

The PILOTS OF ALPA 2013

Pilots Confront Extreme Weather Conditions, Scheduling Challenges

By John Perkinson
Staff Writer

Canadian North

Flying in the northern-most territories of Canada, Canadian North pilots transport daily both passengers and cargo in what most of us would consider challenging conditions. Landings and takeoffs on remote ice and gravel runways in the polar Arctic weather are the norm for these pilots, whose distinctive skills are required to “bend the throttles” for this unique airline.

Capt. Chris Kampen, the pilots’ Master Executive Council (MEC) chairman, says that his airline has been steadily hiring new pilots for this demanding operation to fulfill its plans for expansion. Canadian North has announced that it will acquire additional B-737-300s to

charters, and cargo and has been with the airline since its beginnings, and the MEC looks forward to working with Hankirk.

With the ratification of the most recent collective bargaining agreement, the Canadian North pilots instituted a new credit system as part of the overall scheduling process. “That’s probably the biggest positive change as far as lifestyle goes,” says Kampen. “It has taken us out of the previous max-blocking system and is one of the biggest gains from our last round of negotiations.”

Because of the nature of Canadian North flying, pilots bid for days off and have traditionally worked 18 or 19 days a month, depending on

hardships that come along with flying in extremely challenging conditions. The pilot group is also developing a post-accident/-incident checklist to supplement the information ALPA provides on its Worldwide Accident Hotline “orange” card. The MEC pilot representatives, through both personal experience and member feedback, recognize that there are issues specific to Canadian North operations and that this new reference item will address the airline’s fleet and the nuances of flying in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.

Along with these efforts, the pilot group is ramping up its current communications efforts and plans to establish a website as a resource for Canadian North pilots sometime early in 2013.

Sporting the slogan “Seriously Northern,” Canadian North was established in 1989 as a subsidiary of Canadian Airlines to provide air transportation for northern Canadian communities. The airline is owned by Norterra, an aboriginal-owned holding company divided between the Inuvialuit Development Corporation, representing the Inuvialuit people of the western Canadian Arctic, and the Nunasi Corporation, representing the Inuit people of Nunavut. Canadian North maintains its headquarters in downtown Yellowknife. 



A Canadian North B-737-300 at Yellowknife.

supplement its current fleet, which includes B-737-200s and Dash 8-100s in addition to B-737-300s.

F/O Wade Bowman, the MEC vice chairman, notes that 19 new pilots were added at the end of the third quarter of 2012.

With the next round of contract negotiations not set to begin until December 2014, the MEC is concentrating on quality-of-life improvements for its pilots. Facilitating this effort is the reasonably amicable relationship that labour and management share. Steve Hankirk recently replaced Tracy Medve as president of Canadian North. Hankirk has served as vice president of operations,

whether it was a 30- or 31-day month. The new system provides pilots with more credits for time away from base, allowing them to work as few as 14 days a month (although 16 to 17 days is probably more common). The MEC is also pressing for new scheduling software, as the current program is extremely outdated and pilot leaders would like to see the company move toward a system that allows pilots to bid for actual trips.

On its to-do list for 2013, the Canadian North MEC is working to establish a Professional Standards Committee to support pilots who need assistance in overcoming the additional

At a Glance

- **Pilots joined ALPA:** 2011
- **Number of pilots:** 133
- **Bases:** Edmonton and Calgary, Alb.
- **Headquarters:** Yellowknife, NT
- **Operations:** Scheduled flights and cargo services throughout Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, as well as charter operations throughout Canada and the United States
- **Fleet:** B-737-200s, B-737-300s, and Dash 8-100s