



Never Forget

By Capt. Dennis Dolan, ALPA First Vice-President

The North American airline industry that was in operation as dawn broke on Sept. 11, 2001, was the very picture of vulnerability.

The terrorists who were efficiently moving into position to launch their horrific plot had patiently prepared for this exact moment. They had entered the country legally, despite the fact that several of their names were on international watch lists. They had trained in flight schools right under the authorities' noses.

The items they brought aboard to facilitate their terrorist acts were entirely legal. Until the moment they inflicted violence, they had broken no laws in their march toward mass destruction.

But the airline industry's vulnerability on that day went deeper than our porous security system. One of the reasons that the hijackers chose the flights they did was their low passenger counts. That made their attack easier, but it also indicated a general slump that was beginning to hit the industry, a slump that was all but forgotten when the bottom dropped out in the months after 9/11.

The historic collision of low interest rates and poor market returns was already starting to push what had been a well-funded pension system toward the eventual debacle that many of us have personally felt. And below the surface, the fee-for-departure world that would keep many smaller airlines afloat during the early part of the post-9/11 reality would make the financial pain at network carriers much more acute.

On so many levels, our industry was not prepared for the events of Sept. 11, 2001. Looking back today, five years later, I can say that only one factor in our lives was not so vulnerable and was actually as prepared as any could have been for the radical shift in the environment around us. That one factor was our union.

Within hours of the events of that dark day, ALPA was working on several fronts to assess and address airline security issues, to develop a plan for a rapid infusion of cash into the airline industry, to plan realistically for a suddenly unstable collective bargaining climate, and to communicate calmly and clearly with line pilots and a jittery flying public.

Every time I attended a meeting on your behalf... testified about pilot security concerns,... spoke to the news media about what pilots needed, I did so secure in the knowledge that your reputations as true professionals made my statements credible and that the faith and trust passengers placed in you were transferred to me.

Within months, those efforts served as catalysts for the Federal Flight Deck Officer program, hardened cockpit doors, the ATSB loan guarantees, negotiations that—while concessionary—prevented the liquidation of several airlines, and pension legislation that—had Congress passed it—might have preserved every pilot pension plan.

Did each of these programs pay off fully for airline pilots? Of course not, but without ALPA's concerted efforts, our industry would be in far worse shape today, and the recovery that is now possible would still be many years away.

Tangible signs of ALPA's preparation are clear some five years later. We remain financially strong, because of smart planning and constant re-engineering (see "ALPA Toolbox," page 17). We did not lose a single pilot group during this downturn, proof that even though ALPA receives more than its fair share of criticism, critical

mass remains on the side of pilot unity.

Some who read this will disagree with me, I am sure, but history will settle that debate. We, however, cannot afford to dwell on the past. Vulnerability can be exploited at any time by any number of enemies. The central lesson of these bitter years is that while preparation is generally an individual responsibility, our profession can only



AIRLINEPILOTFILEPHOTO

be as strong as we make it together. We must remain unified.

As my term of service ends, I leave the ranks of active ALPA members proud to have had the opportunity to work for you. Every time I attended a meeting on your behalf, every time I testified about pilot security concerns, and every time I spoke to the news media about what pilots needed, I did so secure in the knowledge that your reputations as true professionals made my statements credible and that the faith and trust passengers placed in you were transferred to me.

Those passengers are counting on you to remain vigilant, and I know you will be up to the task. I know that you will remain united and strong no matter what the future holds. Thank you for the opportunity to have served on your behalf. 🌐