The pilots of Northwest Airlines have historically been an active ALPA pilot group—pioneers and leaders within the industry who will be remembered fondly. Their legacy is about more than the trademark red tail, and this tribute shouldn’t be considered a farewell to a pilot group, but rather a hello as Northwest pilots are integrated into the new Delta Air Lines, the world’s largest global airline.

Many past Northwest pilot moments should be recognized, including those related to the pursuit of contracts. Northwest pilots conducted strikes for improved contracts in 1969, 1972, 1975, 1978, and 1998. In particular, the strikes of 1972 and 1978 were long (more than 100 days each), and the 1978 strike contributed significantly to the demise of the airlines’ Mutual Aid Pact, which financially supported managements that took on labor. In addition, the 1998 pilot strike successfully reversed an industry trend of concessionary or “no-cost” pilot contracts, which started about 1992.

In 1970, the pilots took the virtually unprecedented step of announcing, and preparing to begin, a sympathy strike to support an ongoing strike by Northwest ground employees. The pilots’ actions helped bring about management’s quick resolution to the contract dispute.

Similarly, in 1995 the Northwest pilots notified Northwest and KLM Airlines management that they would begin a limited sympathy strike to support a KLM pilot strike. (Northwest and KLM had begun a joint flying venture in 1992.) The support of the Northwest pilots helped KLM pilots quickly obtain a contract resolution.

The Northwest pilot group has long been an ALPA trailblazer, as Council 1 (MSP) was the first ALPA council. In addition, the pilots helped to bring about technological advances and to pioneer routes to Asia that are still the cornerstone of Northwest’s operation.

Northwest pilots have had a strong hand in developing and implementing the airline industry’s voluntary safety programs, such as FOQA and ASAP, and have participated in the early 1930s, Northwest flew the Sikorsky S-38 amphibian on its Minneapolis/Duluth route.

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**NWA/ALPA TIME LINE**

1932: Council 1 and NWA MEC established.

1947: Signed new contract.

1950s: Signed new contract.

1930s: Signed new contract.

1940s: Reduced complex and divisive flight engineer issues.

1950s: Signed new contract.

1960s: Signed new contract, Resolved complex and divisive flight engineer issues.

1968: Fought and resolved issues relating to introduction of new aircraft type (B-707 dispute).

1969: NWA pilot strike.

1970: NWA MEC declared its intention to engage in a sympathy strike in support of the striking BTRAC-represented employees of NWA and thereby helped bring that lengthy strike to a close.

1972: NWA pilot strike.

1975: NWA pilot strike.


1980s: Signed new contract, Defined-benefit pension plan negotiated.


1988: NWA MEC accepted management challenge to let the rarely used 10-day clock to self-help begin. Created a unified strike organization and conducted a strike vote of the two pilot groups in less than 6 days. Strike vote passed by more than 95 percent. Management changed course and sought mediation.


1990s: (continued on page 14)

1992: Joint contract achieved through mediation, substantial scope/job security improvements.

1992: NWA/KLM alliance, Codesharing started.

Aug. 12, 1996: Effective date of NWA-Republic merger.

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Though the red tail may disappear, the history of the Northwest pilot group and the Northwest Master Executive Council is one that Northwest pilots and all ALPA members can be proud of.

Northwest’s Capt. Duane Woerth served two terms as ALPA’s first vice-president and two terms as ALPA’s president.

Northwest took delivery of its first B-747 in 1970.

NWA/ALPA TIME LINE (continued)

1992: NWAKLM granted antitrust immunity, and joint venture began.

1993: Bankruptcy filing by NWA averted with last-second pilot agreement, which ensured job security with respect to the joint venture, additional scope protection, a seat on the Board, and more than 15 percent of the equity of NWA for the pilot group.

1998: NWA pilot strike. The NWA pilots sought to reverse an industry trend of concessionary “no cost” contracts.

2001: Never forget, United Flights 93 and 175, American Flights 11 and 77.

2004: Effective date of bridge agreement. Designed to buy time to bring other unions into agreement and avoid bankruptcy.

2005: NWA filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

2006: Defined-benefit plan frozen.

2008: DAL announced intent to merge with NWA.

2008: NWA-Delta joint collective bargaining agreement ratified.

2008: The NWA/DAL corporate closure took effect.

2009: NWA exited bankruptcy.

2009: Compass Airlines established as a subsidiary of NWA. New representational structure with pilots represented by NWA MEC.

2009: Effective date of bankruptcy restructuring agreement with NWA pilots.