



In Memory of Captain Frank Petee

March 22, 1921–January 30, 2001

I first met Captain Frank Petee when I came to work as an Operations agent at the old Allegheny County Airport in Pittsburgh for what was then All American Airways.

In 1953, I was fortunate enough to be hired as a first officer. Over my 34 years as a pilot, I attended many classes taught by Captain Petee. He entered the Flight Training Department in 1959, and became the manager of Flight Training in 1961. In 1972, he became the director of Flight Training Standards, where he was instrumental in the development of pilot ground, flight, and simulator training programs. He retired from active line flying

in 1981, but remained with US Airways as director of Special Projects (Flight) and editor of *Flight Crew View*, an FAA-approved quarterly home-study course for our pilots. The summer issue most often covered aspects of thunderstorms and wind shear. The winter issue, “Win Over Winter” (W.O.W.), covered icing, especially as it pertains to flying over the Allegheny Mountains. Every pilot was required to complete a written exam contained within each quarterly issue.

In addition to Aircraft Ground School, Captain Petee taught Cockpit Resource Management. He also helped develop and start the Fearful Flyers Program. Along with Carol Stauffer, he taught classes that helped many passengers (over 5,000 graduates) overcome their fear of flying. In 1953, Frank was one of the five founders of what is now the US Airways Federal Credit Union, and he was its first elected director.

To quote Captain Bill Leefe, whose remarks were read at the funeral service, “I do not know of any one individual who has the name recognition and respect in the entire airline/aviation industry that Captain Frank Petee had, and it is a very well-deserved respect.”

Little known facts about Frank: Before he ever took the controls of an airplane, Frank, in his teens, had a brief career as a wing-walker and parachute jumper with the famous Gates Flying Circus. The airplanes were Curtiss OX-5 powered Standards and WWI surplus JN-4-D “Jennys”—70 mph top speed. That was when wing “walkers” actually climbed around and stood atop those wings. No safety devices of any kind were used.

When parachuting, Frank and his partner, Kermit “Klinky” Hatt, would leave the forward cockpit of a Standard piloted by Duke Krantz, walk out on the lower wings to the N-struts on each side of the aircraft, and pull their ripcords to open the chutes. Since they had no reserve (or back-up) parachutes in those days, this was how they made certain the darn things would indeed open. In other words, if the chute opened, Frank was literally pulled off the wing. If it didn’t open properly, the jumper would quickly release the harness to let the chute fall earthward while he climbed back into the front cockpit.

I know that I, along with many of our pilots, appreciate the help and knowledge we received over the years thanks to Frank’s expertise and dedication as an instructor. To me, Captain Frank Petee was an “icon” in the aviation industry.

*Jack Semenko
Retired*