

## In One There Are Many



**By Capt. John Prater**, ALPA President

**On Feb. 1, 1927, Northwest Airways**



carried the first paying passengers. The pilot in command was none other than my predecessor, ALPA's first president, Capt. David Behncke. And so it is with a tinge of sadness and a great deal of pride that I give a final salute to the thousands of pilots who flew as Northwest pilots and served as ALPA leaders and recognize their tremendously rich history. It is a

history that will not be forgotten and will be kept alive through the diligent pilot leaders who will continue their loyal service to this union.

And the Northwest story will be kept alive in the retelling of ALPA's history. Simply put, there would be no ALPA legacy to celebrate without our Northwest pilots—for they are woven into the DNA of this union. Over the years, Northwest pilots have been instrumental in leading this Association. Two of the Key Men who founded our union in 1931, shown on the cover of this issue of *Air Line Pilot*, were, not surprisingly, Northwest pilots.

In 1940, the pilots undauntedly faced a rapacious owner who unapologetically admitted that he would disband the airline if he had any labor troubles. Their reaction? The same that we expect from Northwest pilots today: "No way. Not on our watch." It goes without saying that they successfully negotiated ALPA's first collective bargaining agreement in 1940.

We all owe a great deal of gratitude to the Northwest pilots who are known to step up, raise their hands, and get in the game. These ALPA members have advanced this union in everything from preparing and executing work stoppages, taking on safety and security leadership roles, and leading ALPA's membership. Just one example: Retired Northwest Capt. Bob Kehs, who was honored by ALPA's Board of Directors in 2000 with the first David L. Behncke Lifetime Achievement Award. He worked tirelessly for decades to teach not just the Northwest pilots, but all ALPA members the trade of uniting pilots to support a call to action by their union.

Time and again, the Northwest pilots stepped forward to change labor history. Known among the industry pilots as the "cobra pilot group" (the Northwest pilots would strike at anything), their time on the picket lines was extensive and challenging. During the decade of the 1990s, management took on the mantra of "no-cost contracts that were all the same," which really meant lowest common denomina-

tor parity—no one advances wages, working conditions, or retirement benefits.

In 1998, the Northwest pilots had all of that type of parity they could stand. The Northwest Master Executive Council, with the full support of the Northwest pilot group, called for a strike and broke the no-gain parity wide open for themselves and all pilots to negotiate improvements in the future. This action set the stage for the Delta, United, and, most recently, FedEx Express pilots negotiating improvements to their contracts.

As the entire airline industry watches this metamorphosis of mega-carriers coming together, one of ALPA's pilot groups is now the largest airline in the world. With 12,434 pilots, Delta Air Lines—by any description—is a behemoth global corporation, and it's because the ALPA pilots of

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Northwest and Delta made it happen. They showed the world how a merger should work.

As always, ALPA vows to provide first-class service to all of our members, from the pilots of the smallest groups that ALPA represents to the pilots furloughed by airline shut-downs and downsizing to the new Delta Air Lines pilots. This is a commitment, steeped in Northwest pilots' tradition and one I pledge to uphold.

In the spirit of our democratic traditions, I ask you—the members of our union—to reach out to your fellow Northwest brothers and sisters to let them know that you remember and appreciate what they have accomplished for our profession and that you look optimistically with them to a brighter future for us all.