The Pilots of ALPA 2015

ENVOY AIR

A Tale of Two Votes

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AT A GLANCE

Pilots joined ALPA: 1995 (although Simmons had been an ALPA member since 1986, after the National Mediation Board's ruling that the four airlines serving American Airlines—Executive, Flagship, Simmons, and Wings West—constituted a single airlines, the Eagle pilots established a single MEC)
Number of pilots: 2,312
Headquarters: Irving, Tex.
Pilot domiciles: Chicago, Ill.; Dallas/Fort Worth, Tex.; New York, N.Y.; and Miami, Fla.
Fleet: 37 ERJ 140s and 118 ERJ 145s

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...."—A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens

The Envoy pilots did, indeed, experience the worst of times and the best of times during 2014. The year began with the Envoy Master Executive Council (MEC) narrowly voting to approve changes to the pilots' collective bargaining agreement that the pilots ultimately rejected; the year ended with the MEC approving changes to the pilots' bargaining agreement that the pilots ultimately ratified. In between votes, the pilots experienced a roller-coaster ride of change but are now poised to enter 2015 stronger and ready to take on any future challenges.

"Despite tumultuous negotiations, a long-anticipated name change, two turnovers in MEC leadership, the unexpected announcement of a base closure, and higher-than-expected attrition, the pilot group never wavered," says Capt. Sam Pool, the pilots' MEC chairman.

From left: Capt. Christian Barone, F/O Rachel Lindvig, Capt. Sam Pool, F/O Chris Mickey, and Capt. Paul Cavicchi at the LaGuardia road show in December.

Photo: Kimberly Seitz

In January 2014, just days after emerging from bankruptcy and announcing its merger with US Airways, American Airlines Group (AAG—formerly known as AMR) management revealed that its wholly owned subsidiary, American Eagle, would be rebranded Envoy Air. To solidify the placement of larger regional jets on the property, Envoy management approached the Envoy MEC to negotiate concessionary changes to the pilot agreement reached during AMR's bankruptcy.

After an agreement in principle failed to receive MEC approval, both sides resumed negotiations. "In an attempt to come to an agreement, the pilot group was eventually asked in March to vote on the contract changes that the MEC had approved," Pool explains. "However, an overwhelming 70 percent of the pilots who cast ballots rejected the agreement because it did not meet established expectations."

As the year progressed, more than 600 pilots resigned—approximately 240 flowed to American Airlines and the rest left for other carriers. High attrition was compounded by AAG's announcement that it would transfer all 47 CRJ700s and part of the ERJ 145 fleet to other airlines. AAG also announced that it would place 20 of the 60 E175s originally intended to refleet Envoy at another airline and is parking the ERJ 140s. Coupled with the announced closing of the Miami base and the breakdown of ongoing negotiations, the pilots' level of frustration was on the rise.

The MEC focused on fortifying pilot unity and soliciting pilot feedback by conducting a series of Pilot Unity Building (PUB) events in each Envoy base. With Texas BBQ and golfing in Dallas, a hearty meal in Miami, pizza in Chicago, and informational picketing in New York, the pilots and their families were able to communicate their frustration to their elected leaders. "Having frank and meaningful discussions with our pilots lets us know how the MEC should proceed on issues important to the pilot group," says Pool.

Intense year-end negotiations resulted in a tentative agreement that the MEC approved. A whirlwind of road shows that were supported by MEC officers, status representatives, and Pilot-to-Pilot volunteers took place in quick succession, with the pilots voting to ratify the agreement just before Christmas.

"This agreement provides the forward-looking economic foundation that Envoy says is required to build a viable future for the airline, its pilots, and employees," Pool says. "It also will provide the company the operational flexibility of a wholly owned carrier with competitive labor prices, especially in the later years of the contract, while we continue to find ways to improve pilots' quality of life on the line and to ensure that Envoy remains a leader in our segment of the industry."