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September 24, 2013

Bottom Up: the Impact of the ALPA Volunteer

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Airlines exist to make profits, not simply to move aircraft from point A to point B. The injection of economics into an incredibly complex operational environment where the number one corporate priority is "safety first" can result in some friction every now and then where the rubber meets the runway. The concept is as old as the idea of air mail - what used to be called "risk management" is now "threat and error management" and will certainly enjoy some new moniker in the future - and while today's safety toolbox may be more adequately packed, the pilot's burden in go/no-go decisions is as heavy today as it was in 1903.

Consider for a moment the task at hand for both the Delta and ALPA safety teams. Each day Delta and its subsidiaries fly 5,000 flights to 330 airports scattered across 65 different countries. 160 million customers will board a Delta jet in 2013, every one of them confident they will arrive at their destination safely.

The joint efforts of Delta's flight safety team and the Delta MEC Central Air Safety Committee provide a safety culture and record that is not only the envy of our industry, but of safety intensive businesses worldwide. This enviable record is only made possible because of the competence and professionalism of over 12,000 Delta pilots on the tip of the spear every day.

Enhancing safety in the air transport environment was the primary cause and first motivation for the founding of the Air Line Pilots Association. We have to stretch our imaginations as aviators to conceive of the day where a pilot had less than even odds of surviving ten winters, and it is easy to forget that more than half of the 24 Key Men who started ALPA died in their cockpits. That dramatic gulf between aviation safety of the 1930s and flying today is largely due to the efforts of volunteer pilots tirelessly working to improve flight safety at all levels.

As members of the Air Line Pilots Association, we are blessed to have hundreds of ALPA safety volunteers who not only take their job seriously on the flight deck, but also want to make a difference during their time off. At the local level, airport safety liaison volunteers work with local airport managers to foster a safer, more efficient operating environment. Also at the local level are the pilot volunteers from a variety of ALPA carriers who are trained to immediately respond in the event of an accident, while others are engaged in the FOQA and ASAP voluntary reporting programs to keep that accident from happening in the first place.

At the LEC level, we have Safety and Security Committee chairmen in each of our pilot bases to support the local operations. At the MEC level, highly experienced and well-trained volunteer pilots serving the Central Air Safety Committee, Security Committee, and Training Committee interact with our company on numerous issues, ranging from dispatch to HAZMAT

to ATC and airport facilities. Pilot training programs, procedures, and assistance with pilots in the "special training and checking" environment, airport and layover security are all specialties of ALPA's incredibly diverse volunteer team. And let's not forget the work of the Delta Pilots Assistance Committee (DPAC), the Pilot Assistance Network (PAN), and the Professional Standards Committee (ProStan); volunteers in the purest sense, they have helped many of our fellow pilots in ways that words truly fail to measure, preserving not only careers, but helping to save lives.

At the national level in Herndon, ALPA's Air Safety Organization is the largest non-governmental organization devoted exclusively to enhancing the safety of flight, with divisions focused on three areas; safety, security and pilot assistance. The Air Safety Organization is widely recognized as the world's foremost "go to" organization for virtually all matters related to aviation safety and security; whether it be accident investigation and prevention, serving on Aviation Rulemaking Committees, aircraft, airport and airspace engineering or Known Crew Member, ALPA Safety and Security continues to lead the industry.

FAA Deputy Administrator Michael Whitaker acknowledged our contributions to safety when he recently spoke at your association's recent FAR 117 Conference. He thanked ALPA "for the great work you do and for being a solid partner with us in efforts to enhance aviation safety. Your professionalism is an essential component of what we do, and I think this conference is a testimony to that."

What follows are just a few of the significant events of our association's body of work in improving safety of flight. Many of these milestones made possible through a relentless pursuit by volunteer pilots just like you, pilots who stepped up to make our profession safer and more secure.

The approach lights we rely upon every day were designed by ALPA member Captain Ernie Cutrell of Pan Am, and adopted by ICAO in 1953.

In 1955, Captain Larry DeCelles of TWA proved that the crash of a TWA Martin 404 was the result of equipment failure and not pilot negligence. His efforts led to the development of instrument comparators.

In 1996, ALPA was a co-recipient of the Collier Trophy for its work in collaboration with Boeing to design and produce the 777. ALPA went on to receive subsequent Collier Trophies in 2007 and 2008 for its contributions to improving the safety of flight.

In 1998, the National Weather Service issued an improved SIGMET chart designed by United pilot and ALPA safety volunteer, Captain Steven Targosz.

In 2004, Boeing invited ALPA to join in a collaborative effort on design and production of the 787.

In 2009, ALPA participated as a member of the Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC) to revise 14 CFR 121 training requirements. It co-chairs another ARC to develop regulations and guidelines for Safety Management Systems, and it co-chaired the ARC that issued the new 14 CFR 117 flight time duty time rules.

In 2010, ALPA increased its presence in ARCs, helping to develop the Airline Safety and Federal Aviation Administration Extension Act of 2010; it raises the bar on pilot training and certification. ALPA participated in two other ARCs, which included the Flight Crewmember Mentoring, Professional Development and Leadership ARC, and the First Officer Qualification ARC, which established the 1500-hour rule for SIC pilots.

2011 brought even more ARCs. The FAA "gets it" that policies should be developed by stakeholders. The issues in play include Pilot Records Database, Air Carrier Safety, Pilot Training, Stick Pusher and Adverse Weather Event Training, and Flight Crew Member Training Hours Requirement.

Our association has been driven since 1931 by the motivation to improve the safety of flight. No other private organization could even pretend to carry ALPA's water on safety and security, and no other labor organization is as involved in Aviation Rulemaking Committees, or as involved at ICAO. There is no replacement anywhere in the industry for the role ALPA has played in making our jobs and commercial aviation safer.

But this strength doesn't come from the top. None of the accolades, none of the plaudits or reputation could even have a chance of happening without the line pilots who volunteer, who step up and pitch in to make our world a little better - in some cases, a lot better - and through their selfless service to the profession, ALPA draws its strength.