**I NEED SOME WINGMEN**

**By Capt. Jay Straub**

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***It grieves me to once again be in need of some Wingmen…***

On November 22, 1999, my wingman was Flight Engineer Ans Wising, who standing on the ramp as I went climbing back up the jet bridge staircase to bring one of the Flight Attendant’s bags down for her. Right about the time I picked up her bags, Ans heard a loud noise as the jet bridge stair snapped off. Just as he turned to see what was taking place, he saw my, 6’3” 250 lb. body, go 12 feet headfirst into the concrete. He said he immediately came running to me, and as he knelt down he witnessed the blood pouring out of my nose, mouth and ears. I very quickly went into convulsions, and Ans was afraid that I might drown on my own blood, being in the position I was in. He held me to prevent that until the ambulance arrived, to whisk me away, and he got in the ambulance and accompanied me to Parkland Hospital. The next leg of our trip was supposed to be to Nashville which is where he was living at the time. He was planning on having a day and night at home with his precious family, but found it more important to be my wingman.

When my ex wife, Glenda, learned that as soon as my sick leave ran out it was LTD - Long Term Disability and she was going to have to put our house up for sale etc…, she followed some friends advice and went to APA President, Captain Rich Lavoy, for some assistance. He washed his hands of me and basically told her he could be of no assistance. Fortunately, wingman number two came on the scene, Captain Larry Foster, my DFW Base Rep. He set up a meeting with V.P. of Flight, Captain Bob Kudwa, who also washed his hands of me. Then wingman number three, Retired V.P. of Flight, Captain Cecil Ewell, took American Airlines President, Bob Baker, up to Zale Lipshy Hospital to witness my trauma, six months into it, and see me laying in the bed with my feeding tube barely coherent. There were also a number of others in the background doing everything they could to be my wingman. Many thanks to those that did what they could do to get a little assistance from Mr. Baker.

Here we are almost 19 years later and having not received so much as a one cent increase in LTD pay since I have been on it, just before last Thanksgiving, I wrote, CEO Doug Parker, a very kind polite letter giving a very short synopsis of what happened to me in my service to this company and asked if he would please consider a pay increase for our pilots on LTD. I waited a month and having never received a reply, I resent it. To date, I have yet to receive a reply.

Several weeks later on January 11th, 2018, I emailed APA President, CA Dan Carey, asking if he could call me. Several days later he called and I shared my request with him. He basically told me that yes he wanted to get some improvement for our LTD benefits, and indicated that I could be of help in that cause. I told him I was ready to participate and was willing to get involved. He told me he would have someone contact me. I waited a month and had not heard anything, so I emailed him again telling him I was ready and asked who I needed to contact to get involved. As of this date, I have never heard back from him either.

A little over three weeks ago I just decided to give a friend a call that has been very supportive of me, and complained of the lack of company and union support for those of us on LTD. He gave me a name of another LTD pilot, whom I called and learned that the very next day, March 21st, that there was an LTD Forum in Arlington, Texas, being held by CA Markus Bras, on behalf of all LTD pilots at American. I attended and was absolutely STUNNED in learning that APA policy doesn’t allow me to attend union meetings or vote, that I only received about a fourth of what my non-LTD peers received in the equity distribution; and Worse yee that I was “administratively terminated’ and removed from the seniority list without any notice and in violation of the CBA. I was also informed that in accordance with the American’s with Disabilities Ac t(ADA), the Company should have offered me a reasonable accommodation. In fact, many medically disqualified pilots have been given non-flying “special Assignment” jobs in the pilot’s bargaining unit with fully pensionable pilot pay. Sadly, I have also learned that my very union to who I paid dues for my entire working career, the Allied Pilots Association have basically dumped me, and labeled me as an MDD pilot, all of whom the APA BOD had secretly declared to be non-member to revoke all MDD and LTD pilot’s access to C&R.

Sadly, aAll that I have just revealed to you should not have been unpleasant surprise to me, because this wasn’t the first time I was wronged in my career. In fact, before the known to be defective Jet bridge collapsed and ended my career, I had yet another bitter experience.

Back around 1991, I was awarded my first bid for Captain, but the company withheld me for three months and then set a class date. I lived in Pampa, Texas at the time and planned to fly from Amarillo, Texas to DFW the morning of my first day of training. I had my alarm set to get up and head to training, but unfortunately, I woke up about 2:00 a.m. with the most horrendous abdominal pain. It got so bad I decided I had to go to the hospital. Our daughter had a friend spending the night and Glenda didn’t want to wake them up and make them go to the hospital, so I drove myself and went in the emergency room begging for something for the pain. They couldn’t give me anything until blood tests were done and a doctor approved. If I remember right this was on Saturday and a number of tests could not be done until Monday.

To attempt to make a very long story short, it turned out I had a huge gall stone that was almost so large they couldn’t do the laparoscopic surgery and almost had to cut me wide open. They removed the gall bladder and it had gangrene in it. Praise our Lord that it hadn’t spread! Unfortunately, a cardiac doctor that got called in insisted that something in the blood tests indicated a potential clogging in the arteries, so I had to have the camera device inserted down by my groin to go up through the arteries and insure that there was no problem. I cleared and within just over a week from going to the hospital I went back and flew what would have been my next flight as FO on the 767 Intl., had I not been scheduled to go to training.

I called to see what date my training w rescheduled for. They said they would let me know. I waited a week and called back. They informed me that I “failed to qualify” and my Captains bid had gone bye-bye. After my next flight, I went into Chief Pilot’s Office and explained to him what happened. He basically told me that it bull and he would get it fixed. I waited another week, and next time I had to fly I went in to see him again. He told me his hands were tied, and he recommended I file a grievance. This was a my own Chief Pilot telling me this.

I filed the grievance and basically nothing happened over a year long period of time. I finally, after a year, had a hearing with Kilianski giving me his usual style of disrespect of the pilots, of which he was one, on the company side. At the end of that, the APA attorney basically gave me a very lukewarm evaluation of things. I couldn’t believe this.

I later learned that what had happened was, that during the three months I was being withheld was when the company all of a sudden decided they were going to start furloughing pilots and they didn’t really need me in that position I was awarded.  So, when I wound up in the hospital and missed training they were more than happy to try and search for a way to screw me out of my rightful bid award.

Well a short time later, after Captain Cecil Ewell was awarded the position of V.P. of Flight, and went around the system introducing himself and giving his vision. I attended one of those meetings and afterward went and introduced myself and told him what I was experiencing. He said he was going to be very busy in the new job, and if I had not heard anything in three months to call him. That’s what I did. He told me to let him do some investigation and he would hear from me by late afternoon. He called back as he said and informed me that a check for my one year-plus, in 727 Captain back pay, would be in the mail the next day. He also informed me that someone would call me from the flight academy to schedule my class date before the day ended. Captain Cecil Ewell, was yet another of my top notch wingmen.

During that year plus ordeal my Dad was in and out of the hospital. When I would commute home through Amarillo I would always head to the hospital where Dad was to see him. He grew up in the depression and every time I came in he would ask when he was going to get to see that fourth strip on my uniform jacket. He never got to see it. He passed away just a few months before it happened.

I’m sorry to bother you with all this, my point is anyone of you could end up like me in the course of just doing your job, and I don’t ever want to see anyone else experience what I have. It’s an absolute outrage that I’m where I’ve been left, despite all the dues extracted from my pay by the Allied Pilots Association, supposedly so that they would represent and protect my rights.

Therefore, I respectfully ask if you too will please be my wingman, and join me outside the APA Headquarters for the BOD meeting April 16th, to help promote awareness of our woefully inadequate LTD rights and benefits.

My wife and I will be there around 7:45 a.m, and will try to enter the BOD meeting at 9:00 a.m. if they let me in, but I am told that despite paying dues my entire working career, that due to my inactive LTD status I am no longer considered a member in good standing. Apparently APA policy doesn’t allow such pilots to actually attend BOD meetings, yet another slap in the face.

Blessings,

Captain Jay Straub