

A Tribute to the Pilots of Northwest Airlines

By Doreen Clark, ALPA Senior Communications Specialist

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 the early 1930s, Northwest flew the Sikorsky S-38 amphibian on its Minneapolis/Duluth route.

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 managements 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.

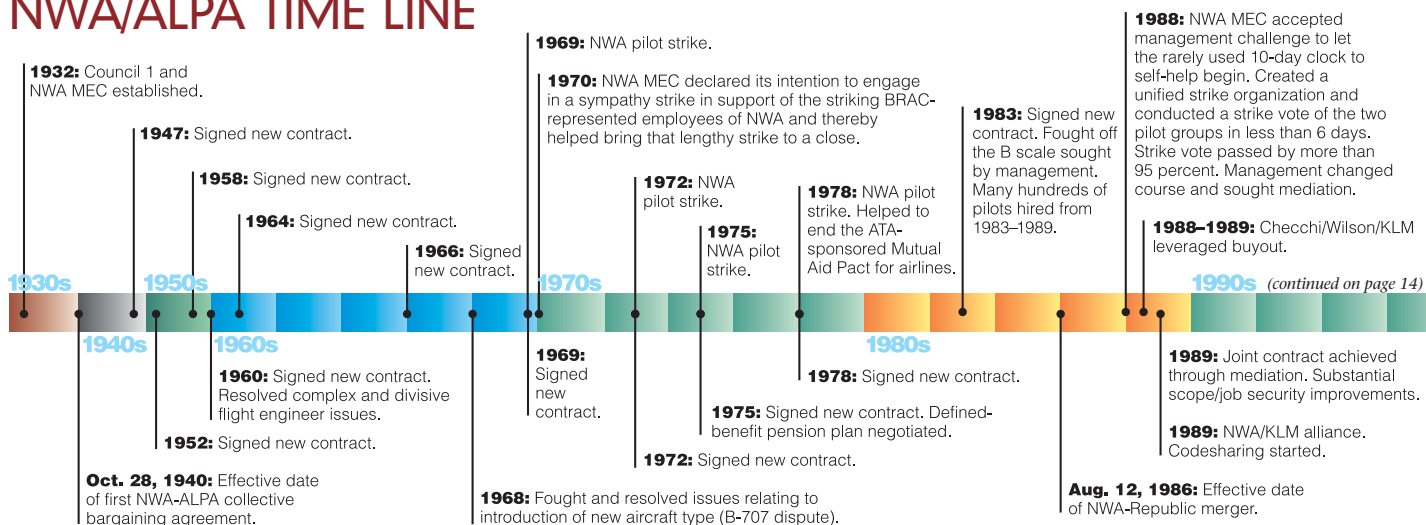
The Northwest pilot group has long been an ALPA trailblazer, as Council 1 (MSP) was the first ALPA council. In addition, the pilots helped to bring about technological advances and to pioneer routes to Asia that are still the cornerstone of Northwest's operation.

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



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in IFALPA and industry working groups that have had a significant effect on improving winter operations and aircraft maintenance. Capt. Paul Soderlind was key to implementing hazardous weather avoidance technology through Northwest's Turbulence Plot

Program. Northwest pilots have also been leaders in ALPA efforts to combat security issues—from the hijackings of the '60s and '70s to the FFDO program in the post 9/11 era.

In 2005 and 2006, the pilots went through the bankruptcy process. While a turbulent and painful experience, the pilot group emerged from the airline's bankruptcy determined to recover lost ground as quickly as possible by focusing on the future. In 2007, they recovered several important contract provisions that they had previously given up during the Chapter 11 process.

When the prospect of consolidation arose, the Northwest pilots were prepared to embrace the right partnership. In a time of record fuel prices and uncooperative managements, the pilots found a way to move forward. Today, they have a new single contract with Delta, a share in the equity of the merged Delta/Northwest, and have accomplished a process to achieve a se-



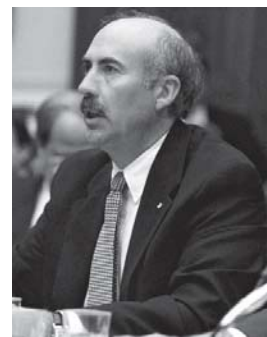
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template for future pilot groups to consider.

Northwest pilots have produced leaders who have negotiated quality contracts, fought for fairness, and persisted through adversity during many difficult times throughout their long and proud ALPA history. They have also shared their experiences and expertise with other ALPA pilot groups and have helped bring non-ALPA pilot groups into the Association.

Capt. David Behncke, a former Northwest pilot who United later hired, was ALPA's first president, and Northwest's Capt. Duane Woerth served two terms as ALPA's first vice-president and two terms as ALPA's president.

The pilot group has held steadfast together through strikes, Section 6 negotiations, bankruptcies, and experienced, along with other ALPA pilots, the challenges of 9/11, followed by an economic downturn. 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. As Northwest pilots move forward into a new era, their history of solidarity in the face of some of ALPA's largest battles will produce many more proud accomplishments for the industry and for ALPA. 🌐



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