

PAN AMUSINGS

There were two types of flight engineers at Pan Am. The original engineer was called a professional flight engineer (FEO) and actually was represented by a separate union called the Flight Engineer International Association (FEIA). This union struggled for years to protect its territory from the great Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), but had been steadily losing ground and members as airlines hired Pilot/Flight Engineers (PFE) and the two crew member cockpit became more common.

The difference between the two categories of engineers was that a PFE could and did eventually move up to first officer and then captain, a professional engineer had no pilot bid rights. This was true even though the ALPA had forced Pan Am to train all professional flight engineers to the level of a commercial instrument rating.

A professional flight engineer would fly in that position until he or she retired. The one advantage was that an engineer had no mandatory retirement age, but a pilot was required by federal law to retire at age 60. Many pilots "down bid" to engineer at the end of their careers to continue flying for their airline. The number of professional engineers increased somewhat when National Airlines was acquired by Pan Am in the late 70's, as National only had professional engineers.

Fred Minkle was a professional flight engineer. A former navy plane captain, and one of the best engineers at Pan Am. Fred had a great sense of humor and loved to tilt with windmills as well as challenge those who would attach too much importance to their positions.

Fred lived on Long Island, within a short drive of Kennedy Airport. This made for easy commuting but also made him high on the scheduling list when a scheduler need an engineer fast. The need could arise for a number of reasons but was usually caused by a long delay that left the schedulers looking for a replacement crew late at night or in the early AM, and the scheduler had run out of reserves.

Fred and his wife had gone to bed one evening, and about 0100 hours the telephone rang. Fred picked up the telephone and heard the familiar "This is Pan American crew scheduling calling for Fred Minkle". Without any hesitation Fred said rather loudly, "**Honey, someone wants to talk to your husband**". Fred did not go on that flight.

Ed Spellacy