

An Abridged History of TWU, Local 514 (Or “Through Their Eyes”) By Jim Cook

No history of this local could be of any consequence if it did not pay homage to the officers, shop stewards and members. For those of us still working we owe much to those who worked so hard for the benefit of all of us. It is with deep humility that this article is written.

It is an impossibility to mention all of those who helped build our local from its beginnings in 1945 when Stores was first organized and the following year when Maintenance, Fleet Service (then a part of the Maintenance contract) and Ground Service was added to the organization. The Union was formed to help those struggling airline workers who found themselves covered by the Railway Labor Act (RLA) rather than the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). These workers had to work in excess of forty-eight hours per week before they were entitled to overtime pay rates and then there was never such a thing as double time pay. It was their need and desire to be treated fairly that led them to choose the TWU, a militant union that had a head and a heart. It was the members that were, as they are today, the boss of the Union. It has been their collective direction that has brought us to this point in our history. This article will focus on the Presidents of TWU, Local 514 for it is through their eyes that an overview of our history can be seen.

In 1945 and 1946 America was embarking on the post World War II era that would change virtually all aspects life as it had been known in the United States. Those workers who were employed by American Airlines were no different, they were eager to claim their fair share of the fruits of the nation that many, if not most, had fought for. It was Elmo Robert (Bob) Burns who was our first leader. He was a stock clerk who had the poise and strength to pull the developing membership together for the benefit of all. He had a certain charisma and presence of mind to lead our sisters and brothers to that first contract. Now we would receive time and one-half for work over forty hours per week just like their counterparts who were organized under the NLRA. They made great progress in bettering the pay of aircraft workers who in those days were expected to work for low wages in order to work in the aviation field that they loved. Burns was well aware of the near poverty of the American Airline worker and his struggle was to bring them out of destitution. It was the first contract, meager as it was, that begun the march for justice in the American Airlines workplace. He knew that he must improve himself through education in order to help the Union workers and undertook to attend classes at Tulsa University. Bob served those members well through the formative years. During his administration came such other firsts in the airline industry as severance pay and limits on contracted out work. These things were unheard of and thought pipe dreams before an eleven-day strike in 1950 proved the strength of unity. In 1952 Bob forced the establishment of overtime lists, before that time overtime was worked on a “kiss ass” basis. The overtime lists ensured that overtime would be as evenly distributed as possible. It was also during these times that Bob needed the full support of the membership; they had work stoppages and sit-down demonstrations on the ramp, one lasting for three days before the company agreed to solve the problem. This was after the company boss addressed workers who were on the ramp by way of a bull horn when the members started walking towards him, at the sight of this he literally turned and ran leaving his harsh words and threats to no avail. During the next decade Bob kept us on a level playing field

with the company and continued improvements in our contracts and working conditions. In 1963 Bob accepted a job as an International Representative.

Bill “Bud” Redwine became president in 1963. He was in the prime of a promising administration when he died in office in January 1964. Edward L. (Ed) Wilson moved from Vice-President. During this turbulent time in Oklahoma Organized Labor the business leaders of the day sought to emulate the surrounding states and keep workers down with a so called right-to-work law. No one in the state worked harder than Ed did to protect the rights of workers and defeat the proposed rip off. He recruited workers who made signs, walked the precincts and did what ever it took to make clear to the citizens of Oklahoma just what a raw deal the law would be for state workers. Needless to point out that Wilson and Labor were successful in their effort to defeat State Question 409 and the opponents of workers suffered a defeat that they thought they could not lose. Ed said that “The major thing that we did in order to defeat right-to-work was to make voter registration available to everyone. Before we got the rules changed you could only register at the courthouse and most workers couldn’t get there in time to register. After the rules changed you could register at churches, Union Halls and a lot of other places. This allowed us to get our people registered. That’s along with a large number of volunteer workers putting out a lot of effort was how we won.” To this day the enemies of workers have been unsuccessful in their many loathsome attempts to defile workers rights by enacting the unfair law. “Another thing that we did was to get Fred Harris elected as U. S. Senator over legendary football coach, Republican Bud Wilkinson. People thought it couldn’t be done but we did it. From these victories Labor gained much more clout in the state legislature and gained the right for an injured worker to be treated by a doctor of his choice,” he said.

Harold Nichols became President in 1965. Harold came up the hard way during the depression. He worked in a c/c camp, drove a truck and bull dozer, worked as a plumber at Camp Gruber where he joined the Plumbers Union, was in the military, worked for Spartan Trailers where he belonged to the IAM. Then he worked for Oklahoma Steel Casting in a non-union job before hiring on at American Airlines as a Stock Clerk and later became a Junior Mechanic in engine teardown. Having felt the difference between a Union represented job and one that was not. Harold immediately became involved. “I knew what the Union could do for workers,” he said. Harold worked tirelessly for a better workplace. He served as Shop Steward, Chief Shop Steward, Executive Board Member, Vice President and President. Harold reminisces, “I have been Union all of my life. It has really been good to me. By putting in all the time to help people I have received great rewards.” Harold also hired the Local’s long time Secretary/Programmer Barbara Cale. She has given over thirty-two years of dedicated service to the Local 514 membership.

Bob Burns returned from the International Union and was reelected president in 1967. In November 1967 the membership left the plant in a “wildcat” strike over the unfair firing of a worker. Bob addressed the membership and told them they had to return to work. To this the workers responded, “It’s all right Bob, we know what you really mean, we are with you on this thing.” The irony was that he really did want them to return to work and let the system take care of the problem. The wildcat ended after three days when the company put the mechanic back to work. It was during this period that the current Local 514 Union Hall was constructed. Bob encountered troubles with the membership and Executive Board members and was forced from

office in January 1969. Vice President Herman Dennis was so opposed to the removal that he resigned rather than filling the remainder of the term.

Jack Lewis, an Executive Board member was appointed by the Board to fill that term until an election could be held. That 1969 election saw the return of Harold Nichols as president. After Jack Lewis left office he continued to be active and accepted a position with The United Way as Labor Liaison, a job he held for many years before his retirement. Even then Jack remained politically active until the time of his death.

Harold Nichols relates that his greatest moment of despair was in 1969 when he was one of those that led the Local 514 membership out on a strike that lasted for three weeks. It was troubling to him to see all of these members put their security and their families security on the line, but "There was no other choice if we were to get a fair contract. I have never seen or heard of a more unified group than we were then, there was not one scab at Local 514, that is why we won the strike." That contract produced 25% wage raises over a three year period, it put weekend work on a seniority basis, extended recall rights to laid off workers to five years rather than the previous two and gained the day after Thanksgiving as a paid holiday. Harold says to today's Union member, "Not being a rat and sticking together is the only way to make gains, attend meetings and make your voice heard."

In 1971 the membership elected Paul Gaynor as president. He was elected amidst many layoffs. His greatest challenge was to win the return of these employees and preserve seniority. Another great issue of the time was the company's effort to transform the maintenance base into an around the clock seven day a week operation. Their plan for plant wide seven day coverage was met with great resistance and under the leadership of Paul the solid membership was successful in holding such work to a minimum. Paul also led a drive that organized Zebco into Local 514 as well as Hem-Saw in Pryor.

Paul was reelected in 1973 and in October he accepted an International position as an International Representative. He distinguished himself as an extremely effective organizer. To his credit are the successful organization drives at Southwest Airlines Flight Attendants, World Airways Dispatchers, Air Wisconsin Dispatchers, Executive Air Flight Attendants and when American Airlines workers were threatened by the advent of American Eagle and the low pay that they paid their workers Paul dug in and organized these Maintenance, Stores and Fleet Service workers into the TWU and the threat of transferring work to that entity ended with the first contract. Today those workers are the highest paid of any commuter airline worker. Paul brought thousands of workers under the umbrella of the TWU and "all of these workers are better off today because of becoming Union members," he said.

When Paul organized the Southwest Airlines Flight Attendants their uniform was the renowned "Hot Pants". This sexist uniform was a trademark of the emerging carrier and they vowed to never change from it. With Paul at the helm of the first negotiations the "Hot Pants" became a part of the airlines history and the jubilant flight attendants became solid members. Paul says, "The Hot Pants issue was by far the biggest issue with them at the time, they felt degraded by the uniform and wanted them gone." In reality the elimination was not only a breakthrough for the Flight Attendants but went far in establishing a workers right to be free from sexual harassment

in the workplace. Today they are the highest paid attendants in the industry and have never had to strike in order to make great gains. His greatest pleasure was “seeing those we organized develop into good Union members.”

Paul was fortunate enough to work with all TWU Presidents except Michael Quill. Paul said, “Matty Guinan was my favorite. He worked hard for the workers and could relate to hard times.” As far as Air Transport Directors, Paul said that he recognizes that “John Kerrigan’s strength of character preserved the airline contracts and he had in depth knowledge of all of the airline contracts.

Paul went on to become an International Vice President who oversaw the Southwest contract, airline organizing and a host of other jobs along the way. Paul and his wife Yoshi still live here in Tulsa in the home where they have lived for the past 25 years. Paul encourages all current members to “Stick together and participate in your Union. United/Invincible.”

Vice President Claude E. Stiles became President in 1973 when Paul Gaynor left office for the International position. Claude had been in office only a few weeks when the airline notified the Union that they were going to layoff nearly 300 workers due to the alleged fuel shortage. This plagued Claude during his entire administration. “That was the toughest part of being president, seeing those workers being laid off. At that time it was very difficult to find work in Tulsa if you were laid off at American Airlines,” he said. Claude also said that another tough time was “when you have to tell someone that their discharge was upheld in arbitration.” While serving as Vice President under Paul Gaynor and before that Harold Nichols he inherited a stack of nearly 3,000 grievances. His task was to settle those that he could, withdraw those that did not have merit and arbitrate those in dispute. Not content to simply withdraw the grievances he and other members of the grievance committee investigated them and “made decisions with knowledge rather than guess,” he said. After showing the company that he was willing to arbitrate the grievances they were much more willing to settle the grievances that had merit.

Claude helped get the United Way Drive at the maintenance base and make sure that contributions were made freely and without pressure. The Red Cross Blood Bank also made good gains during Claude’s time in office. Claude tells the current membership, “Stay with the TWU, they have the best way of negotiating. Remember all the good things in the contracts were gotten by Unions. Don’t get into a fight, stay with what is proven and let the company know that people on board get to move up before hiring new workers. You need to get involved and stay involved while trying not to be excessively critical, and don’t let the union get away from you.”

Vance Warren was elected President in 1975. Vance’s first effort after being installed was to call on the International to file a 29(d) grievance because the company had brought the light “c” check line from Dallas and laid workers off out of seniority. At the time there was no requirement for an A & P license in aircraft overhaul but the company made it a requirement for that line thus violating the contract when it laid off more senior mechanics that did not hold the licenses. The arbitration was won and many of the displaced workers received full back pay because of the company injustice.

During his time in office he was successful in starting a treatment option for alcoholism. Before that time the company consistently fired those who had the problem. He instituted the agreement between Valley Of Hope, TWU and the American Airlines, a relationship that is ongoing to this day. This has been a real milestone in Local 514 history. Knowing that political involvement was critical to workers Vance kept the local active on the political front. His efforts led to legislation that limited the amount that could be garnished from a workers check and an end to being fired because of the garnishments. When the Horace Mann Treatment Center was proposed for a neighborhood where many Local 514 members made their homes, Vance stood toe to toe with then governor David Boren and was successful in getting the center put downtown where there were few residences. Vance worked against right-to-work legislation and gives Ed Wilson full credit for being able to defeat state question #409 in 1964. Vance also recalls the cafeteria boycott when the company would not allow hangar five workers enough time to go to the cafeteria at lunchtime. "We stuck together to get things done and had the guts to stand up for what was right," Vance said.

One of the things that stand out for Vance was when he and Bob Burns were organizing Sargent Brothers. He remembers that the company official told Burns, "If you bastards lose today they are going to have to carry you out of here." The Union won the election by one vote and Burns and Warren walked proudly out of the plant and began planning for a first contract. Vance also mentions, almost casually, that he was fired while he was president for allegedly manhandling a company supervisor. He presented his own arbitration case against a company lawyer and was successful in being reinstated. Vance's message to today's Union workers is, "The benefits that Union workers enjoy today came from sacrifice and were hard fought for. Success of any Union is based on the unity of its membership. Look for the long term benefit and be unified, without unity there is nothing."

Bill Winton became President in March of 1977 when Vance Warren resigned for personal reasons. He served until July of that year to complete the unfinished term of Warren. Bill was a good-hearted man who cared immensely for the workers. At the end of his time as president he went back to work on the floor as a Crew Chief where he worked until retirement. Bill passed away as he had lived, working for others. His Pastor related at Bill's funeral "Bill would do anything he could to help his fellow human being."

Robert J. (Bob) Ridge became president in 1977. His over 25 years of Union service at the time of election served him and the membership well. He had been Shop Steward, Chief Steward, Election Committee member, Grievance Committee, Strike Captain, Chairman of Maintenance (2nd Vice President), Vice President and Negotiating Committee. Also after leaving the job of President, Bob worked on the Negotiating Committee of 1983.

During his tenure Bob helped promote the joint alcoholism committee to be a system wide undertaking. Bob trained Shop Stewards with the help of then ATD Director Bill Linder. He served many years as a State AFL-CIO Executive Board member as well as the Northeastern Oklahoma Labor Council. He was responsible for refining the overtime guidelines and negotiating the Zebco Agreement. He was instrumental in setting up the Jr. Mechanic upgrade program as well.

Bob remembers several job actions when the company would do something that violated workers contract rights. "We did what we had to do in those days," he said. "We had to be together or we would have been buried," he went on. Bob's best memory of his years with TWU is "Being a Union member and being able to serve so many years and enjoy the benefits of Unionism. I would advise all members to get involved in some way and to continue to improve collective bargaining and remember 'United We Stand, Divided We Fall'."

Since his retirement in 1983 Bob was instrumental in forming the Retiree's Association and served six years as President of that organization and a further six years as Vice President. He has continued to work with the Labor Council, is the Retiree Director of the AAEEA and works as a trustee with the Broken Arrow Elks Lodge 2673.

In 1979 Ed Wilson was reelected President. And served until 1981. It was during the negotiations that led to the 1980 agreement that the breakthrough retirement plan was agreed to. The plan took the straight dollar benefit out of the process and instituted a percentage formula that produces a raise in the retirement benefit as the wage rate increases. The agreement also provided that the company assumes the full cost of the plan. It gave credit to those members who had not opted to be in the plan before that time as well. Also before that agreement workers were not given credit for time worked before reaching 25 years of age, that agreement corrected that and gave credit for time worked before reaching 25.

In 1981 James A. (Jimmy) Wilson was elected the youngest president of Local 514. This was one of the most troubling times in American Labor history. President Reagan had just been elected and declared war on Organized Labor when he fired and permanently replaced the Air Traffic Controllers; he also made them ineligible for any other government job. He did this in spite of his empty campaign promises to work in their behalf. That single event signaled private companies in this country that all's fair when it comes to dealing with Unionized workers. Many companies took the lead and in 1982 when the TWU/AA contract was up American took an extremely aggressive approach to contract negotiations. The times were in their favor and they took full advantage of that fact. When the company made their last offer the Union refused to endorse the contract but agreed to let the membership vote on the contract. In the mean time the company issued a contract that they promised to implement if this agreement was not voted in. The proposal, which was known as the yellow contract because of its being printed on yellow paper, was a horror in which virtually all previously negotiated improvements would have been abandoned and the company would have had the right to contract out any and all work with no job guarantee for any worker. They also promised to permanently replace any worker who would strike. The International Union and President Jimmy Wilson urged the membership to vote no on the proposal because it instituted part time workers, ended paid lunchtime for afternoon and midnight shifts and brought in a two tier wage scale that extended newly hired workers pay scale for twelve years. These and for other reasons prompted Jimmy to warn, "This contract will do nothing but serve to divide us, we should not do so." In the face of what was happening nationally and the uncertainty of the times the membership ignored his stern warnings and approved the contract by a wide margin. Jimmy said, "We could have done so much better if we had just stuck together." Jimmy's more pleasurable memories include presenting seventeen discharge cases in arbitration over a five-day period and being successful in returning every one

of those individuals to work; he won them all. Jimmy's record in arbitration was admirable no matter how you looked at it.

Jimmy also remembers the Zebco negotiations. When all thought that there was no more to gain from the company Jimmy went back in and demanded an additional 7 ½ % raise and gained a 5% increase. This was well received until the company told the workers that they would no longer receive a \$25 Christmas Bonus along with a turkey. Even though this upset the membership they opted for the raise after Jimmy explained it to them at a membership meeting. Jimmy advises Union members to give and take, to stick together, unite and stick together. When we go to the company we need to go as one and the snitching that is going on must stop."

In 1983 Ed Wilson was elected president for the third separate time, this time he would remain in that position until 1992 when he chose not to seek re-election. During this time there was the controversial contract of 1989 in which pay progression for mechanics was lowered to nine years but there were few other improvements. Ed Wilson wanted the membership to know the Union's side of the contract and assigned Union officers to attend any and all of the meetings the company was having in order to sell the contract. The membership turned down the first contract proposal but soon thereafter voted in a contract that was little if any different than the original proposal. Ed remembers a member who would benefit from the several bumps up in the pay scale telling him, "I'll receive a \$10,000 a year raise in my paycheck; John L. Lewis himself wouldn't have voted against that." A breakthrough came in 1991 when the company wanted to negotiate a contract extension. Out of that extension came yearly pay increases, the end of the disparity of vacation accrual and a reduction in the pay progression of mechanics to five years. It proved to be a wise choice over the three years of the extension because American Airline workers were receiving pay raises while the rest of the industry was accepting cutbacks in their pay, some of which haven't recovered yet. Ed states that "Between 1983 and 1992 our biggest goal was to regain what we lost during the 1983 contract."

"From the first day I was there until the last day when I left we tried to build a strong political arm. Unions are a product of legislation and without protection of legislation it would be very difficult for Unions to exist," he said. "It's important for us to protect ourselves politically, we owe it to ourselves and our families," he went on. Many remember his political analogy when he said, "One of these days in the future your little grandchild is going to crawl up on your lap and talk about the way things are then You have a choice. You can do what needs to be done today and tell him it's because of the action that you and others took when it had to be done, or you can hang your head and tell him that the reason things are so bad is because you didn't have what it took to get out and fight for what you believed in. The choice is yours, what'll it be?" This will always be true. One of the great achievements politically that was undertaken by Ed was organizing Union workers to build political signs for candidates and issues. This gives much added strength to the voice of Labor. From the early beginnings when Local 514 members met at the Steel Workers Hall to print signs and then haul them back to the TWU hall to be assembled. Today the Local owns a state of the art semi-automated press and dryer, the sign factory has been an extremely effective tool in promoting labor's political influence for the betterment of workers and their families.

During this time Ed is proud of the his accomplishments administratively. “We revamped that whole Union. To start with we computerized everything and put in an up to date phone system in order to better communicate with our members. We stressed communications by printing a members and stewards handbook and we put out a newsletter once a week and distributed it on the floor in order to keep members current and singing out of the same hymn book. Those things had never been done before, we instituted shop steward training during regular shop steward meetings,” he said. Ed is justifiably proud of his record in arbitration. He was able to win cases that were thought to be unwinnable. Ed is the only leader who was successful in getting a member returned to work even after the member’s case had been lost in arbitration. He credits the power of the Union in accomplishing the task.

Ed worked for better community services. During his tenure the local improved the blood bank, sent members to disaster relief training, planted trees along highway 169 and improved the United Way Drive to record levels. Confirmation of that community service work came when the American Red Cross awarded Local 514 the first ever “Samuel Gompers Award” for a labor organizations contribution to the communities they serve. The award goes to the outstanding Local, International Union or other Labor organization and is presented at the Red Cross National Convention. The award is encased in the Local 514 Union Hall.

Other accomplishments were providing a means for people to upgrade to higher classifications through training. “In conjunction with Rogers State College we gave people remedial training in reading and math so that they could pass the tests necessary to begin upgrade training or get their licenses or what ever, it was very important,” said Ed. He was also responsible for the one member one vote at the President’s Council. This has gone far in gaining equal representation of the entire system membership. The larger locals can now vote the strength of their membership instead of one vote per local. “Some people believe that a Union ought to be ran like a business. I’m one of the few that believe that it ought to be ran like a cause. The difference is that a business can advocate one thing and do another, a Union can’t do that. It has to act as it advocates,” he related.

Ed believes it is important for Union members to know “I had a great many achievements and some failures. The failures came from trying and the success came because of a lot of people worked together.” Ed believes that a key to our success is to “Think Union, Act Union, Be Union.”

Ed returned to work on the airplane docks for a short time after leaving office and has since retired. According to current President Dennis Burchette, Ed is always there ready to counsel him on the best way to deal with situations and to run the local. With thirteen years total as President, Ed Wilson served more years in the office than any other President other than Bob Burns.

Marion L. Finley started his time in office with a decisive victory in arbitration. The company had instituted a plan to close the Maintenance Base during the week of Christmas and Finley believed this to be a contract violation. Finley was proved to be correct when the arbitrator ruled in favor of the Union, stating that the International Union and the company negotiated the contract and a local could not agree to anything that violates the basic agreement. He ruled that

because the plan was so far along for that year that the company could have the closure for that year but not again unless it was negotiated during regular negotiations or by way of agreement with the approval of the International Union. In 1995 the company insisted on this being part of the contract, and got it. As it has turned out, what the Union didn't want and what the company did want has turned exactly around. Most Union members like that time off and the company can't seem to get ready for it. Marion insisted that we live by the contract because it is written in our favor, "Without it we would be in sad shape," he said.

Marion instituted the Local 514 dates at Bell's and at Big Splash. And before he left office had laid the plans for the first Labor Fest over Labor Day weekend. These days provide the Union member and his family a time to be with other Union members and their families and gain camaraderie. The days have been vastly successful and have become a tradition that he hopes will have a long tenure.

One of the more memorable times was when Marion organized a 3,000 member march through the administration building and by the AA Vice President of Base Maintenance's office. The march was spurned by the company misapplication of the S.R.P. Program. They were using it far differently than what had been negotiated. The misapplication was eventually referred to arbitration and with TWU Counsel Art Luby presenting the case the Union won the case hands down in a great victory for the Union.

Marion first hired on at American in 1967 and within six months was a Shop Steward. He was involved in one position or another during all of his more than 30 working years at American Airlines. He was an Executive Board member, Recording Secretary, Vice Chairman of Maintenance, a job he says Harold Nichols fired him from, and he was Vice President and President from 1992 until 1998. Marion was a scholar on contract language and prior arbitration cases. His incredible memory on contract and arbitration cases is truly amazing. Marion probably presented more arbitration cases than any other officer in Local 514 history. Marion admits that he lost several of the cases but he won the respect of those opposing him on the company side. Because they knew he would challenge them, they often backed away from actions they would have otherwise taken. Marion is proud of the Junior Mechanic Training Program that was instituted under his leadership. It gave scores of workers in lower classifications the opportunity to advance to mechanic and get a good mechanical training base to boot. With but one exception these mechanics all passed their FAA Airframe and Powerplant tests and work as A & P Aviation Maintenance Technicians. Everyone benefited from the program.

In 1993 Marion was unanimously elected to a TWU, International Vice Presidents position, a position he still holds. He still participates in the International Union as a member of the International Executive Council.

Marion stated that, "I really enjoyed representing the membership and I have received much more from it than I was ever able to give it. One of the things that I am most proud of is giving credibility back to Local 514, not only with management but with other locals and other Unions in general." That credibility paid off here in Oklahoma with the election of Local 514 member Jim Curry as President of the Oklahoma State AFL-CIO. Curry is well on his way to

establishing himself as one of the great labor leaders of our time in the State of Oklahoma. Without the credibility that was established under Finley's leadership a great voice for Oklahoma workers would never have been heard.

Marion reminds Union members, "An injustice to any one member of the Union is an injustice to every member and we should stand together and see that everyone's rights are complied with and taken care of not just one or two but all of us. Be credible with the people that you work with and management."

All of these men gave far more than was ever expected of them and their effort in our behalf came at great personal sacrifice for them. The time away from their loved ones, the missed birthdays, anniversaries, little league games and other family events were given in order that the membership might make gains. It is humbling to have known most of these dauntless leaders. We owe them much, for without them we would still be wallowing in the despairs of hardship.

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