

Breaking The Pilot Sex Barrier



It was 20 years ago tomorrow that Denver pilot Emily Howell was one of 10 students in a class of Frontier Airlines second officers. She was the only woman among nine men (eight white, one black), and became the first commercial pilot for a major U.S. jet airline. Now Capt. Emily Warner, she works for the Federal Aviation Administration, assigned to United Airlines' Boeing 737 program. Warner is pictured holding a model of her favorite

aircraft - - the 737 - - in front of what was Frontier's corporate headquarters, now Continental Airlines' base maintenance center. Years of perseverance paid off: after 7,000 hours of flying experience and about as much rejection by airlines two decades ago, Warner opened cockpit doors for hundreds of qualified women pilots. Expanded coverage begins on page 7, with editorial comments on page 4. (Photo by Lance Ross)

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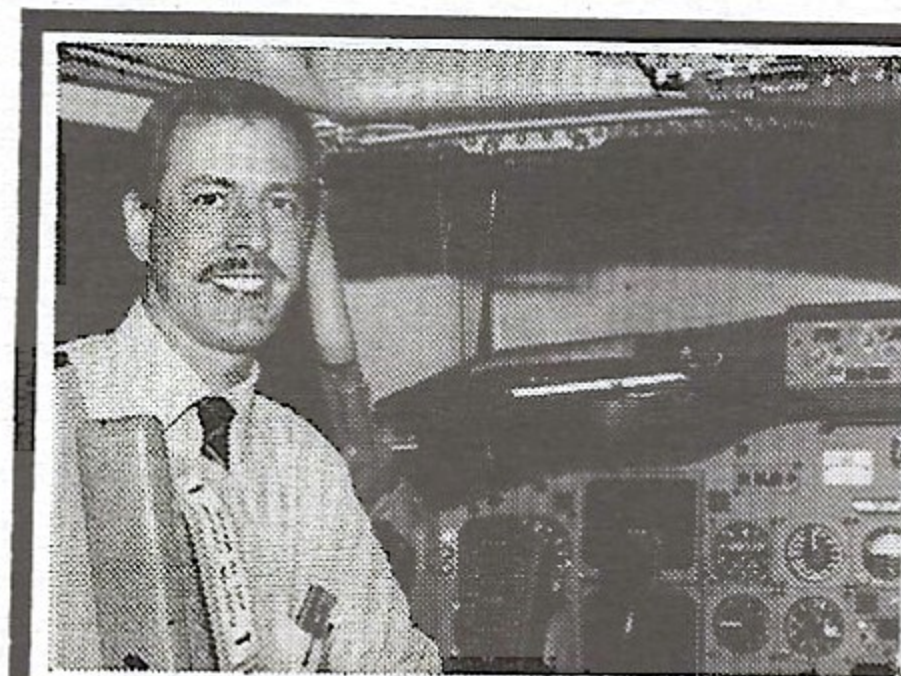
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Analysis

By Lance Ross

Women and Men Can Look Up To Capt. Emily

The biggest mistake I ever made in my life was not taking flying lessons when I had the chance. I'm not saying that I ever had the wherewithal to fly commercially, but it would have been nice to know more than I do now, which is just enough to be dangerous. (Just ask my simulator partner two years' running who, for the sake of his professional reputation, will remain anonymous here.)

symbolizes a breakthrough for women in today's skies. However, she is quick to point out that she was not the first woman to become a commercial pilot.

In the early 1930s, Edith Faltz was a Fokker-10 tri-motor co-pilot for West Coast Air Transport, which later became Western Air Transport and, eventually, TWA. Not much is known about Faltz, who has since died.

I have flown with, and reported about, some terrific pilots. Some are my friends. Other friends who fly have never been the subject of my reporting - - - probably a blessing!

Therefore, they may find it curious that, after covering presidents and pilots, CEOs and senators, the interview leading up to this week's cover story and special edition was one of my all-time professional thrills. I was a college junior when Emily Howell was hired by Frontier Airlines and, being 600 miles away, couldn't cover much of what I thought was an important aviation development. I was in my first reporting job out of college when Emily Warner made captain for the first time. And I didn't move to Colorado until the year after she made captain the second time, now on a 737. I always felt that, in my extensive reporting of Frontier and other airlines, I was always one step behind the pack in its "Emily coverage."

Of course, there are many pilots just as qualified as she. But I like to root for the underdog and, in her case, I'm about 20 to 25 years too late. As she excitedly told me a story she has told so many times before, I found myself fascinated by the trials and tribulations she faced. My male pilot friends who are furloughed, and passed over for jobs in favor of younger, more inexperienced pilots who can be "molded," must surely sense some of the frustration she experienced.

When our interview was over, we were walking back through Frontier's old concourse D. I was holding a Frontier gate sign that was to have been a possible photo backdrop; Emily was holding the 737 model you see on the cover. As we talked, another veteran pilot, Capt. Chuck Barmettler of Continental Express, approached us, and I introduced the two. Both are record setters: Capt. Barmettler, you'll recall from earlier InnerLine stories, holds the world's record for time in the de Havilland Dash 7. Just as Emily flew the Dash 6 Twin Otter, so did Chuck. (Perhaps they can swap stories about how a good headwind spooked air traffic controllers when they realized that the Otter was flying backwards!)

Anyway, I introduced my interviewee as Capt. Emily Warner, her name for the last 17 years. Chuck's eyes brightened when he said, "Oh, I know you as Emily Howell. I made sure that my kids saw your uniform at the Smithsonian. Congratulations!"

Emily beamed.

Emily Warner's uniform at the Smithsonian

Several years later, Helen Ritchie of McKeesport, Pennsylvania, flew Boeing 247s for Central (later Pennsylvania Central) Airlines, which eventually became part of Capital and United Airlines. Never allowed to fly at night, Ritchie was blackballed by her union, and forced to resign. During World War Two, Ritchie became an Army Air Corps instructor. She went into retirement after the war, and died two years later at the age of 37.

One year before Warner became a certified flight instructor in 1961, a Norwegian woman, Turi Wideroe, had become a first officer at SAS. Reading a story about Wideroe in *Time Magazine* three years after her DC-3 flight to Gunnison, Warner said she got her first realistic inkling that women could be airline pilots. Wideroe's family owned a flying service which, today, still exists as Wideroe Airlines of Oslo. Capt. Wideroe retired a few years back. And when Warner returned to Denver after her maiden flight with Frontier, Wideroe sent her red, white and blue carnations and a congratulatory telegram.

It is also known that eastern bloc countries had female commercial pilots. The former Soviet Union's Aeroflot and Bulgaria's Balkan Airlines reportedly had the greatest number of women flying planes. However, they refused to supply crew data to the west for decades, and current information about the number of women who flew during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s is unreliable.

In 1978, 21 professionals met to form the International Society of Women Airline Pilots (ISA). Now, there are 500 members representing 60 airlines in 24 countries, including Russia. Frontier sponsored the 1980 meeting in Denver, with 42 pilots attending.

The growth in numbers has been significant. For some, growth has been staggering. Not so, according to Warner: they make up two percent of the pilot workforce. Warner expects that to double in the next few years.

Several years before Warner was hired, Robert Green became the first black hired by a U.S. airline. It took a lawsuit against Continental Airlines, after Green faced some of the same obstacles as Warner. Ironically, Warner's 1973 class of 10 pilots at Frontier included Frontier's first black pilot, Bob Ashby. She was 33; he was 49. Both were the oldest members of their class. Warner got so much media attention that Ashby was overlooked.

Capt. Emily Warner: Breaking Industry Barriers For 20 Years

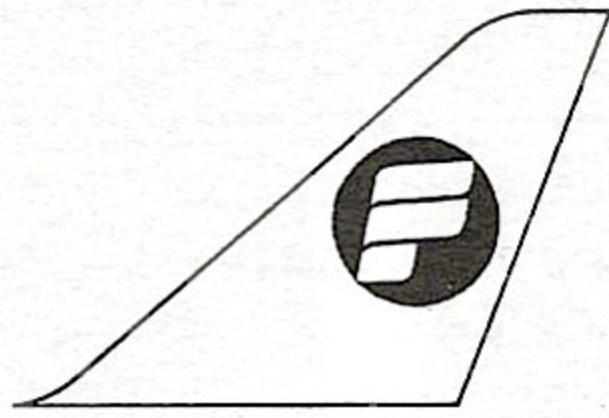
By Lance Ross

It's been 20 years since Emily Howell of Denver refused to take "no" for an answer, and became the first woman pilot for a modern U.S. airline. Howell... now Emily Warner... was hired as a second officer by Frontier Airlines on January 29, 1973, and flew her first working trip to St. Louis, flipping dials and knobs from a Boeing 737 jump seat behind the captain and first officer, 10 days later.

Even though she had amassed 7,000 hours of flying time and had become the chief pilot at Clinton Aviation, once one of Denver's largest fixed base operators and charter services, Howell had been passed over by Continental, Frontier and United Airlines in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In some cases, pilots she trained were hired right and left. In other cases, she couldn't even get in the front door for an interview.

Today, Capt. Emily Warner can look back proudly as the person who opened doors for the 1,600 women who are commercial pilots in the U.S., and many of the 600 to 700 female commercial pilots in other countries.

Warner flew turboprops and jets for Frontier from 1973 until Frontier was grounded 13 1/2 years later. That fall, she joined most of her Frontier colleagues who went to work for Continental Airlines. However, she said, it became apparent that most Frontier captains would never make captain at Continental, so she accepted a job with United Parcel Service as a Boeing 727 captain. In 1990, Warner joined the Federal Aviation Administration as an air carrier safety inspector. Last year, she was promoted to assistant air crew program manager, assigned to work with United Airlines' 737 fleet. She also does some liaison work



between United and the FAA regarding Denver International Airport.

Ironically, she is also working with United pilots she trained more than two decades ago, hired when her applications were rejected simply because she was a woman.

Warner was among the last second officers hired for 737s. Following Frontier's lead, most airlines and the Air Line Pilots Association eventually reached agreement that 737s did not need a second officer in an aircraft designed without an engineer's panel. Her first true airline flying came a few months later, still on probation, when she became a first officer on the smaller, 19-seat de Havilland Twin Otter. Later, she was a Convair 580 first officer. She eventually moved from first officer to the left seat where, on a Twin Otter in 1976, Emily Warner became the first female commercial airline captain in the U.S.

After a while, Warner went back to the Convair, later becoming a 737 first officer in 1978. Six years later, she qualified as a 737 captain, another first.

It is fitting that Warner was hired by Frontier. In 1958, her first airplane flight was as a passenger aboard a Frontier DC-3. The flight to Gunnison, via Pueblo, changed her life. The 18-year old passenger didn't know what she wanted to do. Her twin sister had already decided to go into nursing. Influenced by a cousin who was a stewardess for United Airlines (in the pre-flight attendant days), she was leaning toward airline inflight.

Then, on the return trip from

Gunnison, she was the only passenger. Security being more lax, she was allowed up front, and rode home in the jump seat.

"When I went through that cockpit door, that's when I knew that's what I wanted to do... just like that," she said of the lasting impression of the working crew, the instruments and the magnificent view of snow-covered mountains out what seemed to be a living room window, compared to those in the passenger cabin. "The very next week, I started flying lessons." The co-pilot recommended Clinton Aviation, and that's where she went.

(Warner still has the ticket from her life-changing flight, but was never able to track down the crew members.)

She was making \$38 a week at the May Company, and gave up \$13.75 each week for lessons. Today, flying lessons are about \$60 to \$70 an hour. Her foot in the door was as a receptionist at Clinton Aviation, working her

(See FRUSTRATION, page 12)

Battery Sale



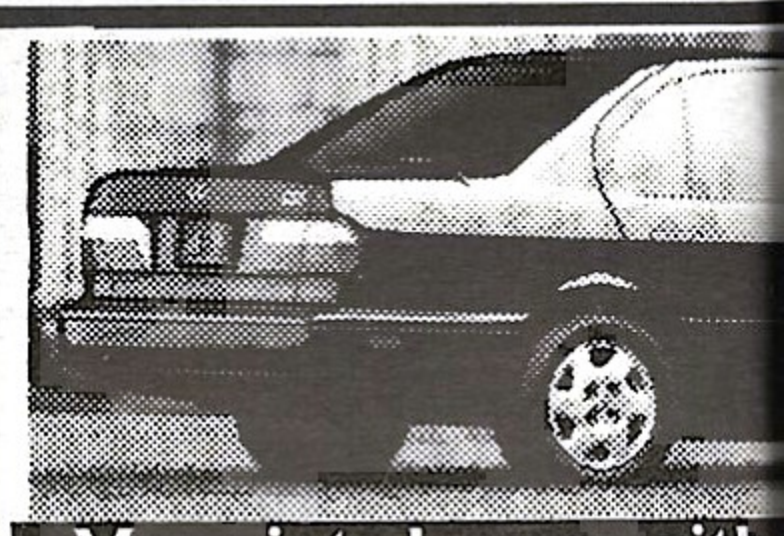
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Frustration: Good Enough To Train Airline Pilots, But Not To Hire

(Continued from page 7)
way up as a pilot. The next year, KHOW Radio began an aerial traffic report dubbed, "Operation Airwatch." There was relatively little traffic in Denver in those days, and the reports were even

less exciting because they were anchored by inexperienced staff members from the AAA auto club. KHOW later used reporter Don Martin to do the reports, and Warner eventually became his regular pilot. It gave her a

chance to build up 160 flying hours each year, just from the traffic reports. Martin was so impressed, he eventually got his own license, flew himself, and became the KHOW "SkySpy."

Even with a private license and an instructor's rating when she was 21, Warner still decided to pursue her original plan, to become a stewardess. But, at nearly five-feet nine-inches, she was three-quarters of an inch taller than United's maximum height. So, she stayed at Clinton for 12 more years.

"My boss treated me like a daughter instead of a pilot," she remembered. "He would never let me go on an overnight charter. I was fine as a flight instructor, and they could keep an eye on me, as if I was different from somebody else." That over-protection hurt her ability to build up her hours and accumulate multi-engine time.

Perseverance being her middle name, she kept at it.

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When Emily Warner was hired at Frontier Airlines in 1973, "Arrow Jets" used concourse D. The third aircraft back, N7373F, was Warner's inaugural plane. Built in 1969, the 737-200 is now N10251 in the Continental Airlines fleet. (Frontier archives)

Aviation had a contract to train United Airlines' newly-hired pilots. In three weeks, Clinton had to get them their instrument rating - - - the ability to fly in something other than clear skies. The primary instructor for two years: Emily Howell, in her late twenties.

"I couldn't get a job, but I was teaching them," she noted wryly. Two of the United managers with whom she now works as FAA liaison were her students 25 years

ago.

The year Clinton got the United training contract was also the same year she began applying to airlines for pilot positions. Continental, Frontier and United got steady streams of updated applications signed, "Emily Howell."

Working against her was an industry slump not unlike today's: United alone had 600 pilots furloughed. Tired of form letters, she tried a different technique: she wrote to actress Audrey Meadows, wife of Robert F. Six, the mastermind behind Continental. Meadows forwarded the letter to Continental's chief pilot, Capt. Red Stevens, who promised to keep her application on file.

In 1968, Frontier's chief pilot, Capt. John Meyers, said, "Emily, you're well-qualified, but I don't know if an airline will ever hire a woman."

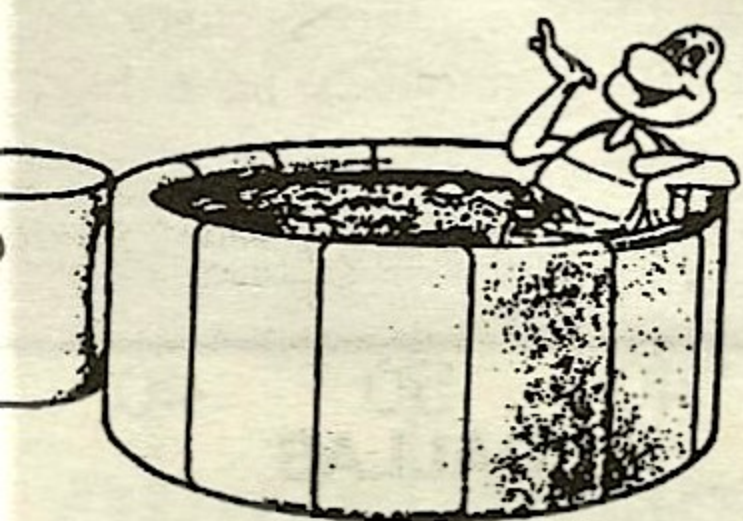
"That's what he said!" she remembered, as if it was yesterday.

The sexist slap from the chief pilot, whose wife was also a private pilot, came with some good advice, for Warner to build up her multi-engine time, and get an air transport rating.

At age 30, in 1969, things looked bleak. Airlines weren't hiring, and she was pushing the

(See WAITING, page 15)

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Waiting. . . Waiting. . . For Answers

(Continued from page 12)
maximum age limit some carriers had for pilots. Three years later, she was Clinton's flight school manager, chief pilot, and holder of 7,000 hours that airlines did not want to acknowledge. Then, she learned that Frontier was hiring . . . and had already hired one of her pilots, and was interviewing another. Both had considerably less flying experience than Warner.

"I just got mad at myself and everything else," she told **InnerLine**, at the same time trying to be supportive of her pilots' better opportunities. She stormed over to Frontier's personnel office late in the day. Fortunately for her, it was closed.

That night, she collected her thoughts, updated her application, and took it to Frontier the next day. That was in September 1972.

"I waited a couple of weeks. Nothing," Warner said. "Not even a form letter. By this time, I was really ready to fight. I was

really ready to campaign. So every couple of weeks, I went over to Frontier. I'd start to meet people. Anybody I knew at Frontier, I'd call and say, 'If my name comes up, put in a good word.' I had a lot of people doing things for me."

Clinton Aviation had moved from Stapleton to Arapahoe County Airport, now Centennial Airport. In December, flying into Stapleton one day, an air traffic controller called her on the radio, as everybody on that frequency heard him excitedly

say, "Hey, Emily, I heard you've been hired by Frontier Airlines!"

"Gee, that's great news, but I haven't," she answered back. "I knew that word had gotten to the tower, and that was good."

It wasn't as good as she thought. She still heard nothing from Frontier, and no interview had been scheduled. In December, she learned that Frontier had scheduled a new pilots' class for January - - - and

(See LOCAL, page 16)

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Local Reaction: Women's Pages and Hippopotami

(Continued from page 12)

she was not on the list.

"Your name came up, and it was dropped like a hot potato," one of her moles inside the airline told her. "They don't know what to do with you. I don't think they're going to call you."

She took the advice of a friend, and found a way to meet Capt. Ed O'Neil, Frontier's vice president of flight operations. What appeared to be a case of casually dropping in was actually a well-staged set-up with a go-between. Once in the door, everything else was impromptu.

"Hey, Ed, there's somebody here who wants to talk to you, and I think you'd better talk to her," the go-between told O'Neil. The 30 minute conversation that followed was her first chance to get through to someone with the power to hire her, let alone interview her.

"It went pretty well," she remembered. The next day, back at Clinton Aviation, Frontier's



Emily Warner is pictured in a 737 cockpit, the day she made captain in 1984.
(Frontier Airlines archives)

"Good luck, Emily," one controller told her on her maiden flight with Frontier. Photographers waited for her in St. Louis.

Checking air conditioning and heating levels, monitoring gauges and handling the radio are routine assignments for junior pilots. On aircraft with engineer panels, the second officer can do the job a little more comfortably than one crammed in a 737 jump seat.

"I didn't care," she said. "It got me into the airline. I had a seat, and I had a seniority number. Within six months, I started flying the Otter."

However, even at Frontier, there was still a little ice to break.

"For the first six months, everybody looked to see if it was for real, or a publicity thing," she added. "It took for me to get in the right seat of the Otter that things started to change. As I started to fly with different people, word got around. I could almost feel the change to real

personnel office called: O'Neil wanted a formal interview. The questioning was slightly different than that of male pilots: how could she handle being a divorced parent with a seven-year old son? When they asked what kind of uniform she would wear, she replied, "I think that's the least of your problems."

Recognizing the historic nature of a possible hiring, O'Neil deferred to Al Feldman, for many, Frontier's most beloved president. Feldman asked Warner how she would handle the pressure of the certain publicity. Feldman then called his wife, also named Emily, and had her ask questions of her namesake.

Next, with only three hours to prepare, she was asked to fly Frontier's Convair 580 simulator. She ran into a personnel staff member, who said that everyone was rooting for her.

"That was a boost," she recalled. The two-hour simulator flight was tiring at the end of a long day. O'Neil, who had spent more time behind a desk than in a cockpit for ages, wound up flying captain to Warner's first officer.

"The sim went really well," she remembered, after acknowledging a shaky start. During the post-flight briefing, Frontier management tried to discourage her from pursuing her career.

"I looked at Mr. O'Neil and said, 'I know I can do the job,'" according to Warner. "He said, 'You have the job if you want it.'"

I said, 'Of course, I want it!'"

Even then, O'Neil asked her to go home and sleep on her decision. But, she is convinced, it is because O'Neil wanted this dramatic change to work well for Frontier, the industry and Warner.

The media coverage was intense, if varied. There was an interview on NBC's "Today" show. There were guest appearances on talk shows. Television cameras and radio microphones followed her around Stapleton, and at smaller airports into which she flew throughout the Frontier system. Mostly, there was a myriad of print coverage. The Associated Press and United Press International moved stories and photos around the nation and around the world. The *New York Times* had

coverage; *Aviation Week and Space Technology* ignored the story. Locally, *The Denver Post* treated her hiring as a feature in the "news of women, home and family" section. And *The Rocky Mountain News* placed the story well inside the paper, under a picture of a zoo director feeding Cleo, the hungry hippopotamus, during a Milwaukee zookeepers' strike.

During a 1973 interview, she was asked whether she was trying to strike a blow for women's liberation.

"I'm not trying to strike a blow for anything," she replied 20 years ago. In fact, during the 1960s, she began to wonder herself if women should be commercial pilots. Then, her feelings changed. Having been in

aviation for 15 years, she wanted a good job, and was tired of being passed over. She told her students for years to believe in themselves; now, it was her turn.

Her first flight as a Frontier crew member came Tuesday, February 6. She was a reserve second officer, assigned to fly to St. Louis with Capt. Les "Swede" Nettleblad, hand-picked for the pairing. She describes Nettleblad, now in a nursing home, as "a great guy." Warner plans to visit him shortly, to mark their twentieth anniversary.

For the longest time . . . between Clinton and Frontier . . . Warner was one of only a handful of women pilots regularly in and out of Stapleton. Air traffic and ground controllers used to call her by name on the radio.

acceptance."

For the most part, she did not detect a lot of sexism at Frontier.

"The gentlemen at Frontier were exceptional," she said fondly. "When you flew in the cockpit, you were two professionals doing the job."

There were, though, the diehards who refused to accept a woman as a co-pilot. One captain tried to blackball her in the Air Line Pilots Association, in which she would become the first female member. Using graphic language, he swore that he would never fly with her . . . but he did. And he carried his grudge until he retired in the mid-1970s, she said.

A retired Frontier captain said just a few years ago that women shouldn't be airline pilots because they're not strong enough to manually control the aircraft when hydraulics are lost. "Besides," he added, "what man worth his salt wants to take orders from a woman if she makes captain?"

These turned out to be the exception, rather than the rule. Frontier was her first choice. With a pilot pool at the time of 600 to 700, the workforce was closer knit than at an airline with 10 times as many pilots. Plus, her reputation as an instructor was well known among her former students, many of whom were flying for Frontier and other airlines.

There was even a slight rivalry

(See AAL, page 17)

What Others Say About Emily Warner

In 1976, John Heimburger was a first officer on a Frontier Twin Otter. His bid called for him to fly with Emily Warner the day she made captain, when their aircraft was surrounded by reporters and photographers everywhere except in the air. Later a 737 captain in his own right at Frontier, Heimburger now flies as a Continental first officer, and led the Continental Himalayan Expedition to Nepal in 1991.

"Emily was mildly unaware of the footprint she was making as a pioneer in the airline industry. She always had that perfect balance of tact and competence that allowed her to be accepted by an otherwise salty group of Frontier captains. She never pushed herself on anybody, and made the slide to history without fanfare or controversy. She has always been at the forefront and has had a large impact. She made me feel as if I knew every bit as much as she did; she was not the traditional captain. Frontier was quite wise in hiring one of the best prospects around."

Bob Schulman was Frontier's corporate communications director for 11 years, and worked extensively with Emily Warner. When she was hired at Frontier, Schulman was public relations director for the Air Line Pilots Association.

"We checked the bylaws to see if there would be any problems, since she was the first woman member. Fortunately, there weren't any. She met all the qualifications [as a pilot], and the feeling was, 'Welcome aboard.'"

AAL Claims First Pilot, Despite Record

(Continued from page 16) pitting two "first" pilots against each other. Frontier may have hired Emily Howell and her 7,000 hours on January 29, 1973. But American Airlines hired Florida charter pilot Bonnie Tiburzi, with 1,400 hours, on March 30, 1973. In 1984, Tiburzi wrote a book, "Takeoff!", which American billed as "the story of America's first woman pilot for a major airline."

According to the Air Transport Association, *all* members of the ATA, including Frontier, were major carriers in those days; the differences were in trunk and local service airlines. Today, a major airline is one with \$1 billion in business. The historical hiring of a Denver woman by Frontier Airlines may have been overshadowed by American Airlines' larger and better-staffed public relations operation three months later.

But as Tiburzi . . . now a La Guardia-based American Airlines captain . . . acknowledged in her book 11 years after being hired, Frontier had already hired Warner (Howell), and Michigan cargo and charter carrier Zantop had Barbara Barrett. And, at no time in the book did Tiburzi scoff at the size of Frontier's 52-aircraft fleet.

Shortly after Tiburzi, Continental hired Claudia Jones as its first female pilot, with eight women in one class. It took United almost two years to hire women as pilots, largely due to outstanding furloughs.

"It made Frontier pilots mad that American viewed Frontier as a Denver puddle-jumper," Warner laughed. "The pilot group just got more supportive of me."

Besides, it is not Tiburzi's uniform hanging at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum . . . it is Emily Warner's.

In 1974, former astronaut Michael Collins wrote Warner

that a new air and space museum was under construction, and that, as museum director, he would like her uniform as an exhibit. She and Frontier readily agreed. Two years later, her uniform was placed in a glass case when the National Air and Space Museum opened.

Within two weeks, Warner and her 10-year old son were back for a personal tour by Collins.

"It was really exciting," she said, her face beaming. "I was very moved. The 'Spirit of St. Louis' is hanging 17 feet from me. What great company to be in!"

The Smithsonian made one slight error, though. Warner had light hair at the time; her replica did not, when she saw it for the first time.

"There's this red wig on this mannequin!" she laughed. "Otherwise, it looked quite a bit like me!"

Now with the FAA, Warner remains current in the 737. She has moved from Frontier's 737-200s to 737-200s, -300s and new -500s, leased from United by the FAA for training. She has monitored commercial airline operations' training, flight checking and pilots. Six months ago, she became an assistant air crew program manager, assigned to oversee United's 737 fleet.

Her 737 flying is only about two hours every six months.

enough to remain current in the fleet. And then, it's usually zipping to, from and around the Pueblo Airport late at night.

She smiled when she said that the 737 is still her favorite airplane. She would have liked to have had more time in the 727, which she flew at UPS.

But Warner is enjoying her new role. And she continues to speak at a host of presentations around the country, often discussing aviation safety, careers in aviation, and women in aviation. She was recently at the Smithsonian for a conference. In early March, she'll be at the Womens' Aviation Conference in St. Louis. Later this year, the International Society of Women Airline Pilots (ISA), which she co-founded, will meet in Atlanta.

For fun, she and her husband of 17 years may buy a small single engine Cessna.

In 1973, Frontier's Ed O'Neil said that it would take 12 years to become a captain, but that Emily might become a captain in less time. She proved him right, by one year, but O'Neil did not live to see it.

"I really thought a lot of him," she said somberly. "He took a big chance hiring me. He wanted it to work out well. I think it would be nice for him to know that it *did* work out well. I'd like to say, 'See, Ed, it worked out OK!'"



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