

In Memory of Captain Dick Henry

December 5, 1927—August 2000

A lot of us First Officers and Captains lost a good friend and dedicated pilot this past August when Captain Dick Henry passed away after a short, fierce battle with cancer. Most likely, three quarters of the US Airways pilots never knew of Dick Henry. But, for those of us who did, especially us guys hired around the 1963 to 1975 era, he was one of a handful of Captains that got us through our first year check ride and Captain check out.

After I was hired by Allegheny Airlines (actually Captain Harvey Thompson) in 1963, and after a few trips over the mountainous Allegheny system as a Reserve First Officer, I knew I had to fly with someone who would take me under his wing and teach me “how to fly.”

I talked to the most senior First Officer at the base, Don Davis. He mentioned two Blockholding Captains and a Reserve Captain, named Dick Henry, who could really help a new First Officer.

I received a block and flew regularly with one Blockholding Captain, occasionally with the other, and about once a month with Captain Henry.

During my first trip with Dick, the cockpit atmosphere was similar to that set by the other two Captains. We read the checklist, used the required airspeeds, made the altitude callouts, and the flight proceeded like it was right out of the book. Then I made the mistake of telling Dick that I was to have my first-year check ride with an infamous check airman: simulated engines failures, a newspaper placed in front of the windshield to simulate IFR, slow flight, no-flap landings, crosswind takeoffs and landings, hydraulic and gear failures, partial panel, and . . . oh, you get the idea by now . . . questions, questions, and more questions.

I wasn't the only First Officer that Dick Henry worked over for that first-year check ride.

Dick was also a nuts and bolts guy who really got into the prop controls on the 440, Martin, 580, and the F-27. Dick also had a nickname. He was often called “Needle Ball Henry,” as he was very boisterous and upset when the turn-and-bank instruments were being taken out of our aircraft. He started a one-man campaign to get the instruments back into the fleet, and he was successful.

Fourteen years ago this September, Dick was taking off in a light aircraft when the engine quit. A hard crash landing left him a paraplegic. He never left this bed except to go to the hospital.

Most times he was bright and cheerful. Maintenance manuals and accident reports were everywhere in his room. The only time I saw Dick upset was after the loss of our B-737 over Aliquippa. He was always writing to the FAA, ALPA and Boeing over the B-737 rudder system. He redesigned the B-737 rudder with a hydraulic dump valve, and sent the drawings to ALPA. ALPA Engineering asked him how he came up with this rudder pressure dump system. He replied, “Out of a small handbook, published by the United States Navy in 1944, called *The Aircraft Maintenance Handbook*.”

Goodbye my friend, and have a good trip.

*Don Shipley
(retired)*