



e-Torque



Welcome to the July issue of *e-Torque* – the ALAEA's monthly newsletter bulletin for ALAEA members across the nation.

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Lead Story - LAMEs Read Future

We said in last month's *e-Torque* it was an ill-conceived idea to take LAMEs off the headsets during push-backs at JetStar – and it only took three weeks for us to be proven right. On 21 June a JetStar Boeing 717 was damaged at the Sydney terminal while being pushed back with the cabin door open and the passenger

boarding aerobridge still in place. (It is believed pax were still boarding.) Express Ground Handling - a contractor engaged to displace the Engineers on pushback at JetStar - were using the remote-controlled 'Power Push' machine, which hooks on to the main-gear underneath the wing.

The company is currently running a smokescreen that because an aircraft was also being boarded in the adjacent bay, two remote units were present – and the operator simply picked up the wrong unit. If this were the case why were the brakes off on the damaged plane? Wouldn't the other plane have been damaged anyway as it was loading at the time?

Federal Secretary David Kemp says the incident appeared to have been caused by the errors of poorly trained workers doing jobs that should be carried out by LAMEs. "The message we are getting from Engineers on the ground is that JetStar is providing just two hours training for workers to handle highly complex tasks," David commented. "This is just another example of how cost-cutting can compromise the safety of the public."

David says it is also vindication of the JetSafe campaign, which is continuing to generate national media interest and significant traffic to the campaign website.

For more on the JetSafe campaign go to <http://www.jetsafe.com.au>

Secretary's Report - New Technology, Same Old Story!

When is new technology not new technology? When an 'all singing, all dancing' computer-based maintenance system software package called Jetsmart is described as a 'minor system upgrade'. That happens when the employer doesn't want to acknowledge that our members deserve a pay-rise for implementing new technology that will eventually save the employer well over \$20m annually.

Doesn't it seem ironic the aircraft manufacturers and airlines want to portray themselves to their customers as global leaders in the use of the latest technology and the newest and safest equipment, but put an airline manager in front of the Industrial Relations Commission and ask him whether he agrees that his employees are due a pay-rise for implementing and training on this new

technology he will suddenly describe the leading edge aircraft as merely the equivalent of a venerable DC3. And he will also describe the new cutting-edge computer-based totally integrated maintenance/parts tracking/accounting systems as a minor upgrade and go on to tell the AIRC that it can be compared to the skill required to install Windows 98 over Windows 95.

This scenario faced the ALAEA recently after advising members employed at Qantas to maintain the status quo with regard to their normal duties and not assist with the implementation of the new computer-based system called Jetsmart, until the value of the claim had been determined. The ALAEA had previously advised Qantas that this was a new claim and therefore outside the terms of the current EBA. Qantas countered by seeking s127 Orders alleging the ALAEA had in place bans and limitations.

Aviation is in constant technological evolution with new equipment being developed and new skills always being gained. For a major employer to deny our members fair recompense for a major upgrade of their skills is just plain lousy. The ALAEA has not conceded on Jetsmart and we will regroup with our members to ensure they get fair recognition for their contribution to the success of the system.

Until next month -

**David Kemp
Federal Secretary**

Making News :-

Sickness Spreads

Serving and former RAAF members who worked on Hercules and Orion fuel tanks are reporting similar ailments to those suffered by F-111 ground crew. The Department of Defence and Newcastle University have launched an investigation into health complaints by F-111 maintenance workers who performed de-sealing and resealing tasks on aircraft fuel tanks. Amongst other chemicals, they were exposed to solvent agent SR51, used to remove seals.

Affected staff have suffered a range of ailments including cancers, memory loss, mood swings and skin conditions. Any member who worked in Hercules and/or Orion fuel tanks or knows of any other persons who performed de-sealing and resealing tasks on Hercules or Orion aircraft is asked to contact the ALAEA office on rc@alaea.asn.au [please put 'deseal//reseal' in the subject field]. For more information go to www.gooptroop.com

Getting It Right on JetStar

Our campaign against the reduced presence of LAMEs at JetStar is certainly gaining high levels of public exposure, but it has also caused some unintended angst amongst some of our members at JetStar. One JetStar employee has written to us raising concerns that we are belittling the hard-working LAMEs in the new airline. Nothing could be further from the truth. For the facts behind the campaign members should read the 'Letter of the month' and the Editor's response in the March *e-Torque*. Go to 'Newsletters' at <http://www.alaea.asn.au>

Virgin Techie Speaks

e-Torque received another interesting letter this month on the subject of one of our April scuttlebutt pieces. That piece pointed out the hypocrisy of Virgin's claim to superior customer focus through newspaper ads depicting three engineers inspecting an aircraft - given the airline's hit-and-miss inspection/certification policy. In fact Virgin Blue is in contravention of an MOU with the ALAEA on this issue! None of the persons depicted were LAMEs, but there was an AME, who, we noted in the article, was a vocal and militant activist with the AWU, in a previous life with Ansett.

That AME wrote to us claiming Virgin did not inspect aircraft irregularly and that no such MOU existed with Virgin Blue. The AME also stated he was proud of his "militant" and "active" union past, and the company he now works for. *e-Torque* is thrilled that Virgin Tech has such a committed union activist in its ranks; he may be needed soon with the anti-union tack Virgin Tech is on. But does he wonder whether such militancy might clash with his new role as pin-up boy for Virgin Airlines?

Industry Feature - Mick O's 'Rants'

Federal President Mick O'Rance filed the following report from the ITF One World Coalition Meeting held recently in New York.

The American Transport Workers Union hosted this meeting which was chaired by Jim Little, Vice President and Director of the Air Transport Division. The meeting was well attended by the coalition, the UK, Spain, US, Argentina, and, of course, Australia.

The message from the conference is that similar problems are being encountered around the world - drug and alcohol testing, attacks on sick and accident pay, regulatory issues, and the use of low cost carriers - and their dominance - in certain countries. In Europe, for example, there are 58 low cost carriers (LCCs) in operation.

I gave the meeting a run-down on our battles with the LCCs in Australia on safety issues such as the pre-flight safety inspection and certification and also briefed them on our media campaign. The Americans were very impressed with the www.jetsafe.com.au website and said they would be looking to adopt a similar approach in relation to upcoming problems they are having with overnight checks.

American Airlines talked about their restructure in the face of Chapter 11 bankruptcy. After 9/11 and the crash of AA501 (A310-600 tail separation) the feeling in aviation circles was "that you could stick a fork in us" - which means we're "done". The feeling within the AA officials group was that union leadership through hard times is not easy - unlike easy times where it's like riding the crest of a wave. British Airways had similar problems with "restructuring" after 9/11, with 13,000 jobs lost.

I will report on the FAA/EASA/JAA Safety Conference in next month's *e-Torque*.

Member Profile – Vale Brian Chatfield

Sadly, we advise members that Brian Chatfield, a well-known character of the Association, has recently passed away. Brian

Chatfield was a LAME when baby-boomers were just apprentices and he will be remembered by all those who knew him as a careful and giving teacher.

Brian used to service the 'milk-runs' which would head off out to Wagga Wagga and the back of South Australia flying to small communities which relied on the air service – in an era when people were still very apprehensive about flying.

Once Qantas rushed him up country to fix a crook starter motor after the plane had been grounded for a week. He was sitting out the back of the aircraft completing the tech log paperwork when a little old lady boarded with a young girl. The girl asked, "Is it safe to fly now, Grandma?" She replied, pointing to Brian: "You see that man there? If he says it's alright to fly, it's alright." Chatfield always used to tell the story to illustrate how people viewed LAMEs out in the bush.

He used to contrast the anecdote with stories about how airlines would treat him as a flying spanner. They'd just bump him off a flight as soon as he'd rescued the aircraft – just to fit an extra passenger on board. He found the only way to ensure he got home was to wait until his seat was allocated before finalising the paperwork. Having to face down the crew was common.

In his working life – and life in general – Brian Chatfield always enjoyed the journey. If they have them 'up there' Brian will be inspecting and certifying before take-off 'for the safety of all who fly'. Brian is survived by his wife and adult family.

Scuttlebutt:-

What is this "Scuttlebutt". We've unearthed some definitions:

1. Nautical - A cask on a ship used to hold the day's supply of drinking water
2. Colloquial - rumour, gossip, back-fence talk, scandal
3. Combined - ALAEA Federal President runs into the chief of CASA licensing/regulatory section in the torpedo room of a US navy submarine on public display in Philadelphia.

State Against State

Which airline has done a deal with the Queensland Government to build a Heavy Maintenance hangar in Brisbane to locate the majority of their maintenance there? Apparently, hefty incentives have been offered on the condition that the airline's heavy maintenance is shunted out of Victoria and into the Sunshine state by the end of the year. This raises a number of questions. Will the current Virgin Techies at Tullamarine have to relocate to Brisbane to keep a job? Will the southern maintenance company take over the northern? What does this indicate about the state of play in the very public power tussle between the co-owners of the operation?

If all this is unclear, be sure of one thing. The ALAEA will keep asking the hard questions to ensure our members' jobs are protected, and, if they have to transfer, that all relocation costs are paid for by the company.

Juices Flowing

Members of the travelling public at Alice Springs must have been amazed recently to see a B737NG aircraft taking off trailing a stream of hydraulic fluid. The aircraft had flown into the Alice with the leak some hours before. While the aircraft was observed to have an inspection by persons unknown the leak wasn't rectified because that particular operator does not have engineers licensed on the aircraft based at the central Australian port. Engineers employed there by the other operator did not inspect the aircraft. Apparently this was the second such occurrence for this carrier in two days . . .

General News :-

Taking The P....

Being bailed up at work and being asked to blow into a bag, pee into a bottle or hand over a few hairs may be coming soon after a review into drug and alcohol testing in the aviation industry was launched recently. The Department of Transport and Regional Services and CASA are conducting the investigation. Under one

possible scenario, safety-sensitive personnel would be identified, programs of monitoring and education would be examined and random and regular testing regimes would be compared. A formal submission by the ALAEA is being prepared – to contribute your ideas email fedsec@alaea.asn.au [please put 'A&OD submission' in the subject field].

Jet Care Blue

The ALAEA has been attempting to negotiate a replacement EBA at Jet Care, with the main jostling being over claims by the company that the result of their tender to service for Virgin Blue should be taken into account during the negotiations. While Jet Care is asking for us to be sensitive as they attempt to lock in the work against two other competitors, they are testing our patience by (a) refusing to table the tender documents and (b) attempting to sign our members on to inferior AWAs. The suspicion is that part of the tendering argy-bargy could be pressure from Virgin Blue to lock the ALAEA out of their operations. It couldn't be that they're concerned the ALAEA will achieve better outcomes for members than the company is prepared to offer under non-union agreements? Could it?

Kiwis Not Flightless For Long

A Senate Committee has admitted New Zealand safety, maintenance and licensing standards in aviation are not as high as Australia's by moving to delete part of a bill to go before parliament. Even so the committee will rubber-stamp changes to air safety certification that would allow planes registered in New Zealand to be recognised by CASA. This 'backdoor' has been used by Virgin Blue to 'meet' safety standards, although the ALAEA, along with the Opposition and Democrats, is concerned that this is the harbinger of a single aviation market between the two countries. The committee is moving to make 'mutual recognition' of licences, approvals, registration, etc, contingent on a CASA investigation 12 months after the bill is passed to ensure there has been no degradation of safety in Australian skies. The ALAEA, the ALP, and the Democrats believe that, in the interests of safety, this investigation should be done before the agreement is made law. To view the ALAEA submission to the Senate

Committee go to www.alaea.asn.au and click on Senate Submission ANZA1 in the 'Newsletter' section. Further information, including Hansard, can be found at www.aph.go.au/senate rrat

Airliner Crew Interrogated

Passengers on board a US domestic flight got a shock recently when their crew were removed and interrogated after landing at the Ellsworth Air Force Base by mistake. The Northwest Aircraft, an Airbus A-319, was supposed to land at Rapid City, South Dakota, but instead touched down some distance off course. While the crew were being grilled passengers were sternly instructed to close their window shades and not look out. After three hours the captain and first officer were replaced by a different Northwest crew for the short hop to the right airport.

Info for Members :-

Alliance Airlines & ALAEA Agreement

Alliance Airlines has recognised the value of its LAMEs, awarding them a 12 per cent pay rise over 3 years. The agreement between the ALAEA and Alliance creates a stable industrial relations platform – allowing Alliance to retain its core maintenance expertise while continuing its growth.

Sprinting Spanners

How often do you ask yourself? “Is it possible to bond with family and friends, get fit, pick up a free t-shirt, have a great day out in the sunshine and promote safety in our skies – all at the same time?” Probably never, you might say. But there is a way to achieve all this! – Join a LAME walking or running team in the Sutherland to Surf, or the City to Surf! The 11km Sutherland to Surf is on 25 July and the 15km City to Surf is on two weeks later on 8 August. Bring the kids and join other ‘sprinting spanners’ for a jog or leisurely Sunday stroll in the sunshine. Afterwards you

can reward yourself with lunch on the beach! AND YOU EVEN GET A FREE 'JetSafe' T-SHIRT! Contact Rachel Merrison at rachelm@alaea.asn.au or 02 9554 9399.

Sites of Interest

A true asexual will sit on this website until the wee hours. It's a great example of a practical, well laid out site:

<http://www.luchtzak.be/article4685.html>

Find out about the great services available to union members from low-fee banking to competitive deals on computers at:

http://www.actu.asn.au/memberservices/news/1087967231_30562.html

To read a full report on the JetStar incident at Sydney Airport go to:

http://workers.labor.net.au/226/news9_jetstar.html