

Hotel Updates



*Jay Lyle (PIT)
Chairman, Crew Accommodations Committee*

“... management is very interested in any feedback that I can forward to them. The more detailed the information, the more helpful it is. Stating, ‘the meal sucks,’ may be correct, but it provides us with nothing to go on besides the fact that you didn’t like it.”

As I indicated in previous articles, I’ve been trying to arrange a meeting with the Dining and Cabin Service Department concerning the catering companies’ failure to provision crew meals with the approved contents. The new manager is trying to get a handle on all of the department’s various functions. During our phone conversations, the manager always says the proper things. The committee felt that a good face-to-face meeting would put things back on the proper track.

While attending the MEC meeting in DC, during which I delivered an oral report, the manager and I were finally able to get together. We discussed a wide range of issues. First on the agenda was the failure of US Airways’ in-flight kitchens to properly provision our crew meals. Each kitchen has a copy of the menu that was selected last year by ALPA, AFA, and Company personnel. The menus were developed by LSG and comply with our company’s crew meal price guidelines. These prices, set in approximately 1993, are: \$4.00 for breakfast; \$5.00 for lunch; and \$6.00 for dinner. I suggested that these prices are a bit low to provide an adequate meal. Of course the Company feels that the prices are appropriate, since the size of the portions has remained constant due to flight kitchen efficiencies. If, after working through these issues, we determine that the price guidelines are inadequate, I’m

not sure how we would persuade management to increase these guidelines. In any case, the Company provided the kitchens with menus, including portion sizes, weights, and pictures of each meal. This should have removed any question as to how the meals should look. From the many complaints that I’ve received, as well as first-hand experience, I know that many kitchens are not following the menus. Why? I can only guess that management never followed up on compliance issues, so the kitchens feared no reprisal.

Considering that the Company may thus be overpaying for crew meals, the new manager has promised to follow up on menu compliance. To that end, management is very interested in any feedback that I can forward to them. The more detailed the information, the more helpful it is. Stating, “the meal sucks,” may be correct, but it provides us with nothing to go on besides the fact that you didn’t like it. Please tell us what was wrong. For example: you don’t like kids cereal for breakfast; the fruit in the meal consisted of three orange slices; you received cookies in the breakfast meal; there was a cup of OJ in the breakfast; the lunch salad was very small, and looked more like a side salad than an entrée salad; all the meals were the same; etc. Remember, according to the FOM, there are supposed to be at least two meal selections in order to prevent two pilots from eating the same meal. For those of you who have access to e-mail, I ask

that when you run across an unsuitable meal, send me the details as quickly as possible. This way, I can forward your comments to the Dining and Cabin Service Department for quick action. I prefer that you send your emails to me, thereby enabling me to remain in the loop, retain a record of the complaints, and follow up with the staff. Following our meeting, the Dining and Cabin Service Department developed their own comment cards, which will be distributed with the crew meals. In order to ensure kitchen compliance, please fill these cards out and return them quickly. Receiving the information a couple of weeks after the meals makes it tougher for management to follow up. This is another reason why I suggest sending me an e-mail, perhaps even while you're out on a trip. I generally check my e-mail daily. Let me make one other point regarding kitchen inspections. The US Airways Dining and Cabin Service Department staff includes certified health inspectors, who inspect the kitchens twice a year.

We also discussed the problems associated with delivering hot meals to crews, and are trying to come up with solutions. This problem affects only certain stations, and has been increasing over the last few years. The Dining and Cabin Service Department expressed their preference for a high quality cold meal, as opposed to a hot meal delivered cold or lukewarm. They cited one factor which affects our larger stations, primarily our hubs, where US Airways personnel deliver the food. When Catering does bulk pick-ups, meals may sit on the truck for two hours before they get to your aircraft. Trying to keep a meal hot for that long is a big challenge. I suggested, as a quick solution, changing the schedule, or adding an additional van just to deliver crew meals during the meal hours. Dining and Cabin Services stated that they would love to see other changes made from the in-house delivery, but staff is too scarce. We will certainly pursue this issue.

We also talked about packaging the hot meals in "genie" trays. US Airways has cornered the market on these trays, which are supposed to keep meals hot for four hours. Packing up the hot entrees with extra insulation in "genie" trays should keep meals warmer. Dining and Cabin Services also suggested delivering meals cold, and allowing the crew to warm them. When flight attendants expressed the concern that their Ops manual does not permit them to use the ovens to heat food except for first class meals, Dining and Cabin Services determined

that flight attendants may heat food *provided by US Airways*. That would cover crew meals. Hot entrees come in white plastic containers, which are safe for the aircraft ovens. I saw two problems with this suggestion. First, MetroJet aircraft have no ovens. Second, short stage-length flights will not permit enough time to heat and eat a meal. Crew meal delivery is scheduled around normal meal times, and permits crews to sustain themselves while keeping the airline running on time. Waiting a couple of legs after crew meal delivery in order to heat the meals defeats the purpose of the crew meal schedule. One of the final pieces of the puzzle is making sure that meals are delivered in a timely fashion. Delivering fresh hot meals in the middle of the boarding process does not permit adequate time for crews to eat the meals.

Please help me document situations in which catering companies are unable to deliver hot meals to the aircraft, so that we can identify problem stations. Again, timely and detailed reports of poor meal content will help us ensure in-flight kitchen compliance with our crew meal program. Finally, if we don't have time to schedule a new menu presentation before next month, I'll describe in my next article what the meals are supposed to include. Since it has been one year since the last selection, it is time to update the menu. This discussion of the importance of communication and feedback provides a perfect segue into my next topic.

Recently, the Communications Committee developed enhanced communication tools to facilitate the flow of information between the MEC, the committees, and the pilots. We now have a web page and comment form, available for your use in the "Pilots Only" section of the US Airways MEC website. There are several ways to reach the comment form. Perhaps the easiest path is via the hotel/travel page. Aside from the comment form, the remainder of the page is not yet active. I hope to achieve full functionality soon. Before I attend training on how to update and manage our web page, I need to acquire a new laptop from ALPA. My current computer is obsolete and incapable of performing the required tasks. After I complete my training, additional committee members will be trained to assist me in managing our page. Once the hotel/travel page is active, we'll be able to electronically publish the same information currently available in our *US AIRWAVES* articles. Those who visit our web site will be able to access current hotel/travel in-

“ Crew meal delivery is scheduled around normal meal times, and permits crews to sustain themselves while keeping the airline running on time. Waiting a couple of legs after crew meal delivery in order to heat the meals defeats the purpose of the crew meal schedule. ”

“Speaking of crew rooms, I spoke with the Chief Pilot in Pittsburgh recently about the “quiet room.” For the moment, this issue is dead.”

formation quickly. Those without web access may continue to find information via *US AIRWAVES*. As soon as the web page is fully functional, I will post the menus that we have selected for the crew meal program. For now, the comment form is active, and merely requires that you complete a few fields. The completed forms will go right into a database.

We hope this form will be even more convenient than the OF-310 form. We are trying to accumulate as many comments as possible, so we can concentrate on the cities with the most problems. By filling out the required fields, you will enable us to present verifiable information to our management. If management questions the number of comments, we will be able to show pairing numbers and dates, instead of merely passing on rumors about an overnight. With regard to the comment form, feedback from our pilots about what is missing and what is redundant will facilitate its evolution. We have already completed one revision of the form, and I’m sure there will be many more as we move forward with this program. So please take the time to visit the site. Hopefully, by the time you read this, I will have completed my training, and the site will be active.

On January 10, the Grievance Committee chairman presented our two grievances to the VP of Flight Operations. One grievance addressed the failure of the Company’s computer program to insert crew meals into pairings when required. The other grievance addressed the lack of crew rooms around the system. So far, the VP of Flight Operations has issued no rulings. Speaking of crew rooms, I spoke with the Chief Pilot in Pittsburgh recently about the “quiet room.” For the moment, this issue is dead. The Company sought to replace the current room with a room down on the lower level. But there is no money for the additional rent. I included this item in my oral report to the MEC, but am unsure as to how we will respond. The former PIT Grievance chairman wanted to file a grievance over the issue. But at that time, it looked like we were going to get the room back.

Now I’ll discuss some hotel changes. The first is a change in the long overnight hotel in Allentown. In my last article, I mentioned that we had completed inspections in and around Allentown, but no decision had been made. Once management made the decision, they moved quickly. On February 6, we began using the Quality Inn in Bethlehem. The timing was

very significant, because on February 7 we began 30-hour layovers in Allentown. Getting the long overnight crews out of the Ramada was very important. United has also moved into Allentown, and they are just down the road from us in Bethlehem. We believe you’ll find much better room quality, and more activities within an easy walk of the new hotel.

We recently lifted the restriction we had placed on the hotel in Manchester, England. When we signed the contract, we limited our rooms to the side of the hotel facing the river. We imposed this restriction in order to minimize the noise from the construction on the other side of the hotel. As the construction is now complete, the opportunity to use both sides of the hotel will cut down on any waits that crews have been experiencing.

For the months of February and March, we are using two hotels for the long overnights in Fort Lauderdale, and a different hotel for the short overnights in Ft. Myers. In Ft. Lauderdale, we will be housing 10 crewmembers in the Lauderdale Beach Hotel, just down the street from the Doubletree. In Ft. Myers, we will be moving the short overnights to the Holiday Inn Select, next to the Homewood Suites. We made these changes in both cities for the following reason. Although we had anticipated some increase in our demand for rooms during the high season, we exceeded our original projections by approximately 10 rooms per city. Since it is the busiest time of the year, neither hotel had the additional space. In an attempt to maintain a strong working relationship with both of our original hotels, we agreed to split off some crews. In the case of the Ft. Myers, we had previously used the Holiday Inn, with no complaints. In Ft. Lauderdale, Delta has used the Lauderdale Beach Hotel for some time, and reported no complaints. Of course the primary reason for picking this hotel is the great location. So we are able to keep you in a good location, but the rooms might not be as nice as the Doubletree.

In West Palm Beach, we had to make a quick move back to the Holiday Inn Catalina for the long overnights. When our contract came up for renewal, the Doubletree proposed a very steep rate increase, along with a reduction in the number of available rooms. They probably thought that business would remain as strong as it was during the post-election rush. Anyway, their proposal far exceeded market rates, so we decided to return to a hotel that most crews

liked. The Holiday Inn had been trying to regain our business for some time. They realized their mistake in wanting us to leave at the expiration of our previous contract. We reviewed the Holiday Inn, and still found it to be in good shape.

We continue to encourage management to set an inspection schedule for cities they would like to get to in the next three months. Management has no firm inspection schedule, except for Brussels. We discussed a number of cities, including ERI, LAX, ITH, PNS, ALB (short overnight), MSY, BWI (short), PVD (long and short), TOL, BMH (long), and SFO (short). The SFO short overnight hotel is preparing for a renovation, after which they will become a Crown Plaza. If other acceptable options exist for us in SFO, we prefer not to endure a renovation.

We also discussed with the Operations Crew Support (OCS) staff some adjustments to van times in SEA and BOS. We used a number of crew reports to demonstrate where van times are set far too early for the crews to get to the

airport one hour before departure. We also stressed the fact that, during the middle of the day, our aircraft are frequently scheduled to be on the ground for less than an hour. Since we can't do any work until the aircraft arrives, showing up an hour before departure is largely a waste of time. Hopefully, the adjustments to van pickup times will be complete by the time you read this article. The OCS folks will now be attending a meeting once a month with Golden Touch Limo in New York. We gave them a list of problems to take to the first meeting, and hope to resolve many of these issues through this meeting process. One notable problem involves the reluctance of dispatchers to switch vans when one crew arrives at a destination, their van fails to arrive, but another van is waiting to pick up a crew that has not yet landed.

“ We continue to encourage management to set an inspection schedule for cities they would like to get to in the next three months. ”

Thanks and have a good overnight!



Disapproval List

ERI—This hotel was very high on our list, and the contract is expired. It should not require a large effort to make a very positive change in this city.

LAX (all hotels)—Resolving these issues will require a large effort. We have many locations and hotels to survey, and management is very understaffed. Your committee stands ready to help complete this job, just as we have in other cities.

Watch List

BNA (long overnight hotel)—We now have enough long overnights in this city to attract a hotel with a downtown location.

CHS—The location of our long overnight hotel is quite poor. The contract will soon expire, and we will explore other areas, including downtown.

MSY—The hotel contract will soon expire, and we hope to select a short overnight hotel that is closer to the airport. We should also now have enough of both short and long overnights to merit two hotels. Such was not the case when we last inspected this city.

EWR (long overnight transportation)—This item is new to the list. We have received numerous complaints about the competence of some of TBT's drivers.

Thanks to all who have contributed OF-310 forms and comments. Please keep them coming. As the Committee is nearly caught up from our holiday backlog, we were able to process 180 OF-310 forms this month. Fourteen reports contained favorable comments, 15 addressed hotels or transportation companies that we no longer use, 14 addressed crew meals, and six contained general comments or questions.