

# *In Memory of Captain Willis Petrie*

*February 9, 1913—February 9, 2001*



I heard of Captain Willis Petrie (“Pete” to those who knew him) before I first saw him, sometime in 1971 or 1972 when I arrived at Allegheny as part of the Mohawk merger. I first met Capt. Petrie over 27 years later in 1999 as we were lining up guest speakers for the first Council 94-sponsored “Annual Retirement Dinner” to honor all pilot retirees. Along with Captains Kip Barraclough, John Harkin, and Harvey Thompson, Capt. Petrie was then the eldest of the four still-living pilots who flew for All American Airways (AAA), the forerunner of Allegheny and now US Airways.

Capt. Petrie retired at age 60 on Feb. 9, 1973. At the time, he was the Chief Pilot in PIT. That was a position Pete had held for nearly 25 years, having been appointed by Capt. Harvey Thompson, the first pilot Vice President of the Flight Operations Department.

As I talked to Capt. Petrie prior to the October 1999 retirement dinner, my admiration continued to increase. I learned that he was instrumental

in getting ALPA on the property at Allegheny during tough negotiations in the late 1940s. The ALPA records I was able to obtain show Capt. Petrie as the Captain Representative for PIT Council 94 at the November 1950 ALPA Board of Directors meeting. (The earliest records show Capt. A. L. Tucker and F/O Don Reubert as the first AAA PIT Council 94 reps at the 1949 ALPA BOD meeting.)

I also learned that while he was the PIT Chief Pilot, ALPA never filed a grievance in PIT.

That October night in 1999, Capt. Petrie shared a table with ALPA President Capt. Duane Woerth, Capt. Barraclough, and others. Pete regaled the table with many stories from the “*old days*.” Later from the lectern, he shared other memorable moments in his career with the entire dinner group.

I came away from that October night deeply moved by Capt. Willis Petrie. For reasons I cannot fully grasp, I also felt indebted to him. His kaleidoscope of memories offered a brief glimpse into the history of our airline, pilot personalities, and the profession itself. His passion and insights for pilots and flying were on target, poignant, and remarkable, coming as they did over 26 years after retiring from the line—and in the 86<sup>th</sup> year of his life. Every time I listened to him talk, I tried to fathom how any Chief Pilot could avoid having a grievance filed in 25 years. I don’t have a complete answer to that. But in listening to him and to stories about him, it was clear that he cared deeply about the pilots, and that he had the courage to back up his convictions.

So, Pete, you have flown west, my friend, for that final check. Thank you for sharing your heritage and your memories with us, and in doing so making us the better for having heard them.

*John Davis  
Retired*