

**W**hen negotiations started in May 2009, Piedmont pilots did not expect the process to be quick. However, they did expect management to fully participate in the discussions. But after months of negotiations, little has been accomplished at the bargaining table.

## Piedmont

### Piedmont Fires Back at Stonewalling Management

By Jen Lofquist, ALPA Communications Specialist



Piedmont operates 55 Dash 8s.

Working with other pilot groups in the US Airways family, Piedmont pilots started the negotiations process

with a collaborative mindset and invited other groups to join them at the negotiating table to strengthen their collective hands with their own management and with US Airways management. In contrast to the experience at PSA in which management did not object to other pilot group representatives attending, Piedmont management bluntly refused to participate in any meaningful negotiations with representatives of other pilot groups in the room. Instead, any overture from the Negotiating Committee was met with a terse “current book,” or a demand for concessions.

“In negotiations, you expect not to agree on everything, but you do expect discussion,” says Capt. Charles Martinak, the Piedmont pilot’s Master Executive Council chairman. “Our negotiations team wasn’t even given that.”

With virtually no progress at the table after presenting all contract sections—and little hope of any in the future—Piedmont management opened the door to mediation more quickly than customary, and an application is now pending at the National Mediation Board (NMB). The pilots expect that the presence of an NMB mediator will force management’s negotiators to recognize the contributions of the group and fully participate in the negotiating process.

The lack of progress at the bargaining table comes at a tumultuous time for the pilots—and for Piedmont Airlines. In August, US Airways announced plans to swap gates with Delta—effectively closing the US Airways Express La Guardia hub in favor of flying mainline flights out of Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport in Washington, D.C. This will close one of Piedmont’s domiciles and eliminate jobs. The deal has not yet been approved by regulators but is expected to

take place early this year.

The group is also dealing with the uncertainty of being a wholly owned subsidiary of US Airways. Instead of answering to one management, it’s common for Piedmont management to respond to pilot group inquiries with “We need to talk to Tempe [the headquarters of US Airways].” Right now, the future of Piedmont Airlines is far from clear. Many of the airline’s Dash 8s are up for replacement, but management has made no plans to obtain new aircraft or even to reduce the fleet.

“We asked our management to elaborate on the future plans for the airline,” says Martinak. “It simply couldn’t give us a straight answer. We then turned to US Airways management, asking the same questions. We were told to ask our own management. Our pilot group has a vested interest in the future of this airline and needs to know where we are heading. I’m not sure if anyone knows the answer, but we’re going to keep asking.”

Unlike the pilots at many other regional carriers, pilots at Piedmont tend to be older with higher seniority status. Though the stereotypical regional pilot looks to move to mainline operations, many at Piedmont started with the company and expect to retire from it, making discussion about the future plans for Piedmont even more important. This older pilot group’s priorities have an effect on negotiations, putting a much higher emphasis on retirement and health benefits than may be found at airlines with a younger pilot demographic.

Also in contrast to other regionals, Piedmont has a widely dispersed pilot group—with six domiciles across five states making communications even more vital to uniting the group. The MEC has responded with weekly e-mails, quarterly newsletters, and an active Communications Committee.

No matter how management responds to the pilots’ application for mediation, the group is determined to be heard and will not accept current book as the end result of any negotiations. Despite the turmoil and uncertainty, one thing is clear: Piedmont pilots are unified in the pursuit of a fair contract. The only question is how long it will take management to realize that. 🌐

## PDT at a Glance

**Pilots Joined ALPA:** 1952

**Number of Pilots:** 477

**Headquarters:** Salisbury, Md.

**Pilot Domiciles:** New Bern, N.C.; Charlottesville, Va.; Roanoke, Va.; New York, N.Y. (LGA); Harrisburg, Pa.; Salisbury, Md.

**Fleet:** 55 DHC-8s