

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum (The Safety Forum, That Is)



*Chris Beebe
MEC Chairman*

It was my honor to co-host the 10th Annual ALPA-US Airways Air Safety Forum held in Pittsburgh on November 9 and 10. What is amazing is the number of our pilots who do not know we have this important event, much less attend it. For all of the old-timers as well as the new hire pilots, let me remind you this began in 1990. At that time we were in the middle of five very ugly accidents. Do you remember the numbers 5050, 1493, 405, 1016, and 427? Not a very pleasant thought, but we can all be grateful that from that adversity, our pilot group and specifically, our ALPA Central Air Safety Committee, have put together a safety structure that is second to none! For those of us who lived through the dark days when we appeared to be snake-bitten, this is like a phoenix rising from the ashes.

Throughout the years, ALPA's safety initiatives have guided the airline industry and the government to the next level of safety for both pilots and passengers. Our involvement in these initiatives has always been strong, first by necessity and then by choice. Judging by the participation at the Forum, it is growing stronger every year. Over 200 participants from all levels of labor, industry and government attended. In the past decade, our Forum has grown from relative obscurity to the second largest safety forum in the industry and is internationally recognized for the contributions it makes to air safety.

The success of this year's program, "Safety Through Cooperation," has proven that all sections of the aviation industry want to build upon the progress that has been made, but that the work yet to be done can happen only if we can all cooperate with each other. The safest air transportation system in the world is facing pressures from such things as the steady growth of

air traffic, and the (lack of) modernization of the ATC system. Only through the cooperative efforts of labor, government, and industry can obstacles that will affect us well into the rest of our careers be overcome.

The concern for safety and the status of our Air Safety Forum yielded quality speakers, like ALPA President Duane Woerth, US Airways President and CEO Rakesh Gangwal, and NTSB Chairman Jim Hall, who gave the keynote address despite being in the middle of the EgyptAir 990 investigation.

The Air Safety Forum provided a wealth of information regarding existing or planned safety initiatives:

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NTSB Chairman Jim Hall

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- Data analysis

A Flight Operations Quality Assurance (FOQA) panel, moderated by Don McClure, our ALPA Air Safety Coordinator, included a presentation by pilots from British Airways, Continental Airlines, United Airlines, Alaska Airlines and US Airways. (US Airways was one of the first airlines to start using FOQA systems for the interpretation of flight data.) Each presenter showed how he or she used FOQA data to promote defensive flying, mark trends, compare event numbers, and identify problem airports. Panelists also showed how the data could be used in training feedback programs, visualizations, and videos.

- Accident elimination

Speakers talked of significantly reducing accidents through installation of enhanced GPWS systems, which include a terrain database and GPS update capability, the implementation of “Controlled Flight into Terrain (CFIT) Prevention” training programs, and mandating the use of stabilized approaches.

- Training

Every speaker addressed enhancing pilot knowledge, skills and abilities as a way to increase safety and decrease events and

accidents. As data analysis capabilities become more refined, it is easier to pinpoint areas that will improve pilot training. Proper training can help debunk theories like “automation simplifies a pilot’s job.”

- Industry growth

The figures here are astounding: there will be 50 percent more enplanements by 2010! This kind of growth, combined with the present ATC system, will be disastrous. The media has already started its own spin on this; how will the public perceive it?

- ATC modernization

I don’t need to tell you that we’re desperately in need of ATC renovation. John Cox’s Central Air Safety article in this issue of *US AIRWAVES*, “The Coming Gridlock of ATC,” talks about what is required to handle traffic growth.

For me, the highlight of the Safety Forum was the Dinner and Awards Presentation. Captain John Cox, Central Air Safety Chairman, presented the 1999 US Airways Aviation Safety award to Captains Bill Rule and Gerry McGuckin of Flight 2710 and Captain Dewey Daniel and First Officer Roger Pierce of Flight 2970. Flight 2710 experienced a rudder hard over at FL 330. Rule and McGuckin, using the new procedures put in place by our very own



(l-r) John Cox, Bill Rule, Gerry McGuckin, Dewey Daniels, Roger Pierce and George Snyder

Central Air Safety Committee, successfully recovered the aircraft and made an uneventful landing. Daniel and Pierce experienced construction vehicles crossing the landing runway while their aircraft was in the flare. They executed a successful go-around and landed uneventfully.

Captain Terry McVenes, Central Air Safety Vice Chairman, presented an award to the ALPA pilots and staff who gave up countless hours of their time to work on the investigation of Flight 427. Seeing these men and women receive the recognition they deserved from other members of the flight safety community was extremely emotional for all of us who were touched by USAir 427. Keep in mind that the final report issued by the NTSB not only absolved Captain Pete Germano and First Officer Charles Emmett of any negligence, it read like a script written by our own Central Air Safety Committee.

NTSB Chairman Jim Hall praised the cooperative party system to stretch the resources of accident investigations—we know this to be true, of course, from the investigation of 427. He noted that “ALPA has been an active, integral part” of the safety process and stated that he has a “special place in (his) heart for the people at US Airways and ALPA.” He also predicted that complex and contentious investigations are likely to be the norm in the future instead of the exception.

So, this concludes my report to you on my trip to the Forum. It is important to once again note the significance of this event. We all have become somewhat blasé regarding the influence and successes of our Central Air Safety Committee. We were first with an altitude awareness program that has become the industry norm, first with a Safety Partnership that allows us to address safety issues without fear of prosecution by the FAA, first with normal and abnormal operating procedures for the B-737 and its attendant rudder problems, and one of the first in the implementation of a FOQA program that allows for a feedback mechanism from the line to training. And just this year, we initiated “Safety From the Ground Up,” a program aimed at increasing safety awareness in the cockpit.

There is no other airline or pilot group in the world that is more “plugged in” to safety issues than ours and it goes without saying that we should be extremely proud of our accomplishments. But we should also continue to increase the emphasis we have consistently placed on safety, both as individual pilots and as a union of pilots. The individual pilot part is up to all of us on our own, and as for ALPA, I can assure you we will not be giving up our position of first place to anyone else, ever.

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Duane Woerth



Dr. John Lauber



John Cox