

I had just finished reading Capt. Chris Beebe's article about our union ancestors who were on the ALPA Board of Directors during the Continental, United, and Eastern strikes and how they had the foresight to establish the Major Contingency Fund, and then it hit me like a brick—I was one of them!

My airline career began in 1977, when Aspen Airways, "the World's Fastest Ski Lift," hired me. Besides the motto, and almost 25 years of service, it also boasted that it was the Part 121 air carrier with the shortest route system, Denver to Aspen, Colo.

I was assigned to the charter base in Burbank, Calif. I initially checked out on the CV-440, which I had flown in the U.S. Navy. In addition to flying charters, we flew regular contract service for the Navy to the Pacific Missile Range and for McCulloch Land Corporation to Lake Havasu and Apple Valley.

As I was checking in for my first flight, another of our first officers approached me. He asked me to fill out an application for the Union of Professional Airmen (ALPA's then-affiliate for regional airline pilots). I filled out the application, handed him \$10, and became a card-carrying union member for the first time in my life.

We had just recently joined UPA and were still operating under our in-house contract, basically flying to the FARs. My first-year pay was \$700 per month. But the majors were hiring, and in 6 months, I upgraded to captain, checked out on the CV-580, and saw my pay jump to \$1,200 per month. Captains carried a wide assortment of credit cards to pay for gas and hotel rooms and had a cash account to pay the crew per diem at the end of each trip.

That same year, I jumped into the fray and became a member of the Negotiating Committee working on

our first UPA contract. The admonition was that, because I was still on probation, I should probably be relatively quiet at the bargaining table. Not an easy task for me, but we got a contract and I was still working.

in the mountains." If he could have seen me now!

He probably should have also warned me about unions. In 1982, UPA was merged into ALPA, and I was Aspen's first MEC vice-chairman

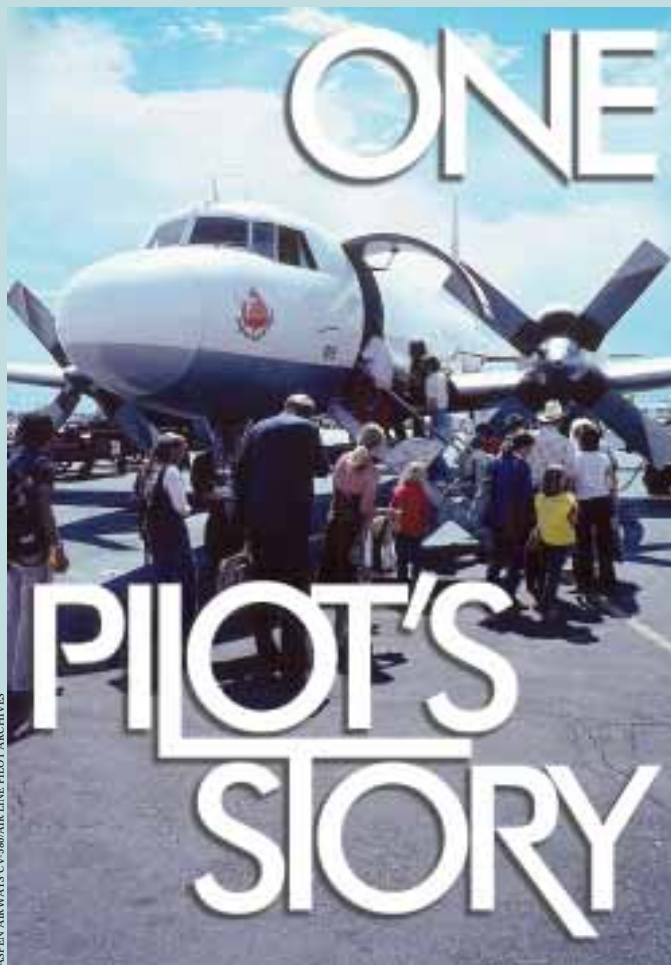
and first officer rep. I had been in office only a short time when I received a letter advising me that I was to attend something called the Board of Directors meeting (apparently, I was a member of it, whatever it was). I went to the source of all ALPA knowledge, the secretary at the field office in Denver. She suggested I talk to one of the Western Airlines reps who happened to be in the office. He explained to me what the BOD was and that, because this was an election year, I should pack for at least 2 weeks!

The secretary/treasurer, Chris, who was carrying the captains' proxy, and I went to Bal Harbour, Fla. We were neophytes thrown to the wolves of ALPA politics. The contest for ALPA President was the incumbent, Capt. J.J. O'Donnell (Eastern), versus challenger Capt. Hank

Duffy (Delta). Chris and I had 37 votes between us. We survived the hospitality rooms and, when it came time to vote, still had a person from each camp literally standing by our chairs. By the Aspen MEC's unit rule, our 37 votes went to Hank Duffy. We weren't the only ones; Hank had courted the small carriers, and he won by 35 votes.

I was now married to the love of my life, a Continental flight attendant. In 1981, they struck, and we walked the picket line. Sadly for me, the Continental MEC spent the duration of the strike debating whether to honor the flight attendants' line. Our best friends were the air traffic controllers, represented by PATCO. They joined us, constantly supplying coffee and good cheer.

Back at Aspen Airways, we had been given FAA approval to begin



## Retiring Leadership Conference Chairman reflects on career and ALPA.

By Capt. Dan Waldmann  
(United)

After the painful beginning of deregulation of the U.S. airline industry in 1978, United, PSA, and AirCal dropped several routes in California, and Frontier pulled out of several small cities in Colorado and New Mexico. No longer was Aspen a one-market airline, and the time had come for me to transfer to Denver. When I had taken my first flying lessons in Lincoln, Neb., my instructor had admonished me to "never fly at night, never fly in the clouds, and never fly

night operations into Aspen. This required special training, culminating in a simulated single-engine balked landing. We flew the CV-580 Mountain Master down the TACAN approach into the valley. It was a dark night with just a few lights. Runway in sight, we turned to line up with the centerline.

"Remember, as you pass Shale Bluffs on short final, the headwind will change to a tailwind, and you'll lose about 10 knots." I eased her down and got the buffet from the wind shift. "Fifty feet, runway's fouled, go around!" Firewall thrust on the one good engine, hear her groan, feel the prop taking huge bites of the cold night air.

Rotate to the stickshaker, and ahead, off the end of the runway, 5,000 feet above us looms the gray form of Aspen Mountain. The stickshaker is relentless, and now, "Whoop, whoop, pull up, pull up."

"Hold her on the shaker, there's the church, ease into a 15-degree bank." Stickshaker, ground prox, 15-degree bank, nurse her through the 180-degree turn, back to the TACAN, down the valley, away from the terrain. "Well, that's it, you're night-qualified."

Well, now I had carrier-qualified and Aspen-qualified. Isn't this why we fly airplanes?

Flying into Aspen was always almost indescribable. Every day, every flight was a new experience. Each time we let down through the clouds, a new world awaited us. In the spring, we were greeted by the changing panorama of greens and spring flowers; the summer brought snow melt; the fall, the yellows, golds, and reds; and winter brought the snow.

To accompany this, we had painted the airplanes with swirls of those same mountain colors. And on each tail, the Aspen leaf. By now, I was the MEC chairman, we had our first ALPA contract, and my life became busier with constant trips to Washington, D.C., Houston, Tex., and Miami, Fla., to special Executive Board and BOD meetings as ALPA dealt with the Continental, United, and Eastern strikes. ALPA was dealing with myriad new issues, and the national officers decided that we could no

longer conduct business as usual.

One of the things we needed was training for our newly elected reps, and Hank Duffy asked me to be part of a committee to oversee the New Council Officers Seminar. The first couple of years were pretty low-key—

**"ALPA is and always has been about the members. Everything we have achieved has been because of the unity of the line pilots."**

—Capt. Dan Waldman (United)

bring the reps to D.C., introduce them to the officers and staff, and share some of our experience.

Other changes had taken place at Aspen. We had joined the jet age, adding the BAe 146 to the fleet. Gone was the aspen leaf, replaced by the United Express logo.

The 1988 BOD decided that it was time to upgrade and expand the reps' training, and that was the genesis of what we now know as the ALPA Leadership Conference. At that same meeting, the Aspen MEC delivered our new contract with some of the best pay

scales among the regionals. With just over 100 pilots, we were a very close group. Almost every pilot who wasn't flying attended our local council meetings, and almost everyone had a position on one of our committees.

Along with the other changes, in early 1988, Aspen changed much of its management team. For the first time in our history, profits turned to loss. In early 1989, it became apparent that something had to give. The company was for sale, and we pilots attempted to create an ESOP, but potential investors were frightened off by rapidly escalating losses.

In late December, management announced that Mesa had signed an agreement to buy everything but the BAe 146 operation and the Aspen market. Later that spring, Air Wisconsin would buy Aspen Air. The United MEC graciously negotiated a first right of interview for the Aspen pilots, and United hired almost half the seniority list; several other pilots were hired by other ALPA-represented airlines.

My personal decision was to go to Air Willie or United. Leaving the Aspen family that I had shared so much with and represented for almost 13 years was as difficult a choice as I had ever made.

Because of my time as a representative and my years with the Leadership Conference, I have had the unique opportunity to meet almost all of the ALPA leaders for the past three decades. (Remember, now, I'm old enough to be one of the ancestors!)

I have great memories, memories of great talents and characters. Some were wiser than others. A few might be described as misguided. Being human, they have all made mistakes.

Having seen the good times and bad at both the regionals and the majors, I firmly believe that ALPA has never been about the leaders—ALPA is and always has been about the members. Everything that we have achieved has been because of the unity of the line pilots.

If you have ever said "No" to an airplane you considered unacceptable or refused a flight for bad weather, you could because you were ALPA. You are the strength and integrity of the airline pilotomg profession. You are ALPA. I am ALPA. We are ALPA. 🌐



The author, Capt. Dan Waldman (United), right, and Capt. David Farmer (Northwest) confer during the recent ALPA Leadership Conference in Herndon, Va.