

Walter Bohl, 1934 – 2017

AAHS has lost a long-standing AAHS member, officer, commercial pilot, author and friend, Walt Bohl, of Orange County, California. He passed away suddenly on September 22, 2017. He is survived by his wife Marnie, four children, and 11 grandchildren.

Walt retired from United Airlines in 1994 with nearly 39 years of experience and over 25,000 hours of pilot-in-command. He held FAA type ratings for eight different aircraft, and FAA certificates for Single-Engine Commercial, Multi-Engine Airline Transport Pilot (ATP), Flight Engineer for Piston and Turbine aircraft, as well as Aircraft Dispatcher. In addition, he held Advanced Ground and Instrument Instructor certifications.

To say aviation runs in Walt's his family would be an understatement. His father was an Army Air Corps and Air Force pilot, as well as a United Airlines captain. In addition, Walt's wife is a retired United Airlines flight attendant. One son is a current 747-400 captain with United, a grandson is a captain for United Express and a granddaughter holds an FAA Private Pilot Certificate.

Walt was born in 1934 on March Air Force Base (then known as March Field) in Riverside, Calif., where his father was stationed at the time. "I was an Air Force brat," Walt would recall. He fondly remembers flying in a B-25 one day with his father, an experience that left a definite imprint on him. After that, a career in aviation quickly became a forgone conclusion.

"My dad had served in the Army Air Corps before the war, then went to work flying for United. When the war started he was called back as a C-47 instructor pilot. After that he began ferrying all types of aircraft around the world for the war effort. He was stationed for a while in North Africa, where one of his duties was getting C-47s from North America to China-Burma-India war zone."

Walt took some aviation classes in high school, and spent the summer after graduation working for TWA, fueling airplanes. He continued his aviation studies at San Mateo Junior College, where he vividly recalls the unique arrangement he had with his first flight instructor. Walt commented, "I paid \$3 per hour to rent the airplane and I paid the flight instructor by doing work on his house. He hated working on his house, so for every two hours of work I would perform on the house, he would give me one hour of dual-time flight instruction. He drove me to and from the airport, so ground school was held in his car!"

After two years of college, Walt emerged with a commercial pilot certificate in 1955. Shortly thereafter, he was hired by United Airlines as a copilot. "I began at United with 250 flight hours and no instrument rating. They put me through a three-week instrument course, which was not too difficult considering the experience I already had."

He served as a flight engineer on Douglas DC-6s, DC-7s and DC-8s for seven years. Then he upgraded to the right seat of the cockpit and served as a copilot on piston aircraft for two years before transitioning to turbine DC-8 aircraft for an additional two years.

Once Walt made captain he continued to fly the same

aircraft. He also began flying newer airplanes like the DC-10 and Boeing 727s and 737s. He spent about three years operating each aircraft, amassing an impressive number of hours. It was a natural progression that he would one day fly the Boeing 747.

Spending over nine years captaining jumbo jets of a global carrier, Walt had the opportunity

to fly the vast expanses of the globe numerous times over. He flew into many of the world's most exotic and legendary airports, including old Hong Kong Kai Tak Airport, where the difficult approach and landing on Runway 13 was revered among both pilots and passengers. The maneuver required such skill that pilots had to be trained in a simulator before being allowed to fly the approach.

Walt retired from United in 1994 as a 747-400 captain, but his involvement in aviation did not end with his retirement. "After I retired from United I taught ground school classes on passing the FAA written tests for Airline Transport Pilot, Flight Engineer and Instrument Airplane rating." There is little doubt that Walt's vast experience and expertise helped many pilots gain the certifications and ratings necessary to fly commercially, a process that takes years of ground and air instruction.

Walt owned a Cessna 170B for a number of years that he flew and worked on, including upgrading to a more powerful engine with a constant-speed propeller. Using this aircraft he flew over 100 search and rescue missions for the Civil Air Patrol.

Walt authored more than a half-dozen articles for AAHS, focusing on airlines and their histories, from start-ups with a few ragtag airplanes to global carriers that crisscross the globe in sophisticated jetliners. Walt served as the Society's vice president and chief financial officer from 1999 to 2010.

Walt was also as a docent at the Lyon Air Museum, where he enjoyed relating the histories of the museum's aircraft to visitors. When asked about his greatest satisfaction from being a docent at the museum, Walt would answer. "I learn from people who come here. We get airline pilots in that are on layover, and I enjoy talking to them about the various aircraft they fly, and their experiences. We get 747 pilots from Los Angeles International, and local crews who fly current models of the 737, both aircraft that I had the opportunity to fly. We trade stories and learn from each other."

AAHS will miss the friendship and aviation expertise that characterized Walt's interaction with others around him. The aviation community has been a better place because of him.

Authored in part by Dan Heller, Lyon Air Museum.

