By 1965 CFS had built up its business at Moorabbin Airport to be a key competitor in the Melbourne aviation scene, offering flying training, charter, aircraft sales and maintenance. Company management was eyeing the boom in charter flying in distant Western Australia, where mining development and exploration for minerals and natural gas required extensive air support throughout the large state.

Because CFS was a new Beechcraft dealer, it approached the main iron ore mining companies in the Pilbara region, 1600 km north of Perth, hoping to sell them new Beechcraft twins. It was quickly learnt that the mining ventures had no interest in operating their own aircraft, preferring to have aviation charter companies bid for contracts to provide the required air services.

The first foothold into WA was gained when CFS was awarded a significant contract to be the sole aerial contractor for the Hammersley Iron projects in the Pilbara. CFS realized it could not effectively operate WA contracts from Melbourne. It would have to establish a new base in Perth, find a new office, hangar and staff. The answer was the time-worn aviation practice of buying out an existing operation to take over its premises, infrastructure, DCA approvals and licences as well as existing charter contracts. Overtures were made to Perth companies, resulting in one expressing interest in a buy-out :- **Millard O'Sullivan Aviation – MOSA.**

Millard O'Sullivan Aviation Pty Ltd had been established in Perth in 1961 by partners Don O'Sullivan and Ray Millard. Known locally as "MOSA", the new company commenced operations in February 1962 with **Perth Flying School** and **Millard O'Sullivan Air Charter Pty Ltd.**

PFS was Perth's first commercial flying training school. Previously the Royal Aero Club of WA had the monopoly on such pilot training. MOSA poached Aero Club CFI Phil Hicks to run PFS, leading to some feisty rivalry between the two organisations, which at the time were based side by side at Perth Airport (Guildford). Neither wanted to be at the main airport conducting training among airliners, but the old Maylands Aerodrome was being closed by DCA and the replacement Jandakot Airport was not yet completed. Both

moved to Jandakot in 1964 as soon as their hangars and facilities were built. Ironically the new airport plan allocated the Aero Club and MOSA adjoining land to build their new hangars, however by then other commercial schools had sprung up at Jandakot and it was no longer an issue.

MOSA had acquired the Piper dealership for WA back in 1961, previously held by agricultural operator Doggett Aviation at Maylands. This resulted in PFS commencing with a fleet of PA-22 Colts and Tri-Pacers, later adding PA-28 Cherokee 140s. With the pending move to Jandakot Airport, PFS was renamed MOSA Air Academy. Piper Aztec 250s were used for charter.

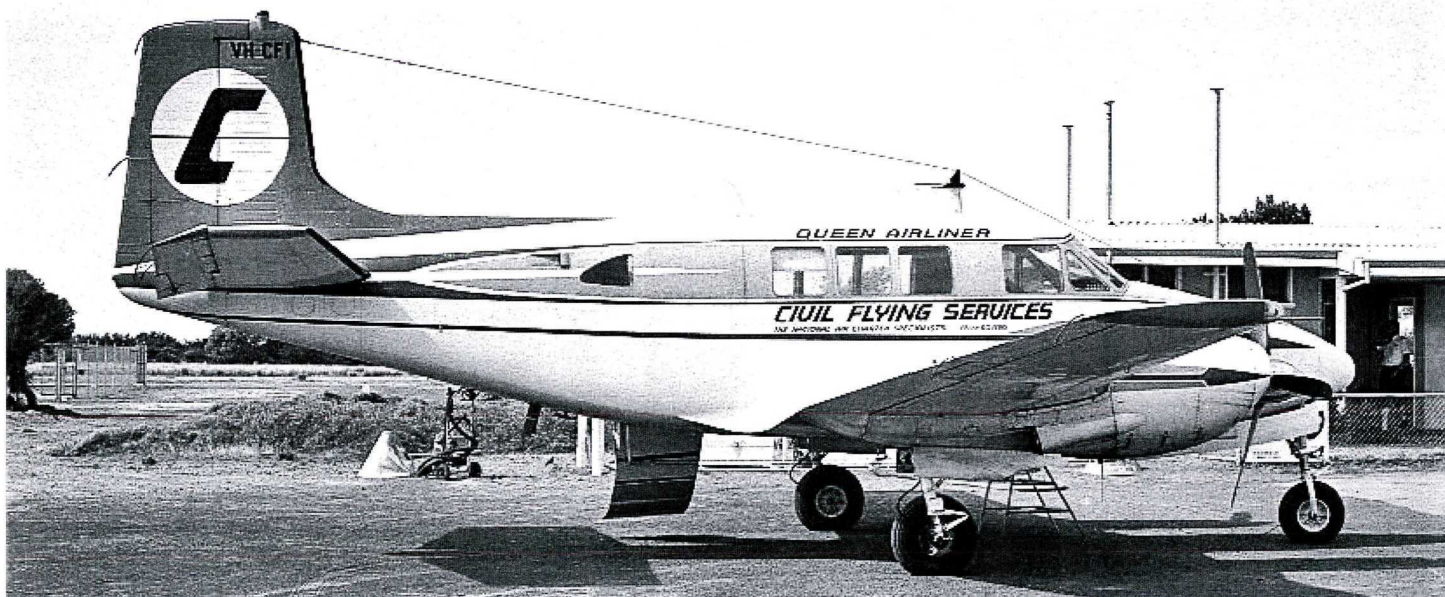
CFS (WA) is born

After the terms of the takeover had been negotiated, Civil Flying Services (WA) Pty Ltd was formed effective 16 October 1965, acquiring all the previous owners' shareholding in Millard O'Sullivan Aviation Pty Ltd and all its assets including aircraft. The newly-built *Millard O'Sullivan Aero Centre* building at Jandakot Airport proved to be a perfect base for the new CFS division.

The MOSA Air Academy became **Civil Flying School**, and Millard O'Sullivan Air Charter Pty Ltd became **Civil Flying Services (W.A.) Pty Ltd.**

The first General Manager of CFS (WA) was Alex MacDonald, who had been with CFS at Moorabbin. First Operations Manager was Max Folks. Both would later team up to operate other charter operations at Jandakot. To get the WA operation off on a firm basis, Bib Stillwell came to Perth in November for talks with the WA Minister for Industrial Development and North West, Charles Court, who later became WA Premier. Court's memo of the meeting recorded that he was impressed by the progressive new aviation company and agreed to investigate Stillwell's requested concessions on the WA State Department of Transport tax levied on air charter operations.

The Hammersley Iron contract required Beech Barons initially based at Roebourne, Mount Tom Price and King Bay. On 29 June 1965 CFS Beech 65 Queen Air VH-CFI arrived at Jandakot from Moorabbin, ferried by Dr. Ralph Capponi.



Beech 65 Queen Air at Esperance W.A. February 1971.

The Queen Air commenced flying mining personnel between Perth and Mount Tom Price. A second new Queen Air VH-CFD arrived at Jandakot 29 November 1965 to replace a Baron on a Conzinc contract, operating from Perth to Mount Tom Price and other North West mining towns. In late 1966 CFS (WA) beat bids from Masling Aviation, Cootamundra NSW and Murchison Air Charter, Perth to gain a Government rain-making project over vast areas of WA. Baron VH-CFJ commenced the operation the following March, fitted with silver-iodide burners at each wingtip.

As well as the charter business, the CFS (WA) flying school and maintenance at Jandakot quickly grew. Because the parent CFS at Moorabbin was a Beech dealership, CFS (WA) bid for most contracts quoting Beech twins. This gave them an advantage over Aztec operators because Barons were preferred by charterers over the long distances in WA - Barons were believed to generally have a ground speed at least 10 knots faster. That was quite an attraction for long flights in the daytime convective turbulence experienced over much of the WA outback in the pre-pressurised charter days. Similarly, the Piper Cherokees inherited from MOSA used by Civil Flying School at Jandakot were replaced during 1966 by Beech Musketeers for basic training.

More expansion

1967 was a big year for CFS (WA). In January the company announced that it had taken over **Muir Airlines of WA** also based at Jandakot, including their two Barons and Beech 95 Travelair. The effective date was 13 January 1967. Douglas C. Muir began his aviation career in 1936 as an apprentice mechanic with Stephens Aviation in New Guinea. He later went to England to work for Imperial Airways before returning to New Guinea and learning to fly. During the civilian evacuation of New Guinea in early 1942 ahead of the Japanese advance, Muir maintained the evacuation aircraft before and he and Arthur Collins flew Stephens Aviation's Avro 10 VH-UXX (formerly *Faith in Australia*) from Port Moresby to Townsville. He joined Qantas Empire Airways as a ground engineer and within a few months returned to the New Guinea war zone as a volunteer engineer on QEA DH.86s evacuating the last civilians from Mount Hagen in the Highlands. He was later awarded a Commendation for Bravery for his part. Later in the war he served as Catalina flight engineer on the secret Qantas Perth-Ceylon 28 hour non-stop service in radio silence. He flew 28 Indian Ocean

crossings through Japanese held airspace. The few high-priority passengers carried received the *Order of the Double Sunrise* certificate.

By 1956 Doug Muir was in Darwin operating as Muir Aviation with two DH.84 Dragons. As the company grew with modern light aircraft, it was renamed Muir Airlines of NT. In 1964 Doug was having health problems and medical advice was for him to leave the tropics. Knowing that SA Air Taxis was keen to expand into the NT he began talks with SAAT's Managing Director Dick Cavill. Planning to move his family to the Mediterranean climate of Perth, Muir quietly made an application to the WA Department of Transport for a new Charter Licence in November 1964. By the time the negotiations for the SAAT takeover as were completed in July 1964, under new name SA and Territory Air Services (SAATAS), Muir flew his Beech twins to Perth to commence Muir Aviation in the West. As Managing Director, he intended to acquire Beech D18S VH-FID from Flinders Island Airways at Moorabbin to add a bit of fun to the charter work, but was persuaded to be more conventional by purchasing another Baron. However he did acquire Beech C17L *Staggerwing* VH-UXP, ferrying it from Sydney to Jandakot to be his private aircraft. Mining support contracts were gained with Beech Barons, a Beech 95 Travelair and Queen Air VH-DHQ, first of its type in WA.

Doug Muir recalls he had good relations with the iron ore companies but after a lifetime in aviation, he did not wish to expand and move up to Beech King Airls, as some customers were urging. When CFS (WA) made him offers to take over, he was prepared to consider them. After selling his Perth company in January 1967, Muir promptly left for USA to collect a Piper Aztec which he ferried back to be his own aircraft. He remained in Perth and was involved in local aviation for many years to come, including restoring Comper Swift VH-ACG to airworthy condition.

Third Level Airline Routes

The next step in CFS (WA) expansion came with DCA's announcement that it had decided to grant Supplementary Airline licences, popularly known as *Third Level Airlines* to commence in Australia from late 1967. Under Regulation 203, specified airline routes could be operated by charter companies with light aircraft. In Western Australia this allowed Perth-based MacRobertson Miller Airlines to divest many uneconomic routes currently being flown by DC-3s. The

Department of Civil Aviation invited charter companies to submit tenders for their preferred routes from a list of sectors across Australia.

During 1967 CFS (WA) management prepared detailed submissions and costings for the many MMA routes being offered to charter companies. When DCA announced the successful bidders, CFS (WA) was awarded the plum routes of Perth to regional towns Albany, Esperance and Norseman, as well as a separate licence for the short Perth-Rottnest Island route.

The company's airline operation was based at Perth Airport (Guildford), using the name **Civil Flying Services**. Having specified IFR Beech Queenair equipment, three Queen Airs were allocated and additional pilots employed. The airline services boarded and arrived at parking bays at the passenger terminal, which at that time was both Domestic and International.

The CFS airline services from Perth commenced during 1968 and continued for the following decade. First was the short Perth-Rottnest Island-Perth commencing 25 March 1968, with 24 services weekly, competing with Murchison Air Charter's Southern Airlines who were also awarded this route. Services then began to Albany, Esperance and Norseman.

Into the 1970s

In 1972 routes to the north to the Murchison district were acquired, adding services from Perth to Mount Magnet, Meekatharra, Wiluna, Cue, Yalgoo, Sandstone and Yeelirrie. The town of Southern Cross was added to the Perth-Norsemen route. The Queen Airs gave sterling service and in December 1973 CFS (WA) announced its 100,000th passenger had been carried on their scheduled airline services.

An additional route was added in 1974 when the small **Newton Airways** at Onslow was taken over, to gain its Reg. 203 route Onslow-Learmonth-Onslow. This service was flown by the company Barons based in the area on mining company contracts. A brand new airline route was inaugurated on 16 August 1976, Perth-Bunbury-Perth twice daily, and proved successful.

CFS (WA) promoted their airline services through extensive WA newspaper advertising, offering advance-purchased fares, tourist packages with hotels and rental cars and ensuring maximum media coverage of each new aircraft or extra services on a route. Their advertising stressed they carried air freight on all services and that their schedules connected at Perth with Ansett flights to the Eastern States, later aligning with TAA.

Meanwhile, CFS (WA) had acquired the Piper dealership for WA in March 1970, resulting in the flying school at Jandakot changing from Beech Musketeers to latest model Piper Cherokee 140s. Also in the Civil Flying School fleet was a DHC-1 Chipmunk VH-UEU painted with the CFS



De Havilland Chipmunk, VH-UEU at Jandakot Dec. 1970.

yellow tail, used for aerobatic training.

Various Piper twins were added to the charter fleet for specific work. However CFS (WA) was still largely a Beech Baron operator, the type still popular with the customers. Yellow Barons were based across North West WA airfields, and were a regular sight meeting the MMA F.28 Fellowship mainline passenger services. In early 1977 two Britten Norman Islanders were purchased for a contract with Cliffs Robe River iron ore mining projects.

CFS (WA) had only one serious accident, when their Piper Aztec VH-CVG went missing in poor weather on a flight from Carnarvon to Perth on 27 January 1971. DCA implemented a large air search with many civil aircraft and a RAAF Dakota carrying volunteer Perth controllers as observers. When cabin seat fittings were washed up on the coast near Shark Bay, the search was called off on 4 February. CFS suffered unwanted publicity throughout, however the facts were that the aircraft was hired to a Perth businessman pilot for several days. He and his four passengers were never found.



Piper Aztec, VH-CVG at Jandakot October 1969.

Enter the turboprops

One of the most sought-after contracts for Perth air charter companies was with WA Petroleum (WAPET) which was developing oil and natural gas fields at Barrow Island, off Onslow in the north. The daily WAPET courier services had previously been flown by Altair using Mitsubishi Mu-2s and Cessna Citation jets, but after that company folded, CFS (WA) acquired the contract. WAPET was a demanding customer, well aware of the realities of air charters. CFS gained the contract by promising a Swearingen Metro type pressurised turbo-prop able to carry larger groups of workers with improved comfort features. The parent CFS at Moorabbin was Australian agent for Swearingen Aviation Corp and recommended a Merlin IV, marketed as the executive version of the Metro. It was ferried from USA and after Australian certification inspection at CFS Moorabbin, delivered to Perth as VH-CFO on 17 May 1975. Among refinements, each passenger had a quality headset to enjoy their own selection of stereo music and entertainment. This was quite a step up for Australian General Aviation in the 1970s. Workers being flown to other WA mines had to be content with DH Doves, a Heron and a variety of unpressurised twins.



Swearingen Merlin 4, VH-CFO at Geraldton 26 August 1976



Stillwell Airlines Swearingen Metro II, VH-SWO

The investment and preparation required to introduce the Merlin 4, their first turboprop, led CFS (WA) to plan replacement of the Queen Airs on the scheduled airline services with turbine equipment. Three Rockwell 690A Turbo Commanders were acquired, each fitted for 9 passengers.

These were introduced on the airline services from Perth on 5 December 1977 and orders placed for two new Swearingen Metro IIs. The turbines on the northern route allowed an extension to Telfer gold mine and on to Alice Springs.

However the world-wide Avgas price increase was making general charter work with the Barons and Navajo uneconomical. To lower overheads, the company announced in December 1978 it was closing the Jandakot operation. A city office was also closed and all business moved to their Perth Airport hangar. The Avgas price rises forced an end to general charter work, concentrating on contracts and airline services with the more economical turbine equipment.

Name change to Stillwell Airlines – and the end

The first of the two Metro IIs arrived as VH-SWN on 29 November 1978, followed by VH-SWO on 13 January 1979. Both entered service on the Albany and Esperance airline services the day after delivery, fitted for 15 passengers with extra space for cargo. Both Metros at first carried no airline name because a change was in the wind.

On 8 December 1978 Bib Stillwell flew in from Melbourne in his Learjet 36A VH-BIB to hold a press conference at Perth Airport. He announced that CFS (WA) was to change name to **Stillwell Airlines**.

Optimism for a bright future under the new name was dashed in June 1979 when the company lost the lucrative WAPET contract when it came up for renewal. The successful tenderer was Jet Charter (WA) which took over the daily Barrow Island runs with Cessna Citations and Beech Kingair 200s. An idea of the importance of the WAPET contract was revealed when Stillwell Airlines announced they were retrenching over half the Perth employees including 9 pilots. Their airline services to Bunbury and Rottnest Island were discontinued.

The other scheduled services continued with the three Swearingens, while most of the piston-engined aircraft and Rockwell 690s were sold.

The end came on 20 February 1980 with the

announcement that the merged Skywest-Jet Charter Air Services Pty Ltd had taken over Stillwell Airlines in a \$5M deal. Included were the two Metroliners VH-SWN & VH-SWO, airline routes and Stillwell Airlines' Perth Airport hangar, offices and departure lounge. The new name for the three merged companies would be **Skywest Airlines**, with Stillwell Airlines' General Manager Dennis Howe appointed to the same position with Skywest.

Skywest Airlines commenced as Australia's second largest Third Level airline, behind Bush Pilots Airways in Cairns. To provide larger passenger aircraft, a Grumman Gulfstream 1 had been purchased in USA. It was a bold move that ended in tears, but that's another story.

CFS (WA) Pty Ltd fleet:

Acquired from MOSA in October 1965:

PA-23 Aztec 250: VH-MEA
PA-24 Comanche: VH-PKH
PA-25 Pawnee 150: VH-MEQ, MER
PA-28 Cherokee: VH-MEB, MEL, MEX, MEY

Acquired from Muir Airlines of WA: in February 1967:

Beech 55 Baron: VH-DMB, DME
Beech 95 Travelair: VH-DMF

CFS (WA) Pty Ltd:

Beech Musketeer: VH-CFA/CTC, CFG/CPO, CFO/CTO, CFQ/CTQ, CFR/CTR, CFK, CTB, CTN, CTU
Beech 35 Bonanza: VH-CFC
Beech 55 Baron: VH-CFA, CFB, CFJ, CFO, CFR, CFS, CFT, DMB/CFG, AGQ, EZX
Beech 58 Baron: VH-CTU
Beech 65 Queen Air: VH-CFD, CFI, ASY, DRV, CTE
Beech 95 Travelair: VH-DMF/CFQ
Piper PA-24 Comanche 260: VH-CFE, CVI
Piper PA-28 Cherokee 140: VH-CTF, CTI, CTJ, CTL, CTP, CVK, CFU
Piper PA-28R Arrow: VH-CVH, CVP
Piper PA-28 Cherokee 235: VH-CFU
Piper PA-32 Cherokee Six: VH-CFO, CVF
PA-31 Navajo: VH-CFP
Rockwell Turbo Commander 690A VH-AAG, -ATF, PCV
Swearingen Merlin 4 VH-CFO
Swearingen Metro II VH-SWN, SWO
Britten Norman BN-2A islander: VH-EQE, -RTV



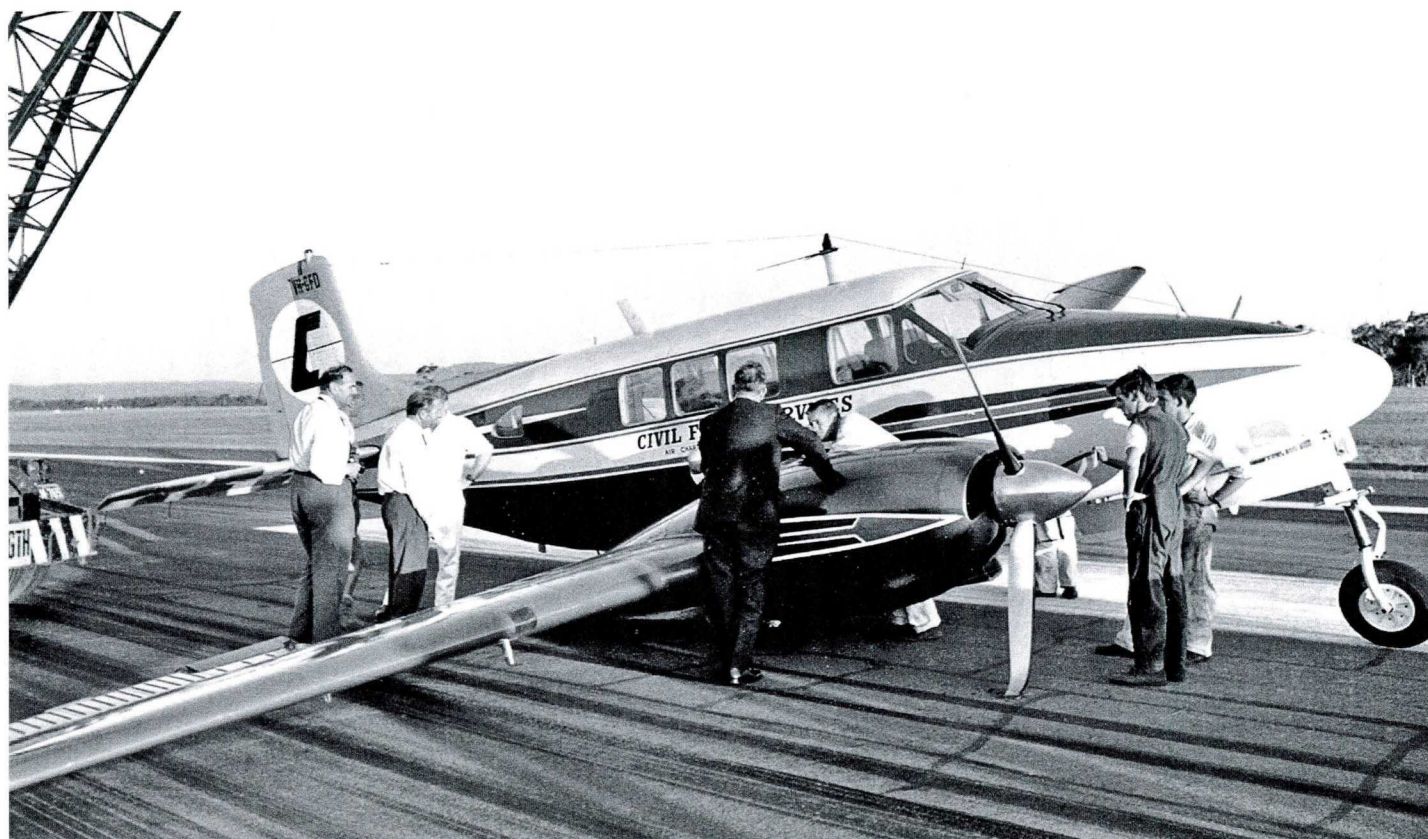
Beech 55 Baron, VH-CFO. Photo: via Barry Tate.



Piper PA-28 Cherokee 140, VH-CTI. Northam, October 1976.



Piper PA-24 Comanche 260, VH-CVI.



Civil Flying Services Beech 65 VH-CFD at Perth Airport, 2 February 1969. Photo: Geoff Goodall Collection.