

In Memory of Captain Edward John Thurber

September 3, 1921 — March 5, 2000



Captain Edward John Thurber, a truly great man, pilot, and friend, passed away March 5, 2000. To know Edward (Ed as he is known to his family and friends) is to know and love the most important part of his life—his family. I am blessed to say I know and love them all.

Alice, his loving wife of 50 years, is one of the nicest, most lovely, intelligent, and genuine persons I have met. His son, Daniel, (“Danny,” as he is known) is a Captain for us in CLT and is my best friend. We have known each other for over 42 years, now. His daughter, Mary Ann, is a Flight Attendant in CLT. Ed’s family and my family have shared many wonderful times together. For those of you who know Alice, Danny, and Mary Ann, you understand—for they are of the highest caliber of people. Ed loved them deeply and that love truly shows in them. For example, several years ago, Mary Ann had a star named for her dad as a gift—The Edward John Thurber Star. That’s just the kind of unconditional love the Thurbers always give to each other. The pride and love in Ed’s eyes for Mary Ann and Danny was always there. When you visit the Thurber household, you are always shown the best hospitality, served the best food (Alice is a great cook), and given the best time possible. No one could tell a joke or story like Ed.

Ed was born in New Orleans on September 3, 1921. He attended LSU on a swimming scholarship for two years and learned to fly in the CPT Program while attending LSU. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps, Ferry Command in 1941. Ed was stationed at Newcastle AFB, Dover, Del., where he flew the Martin B26. He then was assigned to the “Fireball” operation, which was a military airline operation, and flew across the South Atlantic to Africa and India, flying B24s, DC4s, and B26s. Ed served in the European, African, and Middle Eastern theatres of operation until 1946 and then served in the Air Force Reserve as a Major. His airline career began when he went to work for Modern Air Transport in 1946, then as a co-pilot for National Airlines. He was hired by Piedmont as a Captain on March 22, 1948.

Ed was on the first ALPA Negotiating Committee (Piedmont) and served as MEC Chairman in the mid-1960s, served on the Mediation Board, and did extensive work on the contracts for working conditions, retirement and pay. What he worked so hard for, we enjoy and hold dear today. He also served on grievance committees. In the late 1950s, Piedmont sent him to Holland to evaluate the F-27 before they purchased them for the airline.

In the winter of 1949, after making an ILS approach to Runway 36 during a blizzard in Cincinnati, he was informed by the tower that he had just gone on the official record for making the first 200-1/2 instrument approach.

While flying a Fairchild F-27, climbing through an overcast at 9,000 feet over Kentucky, he flew through a flock of wild geese which disintegrated the complete leading edge and wing fairing between the engine and fuselage, and damaged the prop and control surfaces. Ed made a safe landing in Lexington, Ky.

Flying a Martin 404 in the early 1960s from Augusta, Ga. to Wilmington, N.C., Ed noticed smoke was coming through the floorboard. He located the hot spot, cut a hole through the floor with a crash-ax, and extinguished the fire with a fire extinguisher. He then landed safely in Wilmington.

In closing, I am proud to say I have been given the privilege to have known Ed Thurber. I know of no man, other than my father, whom I respect more. It is my wish to have flown as Ed's co-pilot, although through the stories and fond memories of others here at US Airways, I suppose I have. Captain David Koseruba perhaps said it best when he heard of Ed's passing: "As a veteran of the Wilmington crew base, I can tell you again, as I'm sure you know, Ed Thurber was a true southern gentleman. What a class act: soft spoken, articulate, and every bit the consummate professional. His legacy in part, is the continuation of his personal dedication to his craft by his son, Captain Danny, and daughter Mary, a flight attendant in the Charlotte base. They are both a true reflection of that kind and gentle man. We were so fortunate to know and work with him."

Tory W. Vaughan (PHL)
B-767

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