

# A Journey of a Thousand Miles and Other Interesting Times



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**M**y grandfather once told me that we were destined to live under the Chinese curse, “May you live in interesting times.”

This has never been more true. While deciding what to write about for this *US AIRWAVES* article, I thought it would be worthwhile to think about where we have come from—and to where we are going. Now, don’t get your hopes up: I’m not about to make predictions of when you will check out or upgrade to the A-330. Rather, I want to share with you the trends we are experiencing and the decisions we will likely be facing in the next several years.

## Overview and future

Let’s start with the overview or the “macroscopic” view, as our bankers like to put it. As an Association, ALPA is facing several big issues. We have determined that we are a “one-size-fits-all” union. In other words, we will strive to represent the interests of as many airlines, big and small, as we can. This means that your dues dollars are used to finance a contract negotiation at, say, Polar Air Cargo, as well as right here at US Airways. Likewise, it is my belief that the Association will continue to pursue the IACP, or Independent Association of Continental Pilots, with the intent of reacquainting them with ALPA and, in fact, merging with them. The benefits? A bigger ALPA with a broader-reaching effect within the airline and labor community. The downside? The cost of representation goes up, hopefully offset by increased dues income. But, there’s that thorny problem of what to do about scabs.

There is another factor at play here. Right now ALPA is faced with the specter of a competing union, the Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations (CAPA). This union is made up of

APA (the American Airlines pilots—by the way, the American Eagle pilots are represented by ALPA), the IACP, and a variety of pilot groups represented by the Teamsters and other inhouse unions. CAPA numbers 28,000 pilots and has placed its opinion with such bodies as Congress, in opposition to ALPA’s. As you know, ALPA has long represented itself to the public and Congress as THE voice of airline pilots. CAPA is attempting to cast themselves as another voice to be heard and reckoned with.

In the near future, I envision ALPA being involved in the reconstruction of the ATC system in the U.S. This will involve working out the details of how to pay for these changes. Also, the Association has been and will continue to be very active in the enactment and enforcement of scheduling issues like the new Reserve Rest Rules.

## So where’s the beef?

Let’s move from the national arena to where it really matters—our own kitchen tables. What issues face the US Airways pilots in the near and not-so-near future?

RJ’s, SJ’s, AJ’s, et al. Without a doubt, this appears to be the most time-sensitive matter for both us and the Company. The Company wants unlimited use of over 400 and the MEC will decide if that will happen. I won’t even put a whisper of anything else out in this article. You might think I had an opinion.

Next: The Parity Review. Let’s go over the basics first. We began a parity measurement period on September 1, 1999. The measurement period extends for one year. After that, we’ll talk about the results, then argue about the results, and then send them to an arbitrator for him or her to decide. Then the MEC gets to decide what they will do in regard to the results.

If we are above parity plus one percent, the MEC must determine how it reaches parity plus one percent. This could be through pay cuts, modifications to the work rules, or some other change (sick or vacation days as an example). Alternatively, if we are below parity plus one percent, the MEC will have the much more pleasant task of determining whether to give us a pay raise, or some other improvement to bring us up to the parity plus one percent level.

### All boats rise with the tide

The good news is that the Delta pilots have recently brought in an agreement that raises the B-777 hourly pay rate to \$264. Since our A-330 rate is based upon 95 percent of the composite competitor B-777 rate, our A-330 rate will be \$234 in 2000. For First Officers and IROs, the rate in the twelfth year will be 68.3 percent of that or \$160 without the international override. By the way, the A-330 rate is the only one that will rise automatically based on the competition's B-777 pay rates. See LOA 65 for more information.

Here's the point: If you are in your mid 50s, not very senior and want to optimize for retirement, you can opt for the A-330 as a First Officer and be paid more on an hourly basis than a mainline Group 2 Captain. Or, you may opt for MetroJet and the pay and options available there (MJ pilots got a three percent raise on September 1 and will get a three percent raise every September throughout the remainder of the contract. By the end of our contract MetroJet pilots will be able to earn the same amount of cash as a mainline Captain. True, they will have to work 96 hours as opposed to 85, but the MetroJet work rules take this into account and the number of days worked should be about the same.

It's also true that if you are in your mid 50s with aspirations of retiring as one of our senior pilots, the A-330 will add another layer of cash to your Final Average Earnings for retirement purposes, should you care to avail yourself of it.

What was hoped for when our current contract was ratified is happening: the number of options available to us is increasing, and we will all have a choice of how best to make the Contract work for us based on cash, options, lifestyle, etc.

Another plus is that the Delta pilots also got a productivity gain which will affect comparisons to our pay-to-block-hour ratio, and both the Delta and United pilots have contracts that

are amendable next year. Any agreement they make in the year 2000 will be included in the parity review. So, unless they sign a contract that gives back pay or work rules, it will affect us positively.

### IAM what IAM and that's all that IAM

The IAM ratified their agreement on October 5. That news, however, is offset by the continuation of the negotiations between the Company and the AFA. Since the AFA has continually told the Company they will not sign on to a contract embracing parity, this could get interesting. And, just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water, the CWA (Communication Workers of America) must negotiate their first contract with the Company.

Interesting times indeed. Couple that with an economy that appears to be slowing somewhat and the potential it brings in the way of mergers and acquisitions, and there truly is no rest for the wicked. And as if this is still not enough, the movement overseas with the likes of KLM-Alitalia points the way to a global oligopoly in the next decade. All of this for a company and a pilot group (us) that doesn't even belong to an international alliance.

### The journey continues

It used to be that the times that tried men's souls (or people's souls) were confined to that year or so surrounding Section 6 contract negotiations. Now, the dynamics of the airline industry demands almost continuous labor and company interaction. It used to be very comforting to sign a four or five year contract and, after learning the nuances of it, (which were few), you could coast for a while. So is this sink or swim? Adapt or die? I think it is. And this highlights the need for preparation and continually upgrading our base of knowledge.

As I begin developing the themes of future articles, I will do it to increase our collective base of knowledge. Only by all of us having the same degree of understanding can we get out from under this idea that only a few of us have the power or influence to make changes or retain the status quo. By being active participants in how our future is shaped, we ensure that we are not all just along for the ride.



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