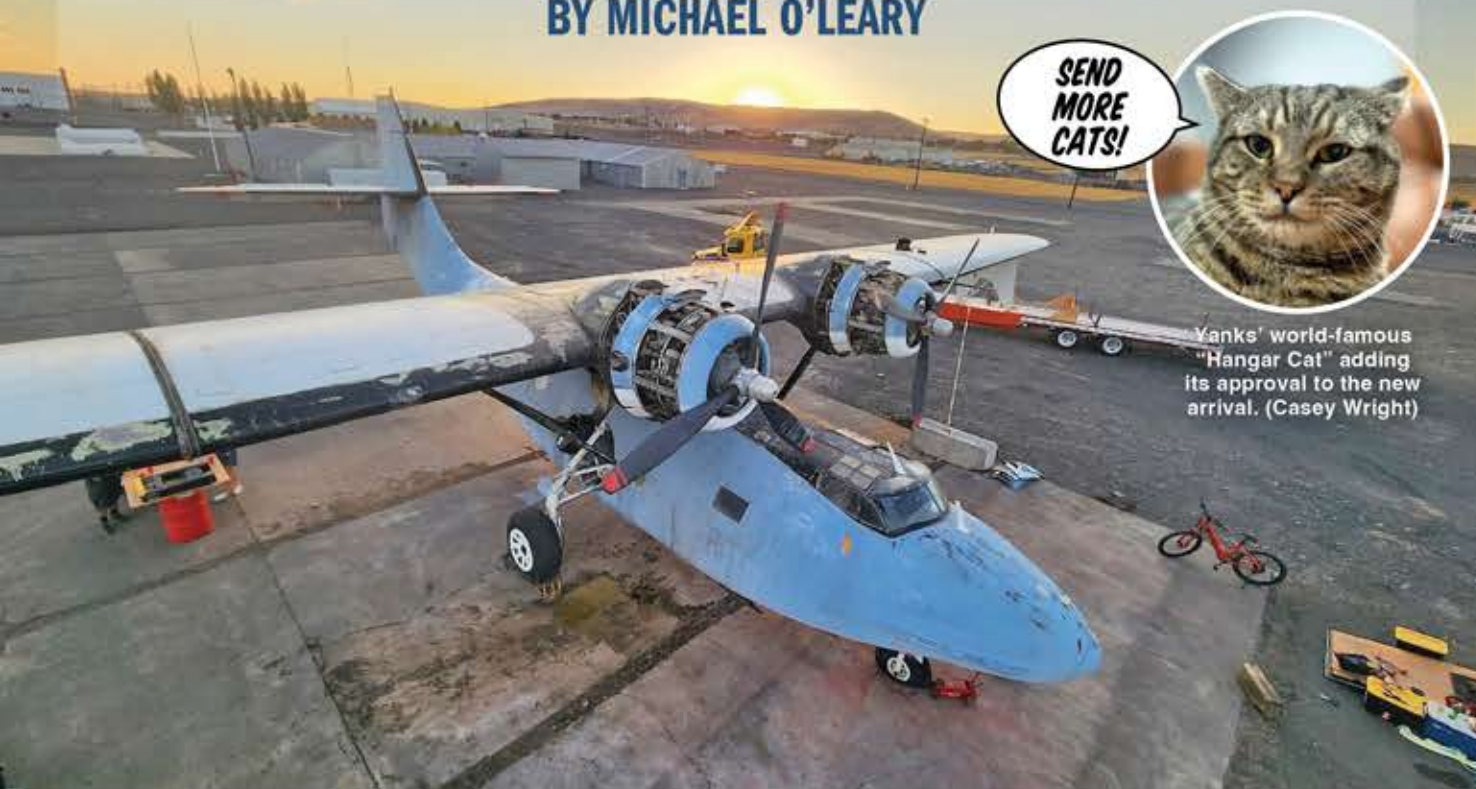


# YANKS SAVES A CAT

HOW YANKS AIR MUSEUM LAUNCHED A RESCUE MISSION TO SAVE A RARE PBV-5A CATALINA BEFORE THE AIRCRAFT WAS SCRAPPED  
BY MICHAEL O'LEARY



Yanks' world-famous "Hangar Cat" adding its approval to the new arrival. (Casey Wright)

I know it seems like it happened overnight, but it didn't. The world population of Consolidated PBV Catalinas (especially flying examples) has drastically dwindled over the last couple of decades. Most of us can remember seeing Catalinas at airshows or fire-fighting in the USA and Canada. All that has changed. When is the last time you saw a flying Cat? Think about it. Few aircraft are more magnificent in flight than the Catalina and I started thinking about the last time that I saw a Cat in flight. I honestly can't remember but it was probably on

a photo flight since, over the years, I have had to good fortune to fly with a number of examples. I will go through photos and try to find that occasion but I have been lucky enough to fly with air yacht conversions, fire-bombers, Warbirds, and survey aircraft. Now, I just wished I had pressed harder to do more aerial missions with the type!

The genesis of this article started some time ago when I learned that a Catalina parked on the ramp at Ephrata, Washington, stood the threat of possibly being scrapped. This was after the example that was

at Buckeye, Arizona, was damaged in a windstorm. And I mean exactly that — damaged. It could have been repaired but the powers to be had that beautiful survivor ripped apart to the point where useful components could not be salvaged. That should not have happened in today's Warbird world.

Talking to the airport manager, I learned that the owner of the Ephrata PBV-5A had basically abandoned the Catalina after not having paid tie-down fees for some time. Some people wanted it gone since it "junked up the airport" but the Cat also had

The Super Cat dominates the Ephrata Airport ramp as the disassembly process begins. (Milo DeGrassi)



Wright R-2600 engines off, work begins on removing the wing from the pylon — no easy task. (Milo DeGrassi)

a strong group of local supporters who seemed to love the fact that the machine was parked at their airport. I knew Charles Nichols was interested in Catalinas and already had one in storage. That machine was suffering some corrosion issues so Charles was looking for either replacement parts or a replacement airframe.

The Ephrata Cat was built for the US Navy as PBV-5A BuNo 34027 with the standard Pratt & Whitney R-1830 engines and went into service with a number of USN units. It was eventually transferred to the US Coast Guard but by 1955 the day of the Cat was drawing to a close. By November of that year, a ferry crew was turning final, dropping the gear, and bringing the plane in for a landing at Naval Air Facility Litchfield Park. Once on the ground, it was defueled and then moved to a parking slot to join dozens of Cats and other USN Navy aircraft of the same time period including Privateers, Texans, Savages, and more.

There was a distinct civilian market for Catalinas and many examples were snapped up in the various auctions held by the government. Catalina 34027 found a buyer during August 1956 and received the civil registration



Removing the elevator and the Steward-Davis Super Cat rudder. (Milo DeGrassi)



Easy does it — with the retractable floats and leading edges removed, the difficult task of lifting the wing off the pylon is underway. (Milo DeGrassi)