

## Training for the Unexpected



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

**Considering our industry's extraordinary level of safety**, it's understandable that many of the 765 million airline passengers who traveled last year would not ordinarily appreciate the importance of pilot training. The safe water landing of US Airways Flight 1549 immediately changed that. All at once, the public, Congress, and the news media became keenly aware that a well-trained flight crew is an airliner's greatest safety asset. And it's no coincidence that for the past seven decades ALPA has worked tirelessly to ensure that airline pilots receive the best training possible.

While pilot and flight attendant training for ditching and evacuation required by U.S. federal aviation regulations is adequate, the goal of accident investigation must be preventing future accidents. ALPA, therefore, encourages the FAA and industry to examine whether these training requirements should be strengthened.

The focus on cost cutting has spurred some airlines to reduce the time allotted for pilot initial aircraft and annual recurrent training, even though the equipment and operating environment have become increasingly complex. Limited time and strained resources have led to less time to review and teach the necessary flying skills during training. And less-expensive computer-based training comes at the cost of less experience being shared among fellow professionals.

As the role of technology in training rapidly evolves, ALPA supports its use when it improves a pilot's preparation for line flight operations. However, ALPA adamantly believes that no substitute exists for a qualified instructor who is thoroughly familiar with the airline's flight operations and the roles and responsibilities of its cockpit crewmembers in the ever-changing environment of local and global flight operations.

ALPA's emphasis on training, however, isn't limited to the cockpit or to pilots' work flying the line. We are equally committed to providing the finest training possible to prepare our pilots to succeed as union leaders. In February, ALPA held its Annual Leadership Training Conference, with more than 80 pilot leaders from 23 of ALPA's pilot groups.

As I opened the union's Leadership Training Conference, I asked your ALPA reps how many of them had become pilots without learning their skills from other pilots. Each of us understands that gaining experience as a pilot takes years of dedicated education coupled with sharing and learning from the experience of our peers.

Likewise, the skills and knowledge needed to become an effective union representative for our profession and for our members are strengthened by education from union experts, educators, and fellow ALPA reps who have decades of experi-

ence in the issues and problems that face new union leaders.

ALPA, unlike other unions, does not use staff business agents to make our contract and policy decisions. ALPA members regularly elect fellow line pilot volunteers to serve as local council reps and make the decisions that affect our profession and our union. The line pilots you elect were schooled in a wide variety of subjects ranging from negotiations under the Railway Labor Act and National Mediation Board to running local and master executive council meetings to understanding ALPA's Constitution and By-Laws, federal laws, and Department of Labor rules that govern union representatives' duties and responsibilities.

In our never-ending quest to become better pilots, we study airline accidents to avoid repeating the same chain of events. With your new reps, we discussed extensively the decisions, actions, and consequences—both good and bad—made by previous ALPA MECs and other pilot unions.

The four-day Conference incorporated an extensive train-



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ing component, a reflection of the ALPA Board of Directors directive to place a stronger emphasis on preparing the pilots you elect as your local council leaders for the daily challenges of their newly held positions. The Conference featured dynamic presentations from a broad range of ALPA staff, detailed the strategic plan approved by your Board of Directors last fall, and showcased the Association's extensive professional resources.

Discipline and practice form the foundation of the professional training that is the hallmark of the piloting profession. It allows us to meet the challenge of the unexpected. Whether it's a potentially catastrophic loss of thrust in both engines, a shift in negotiating strategy at the bargaining table, bankruptcies or strikes, or an interview with a journalist in a hub city, training can make all the difference.

*John Prater*