

**C**apt. Sandra L. Anderson stands firmly in the ranks of U.S. women pilot pioneers. Among the first women in the United States to check out in the left seat of a B-727, -757, -747-200, and -747-400, she is also among the first female B-727 fleet check captains for major U.S. airlines. An ALPA member since 1979, Capt. Anderson was recently inducted into the Pioneer Hall of Fame of Women in Aviation, International. The honor comes as no surprise when you survey Capt. Anderson's outstanding professional achievement, pioneering determination as one of the first U.S. female airline pilots, and unflinching dedication as an ALPA volunteer.

Flying has always been Capt. Anderson's passion, but it hasn't always been her profession. She graduated from Texas Woman's University with a bachelor's degree in art, with minors in music and physical education. In 1970, the then Sandy Allmon joined the faculty of the La Marque, Tex., school district as an art instructor. Located just south of Houston, La Marque was an easy drive to the Johnson Space Center, and Sandy sometimes went to "splashdown parties" to commemorate the Apollo space missions.

At the Johnson Space Center, she met NASA engineer and skydiver Dick Anderson. On weekends, Dick took her to his favorite drop zones to watch the skydiving. During one out-

ing, Sandy prophetically quipped, "Why would you want to jump out of a perfectly good airplane when you could fly one?"

With that remark and her new husband's strong support, Sandy began her career as a pilot. After ground school, she began flight training to become a private pilot in 1972.

Her first instructor, a former Marine pilot, immediately recognized Sandy's aptitude and her talent for the technical demands of flying. While urging her to pursue more advanced certificates, he suggested that she consider becoming an airline pilot. Sandy was intrigued by the idea, but not completely sold on it. She continued building up flight hours while working full time as a graphic designer at Exxon Oil.

In 1975, Dick was killed in a motorcycle accident. "Something like that happening to you is life-altering," says Capt. Anderson. "I wasn't sure that I wanted to be at a drawing board the rest of my life." At the time, Sandy was making progress toward her commercial pilot certificate, but she was still working full-time as a graphic illustrator and it was slow going. Dick's death caused her to reevaluate the direction her life was taking.

With the encouragement of her flight instructor, Sandy decided to leave her full-time position and poured all of her energy into logging flight hours, giving flight and ground instruction, and qualifying for increasingly advanced certificates and ratings. She earned her commercial certificate, instrument rating, CFI certificate, and multi-engine rating in a single year.

In 1978, Sandy began to apply, without success, for second officer positions at a number of national airlines. Undeterred, she enrolled in B-727 flight engineer school, hoping that a flight engineer rating would be the key to opening doors at the major carriers. In October 1979, Sandy Anderson became the second female pilot hired by Northwest Orient Airlines.

At Northwest, S/O Anderson became a member of ALPA and recognized that both the union and the airline would benefit from enhancing community relations in the regions Northwest served. "We had numerous requests to go to local schools, so it was clear that by talking about pilots with children of all ages, we had a tremendous opportunity to build a stronger relationship with the entire community," says Capt. Anderson.

S/O Anderson reworked an exist-

# NORTHWEST CAPTAIN HONORED

**ALPA member enters  
Women in Aviation  
Hall of Fame.**

By Linda Shotwell,  
Senior Communications  
Specialist

ing ALPA slide presentation and added new images and information. Capitalizing on her education background, she hit the road and met with elementary, junior high, and high school groups as well as with community groups throughout the Minneapolis area. During her career, Capt. Anderson has met with hundreds of groups of all ages to talk about life as an airline pilot.

Enthusiastic about S/O Anderson's presentation, Northwest Airlines duplicated it for their Seattle, Minneapolis, and Detroit offices. Pilots across the region that Northwest served could borrow the presentation and get the word out in their own communities.

In 1984, S/O Anderson became a B-747 second officer and began flying internationally. "When I was in college, I played in a great all-girl stage band," says Capt. Anderson. "We were invited to take a USO tour and performed in Greenland, Iceland, and Labrador—it made a big impression on me. I thoroughly enjoyed traveling when I was younger, and I was thrilled with the opportunity to fly internationally."

Capt. Anderson made B-727 captain in 1989. She was the first female B-727 captain instructor/check pilot at Northwest. In 1992, Capt. Anderson became the first woman in the United States to earn the title of B-727 fleet

check captain, responsible for evaluating Northwest's B-727 training instructors and conducting line checks.

During this time, Capt. Anderson was hearing a lot about a fledgling group called Women in Aviation. In 1992, she decided to attend the organization's third annual meeting in Las Vegas and discovered a new way to pursue her passion for aviation and education. "I liked the concept of Women in Aviation because it incorporated all of aviation, including aviation writers, pilots, air traffic controllers, flight attendants, and women who own their own aviation-related businesses," says Capt. Anderson. "It wasn't just pilots, and



**Capt. Sandy Anderson made history when she became chief pilot for the Northwest Airlines Minneapolis crew base in May 1995—a first for a female pilot. She was also the first female B-727 captain instructor/check pilot for Northwest.**

I met so many interesting women with similar experiences."

Capt. Anderson went on to become a founding board member of Women in Aviation, International (WAI), which formed a professional, non-profit organization in 1994. "Sandy was also instrumental in founding WAI's endowment," says Peggy Chabrian, Ph.D., president of WAI. "She not only made the first contribution, but she spearheaded fund-

raisers such as the annual WAI golf tournament, which have helped increase the endowment to several hundred thousand dollars today." The WAI endowment provides scholarships to women for aviation education and flight training.

One of Capt. Anderson's favorite roles in WAI is that of mentor to young women considering a career in aviation. "I enjoy the job and the people, but I always tell young women I mentor that there's no question that it's going to be a lot of work," she says. "But then again, anything you really enjoy doing won't just be given to you."

Chabrian adds, "Whether through a personal conversation, a telephone call, or an e-mail message, Sandy always takes the time to answer questions from young women who are interested in getting into aviation or are just starting out as pilots."

Capt. Anderson, who also holds an MS degree in Human Resources/Organization Development from American University in Washington, D.C., underscores the importance of education to young women at every opportunity.

"I was widowed at 26, but I had my education to fall back on," she says. "You are going to have things happen to you that you don't expect and that you can't control, but how you handle those situations determines the outcome."

In May 1995, Capt. Anderson made history when she became chief pilot for the Northwest Airlines Minneapolis crew base—a first for a woman.

She has since checked out as a B-757 captain, a B-747-200 captain, and in August 2000, as a B-747-400 captain, the position she still holds while flying international routes today.

"As chief pilot in Minneapolis, I came to appreciate the depth of the support, expertise, and resources that ALPA offers," says Capt. Anderson. "My colleagues came to me with serious issues that had the potential to affect their entire careers, and I could direct them to the ALPA Aeromedical Office or to the union's Legal De-

partment, and I knew they would get the help they needed."

Capt. Anderson is also an active volunteer at Northwest Airlines and continues to work on ALPA's Critical Incident Response Program team, the Northwest Airlines Pilot Assistance Program, and on ALPA's Professional Standards Committee. Capt. Anderson was presented Northwest Airlines' prestigious Humanitarian Award, as well as the Distinguished Alumna Award of Texas Woman's University.

As for the challenges she faced as a woman pilot climbing the ranks, Capt. Anderson, now 57, says that she has experienced only a few instances



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of less-than-professional attitudes and mostly strong encouragement from her male colleagues.

Today, the 5 foot 3 inch Capt. Anderson says she still receives the occasional stare or second look when she flies internationally, but she takes it in stride. "One time, an agent handed the paperwork to my copilot just because he happened to be a man," says Capt. Anderson. "Sometimes people just don't understand a woman pilot being in command of a B-747, but they will." 🌐