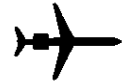


# All the Peanuts You Can Eat (and Other Pilot Perks)

by Jerry E. Tobias



The incredible events of the past few years have redefined our industry and made our role as pilots much more difficult. Rather than discussing the negative side, though, I'd like to provide a bit of balance by reminding you of some of the *positive* things that accompany this job of moving people from one airport to another.

There are, of course, the usual perks: protective duty time limitations, schedules that are usually known a month ahead, medical and retirement plans, and - oh, yes - the money (maybe, eventually). However, there are also other important benefits that are frequently overlooked. Let me mention just a few of them.

## • Supplies

Unless you spend your whole career flying one-day turns, you will be able to eventually accumulate vast quantities of personal supplies (aka "hotel booty"). I'm specifically talking about the famed "Four S's" of overnights: soap, shampoo, sewing kits and shower caps. Besides being able to solely outfit most of the world's armies with needle and thread, just think of all the money you will save over time (my family hasn't had to buy any of those products for the last thirty years). And matches. Don't forget about matches. Based on the present rate that my wife and I use them (probably 3 or 4 per month, 6 if she cooks a candlelight dinner), we have now collected enough book matches to last us through the twenty-fourth century.

These supplies are a really great benefit. Be aware, though, that your children may grow up with distorted concepts of a few things because of it. Don't be surprised, for example, when - after her first week of college - your daughter calls you and says, "Dad, this place is amazing! You wouldn't believe how big the bars of soap are around here!"

## • Uniforms

Like all pilots, you look great in your uniform. And, while you may have to worry about the weather or making your block time, isn't it nice that you never have to be concerned about fashion in the cockpit (although I used to fly with a Captain who finished every pre-takeoff briefing with "...and do I look OK?").

Consider, also, how much time and stress you save each day by not having to decide whether to wear the red tie, the burgundy tie, or the yellow tie. Having a job where the only real fashion decision is long-sleeved shirt or short-sleeved shirt gives you a significant advantage over most of corporate America.

## • Relationships

Another privilege that pilots enjoy is the opportunity to develop long-lasting friendships with some really great people. There is an instant professional connection that occurs when you meet other aviators anywhere in the world. While that may not be unique to aviation, it is a very special part of the job.

"I'm way too busy to develop close friendships," you say? No problem. Since you and your fellow pilots spend more time watching The Weather Channel than all other people groups combined, you can take advantage of the fact that the meteorologists there (Heather, Nick, Jeff, Vivian, Warren, Kelly, Jennifer, Paul, Jim and all the others) make really good friends. Why? Well, you already know them on a first name basis, plus they are great listeners. Really. All you have to do is mute the TV and pour your heart out. Then, when you turn the volume back up, one of them will look you in the eye and say something like: "In spite of all of that, the weather looks really great across the Upper Midwest for the next couple of days." They are such encouragers!

- **Status**

Pilots are esteemed highly by the general public, in part because of their assumed knowledge of many subjects. One such subject, of course, is the weather. Many people believe that pilots know a lot about the weather simply because they spend so much time in the air (the public is not aware of The Weather Channel addiction thing). Therefore, once the word gets out that you are a pilot, everyone from family and neighbors to complete strangers will try to take advantage of your exceptional forecasting expertise.

How do you know when you've achieved this "expert" status? Well, you'll know for certain when you're stopped at a stop light and the guy in the next lane rolls down his window and yells, "HOW MUCH RAIN IS DÜSSELDORF SUPPOSED TO GET NEXT TUESDAY?" Or when your brother-in-law's sister calls you from three states away and says, "I have to drive from Phoenix to Marshalltown, Iowa five weeks from today. How does it look?" How do you answer that? Just use the response that I use: "It looks pretty good right now, but you might want to throw in some sun screen, an umbrella, and your overcoat." I haven't been wrong yet.

- **Shopping**

As a pilot, you are automatically considered to be one of the world's best gift givers. This is not because of how much money you spend (probably an understatement), but because you brought back something from Beijing, London, San Diego, or even Chattanooga. This, of course, makes shopping both easy and economical. No matter what you purchased or how little you paid for it, if you brought it home from out of town, it's terrific! And always bring back two of everything. That way, you'll have plenty of great stuff for garage sales after you retire.

- **Books**

It's easy to build an impressive library when you're a pilot...just don't throw anything away. I probably have the equivalent of three libraries full of old instruction books, flight manuals and aviation periodicals stored in various places around the house ("Honey, can't you keep your old 747 books somewhere besides the pantry?").

If you haven't noticed, there is also a glut of new aviation books on the market these days. Some are very useful; many are absolutely not! One that fits that latter category is the book I ordered about the pilot's mind and normal mental processes. It had to have been the first rough draft of a book written by a dozen preschoolers somewhere. I'm still waiting, though, for my copy of "*A Pilot's Guide to Cockpit-Related Stress and Other Aviation Symbolism Found in Soap Operas Aired Between 1970 and 1975.*" If it hasn't been written yet, I'm sure that some non-flying college professor will produce it soon.

- **Satisfaction**

On a more serious note, two of the greatest things about being a pilot are simply the opportunity to continually experience the joy of flying and the satisfaction of a job well done - all while seated in an incredibly panoramic, high-tech office that you get to share with other very professional and like-minded individuals. No other job or virtual experience will ever match that!

- **Sustenance**

Oh, and don't forget the free food. You get all the peanuts you can eat.

So, yes, there are hard parts to this job, but the positives still far outweigh the negatives. I wouldn't trade it for four walls or a cubicle anywhere in the world, and neither - I suspect - would you. ■

Copyright © 2011, Jerry E. Tobias