

Captain Upgrade

Becoming the commander

Upgrading to the captain seat of an airliner has to start with a series of decisions. Somewhere along the line, the phone rings, with chief pilot calling. Whatever could he be calling me for? The question is straightforward: "Walter, do you want to fly the -500?" Well, the "-500" meant the new airliner that our airline was replacing the 737-200 series with. The "-500" has a glass cockpit, computers, and quieter, more powerful and fuel efficient engines. Yes, of course, I would love to fly the 737-500. Who would not want another type rating on their license, on a more modern, marketable kind of aircraft? Another type rating is like a meal ticket against the day when your airline is sold, or starts downsizing. However, there was a second part to the question: "...OR do you want to be on the captain upgrade list, staying on the 737-200? We need to know for planning courses and simulator times."

So, that was the choice: the new airplane and probably another year to become a captain, or the old plane and probably a faster time to become a captain. But who knew which would really come first? The airline was planning on replacing all the old planes with new ones. Maybe the growth on the new aircraft would mean a faster left seat after going on the new plane—or maybe the whole expansion would be stalled and I would be on the street beside my friends, with the only difference between us being the new type rating they had in their pockets. The choice was not obvious if one believed the company press releases about all the old -200s being replaced the -500s "by the summer." If we were getting rid of the old fuel guzzling planes as fast as possible, then there would be no need for captains on them either, would there?

In a rare moment of epiphany, though, the choice became crystal clear to me: since when can you believe press releases? Since when has any "new to us" airplane been delivered on schedule to a small airline? Never! Not with government involved, even if the money is straightened out. Sure, the new planes will come, but they will come a lot later than everyone hopes. All kinds of government agencies want huge amounts of money, convoluted paperwork and ego strokes. There will always be some discussion about who pays for what on the transfer of the aircraft from the leasing company to the airline, even if the price is agreed on. There is always some detail to be argued over, such as who pays for the airworthiness directive that was not done? It is not required in the USA, but in Canada, the regulator wants it done. How about the scratch that the leasing company swears was not there before the plane went into the "C check" shop? How about the little light that Transport Canada wants in the cockpit to show if the speed brake is up? It was not a standard item on the rest of the fleet. It took months to get permission to fly our first Boeing 737-500. This is what happens with the most common jet airliner in the world, flying at a squeaky-clean airline that has years of operating experience. With the burden of our government bureaucracy squashing any efficiency, my choice was clear: go captain on the old plane; since the old planes will be around for quite a while. The chief pilot was saying "...think about it for a while, call me back...", but once I knew that the captain upgrade training was happening at my next simulator session, no time to think about it was necessary. Sign me up for captain training! Who knows when the opportunity will come again?

Captain upgrade training is a multi-step process. First, you get a line check to see if it is even worth sending you to simulator. With a satisfactory line check, off you go to simulator, in the left seat. With a satisfactory simulator training session and flight test, there is about a month of line indoctrination, followed by your glorious “release” to fly the line with actual co-pilots instead of check pilots. The failure rate is fairly high, and one failure means waiting for another year in the penalty box. Two failures meant “rotting in the right” seat as a first officer for a couple of years, all at the discretion of the examiner and chief pilot. By the time one or two failures had passed, the co-pilots who chose to go on the new plane would have long since had their chances to upgrade to captain. Not everyone should try to be a captain right away, especially if confidence is an issue, combined with very little jet experience. Failing means a long wait, not to mention damaging the fragile ego and self image that big, macho jet pilots usually conceal behind their mirrored sunglasses.

I was lucky to be paired up with a solid simulator partner. He was a dedicated family man, one of the most mature and responsible of the little group that went through our initial new hire ground school together a couple of years before. This was important to me, since a man who takes his responsibilities seriously has motivation to study and prepare, which would help me out in the simulator. We decided that the \$20, 000 per year raise was worth a bit of work beforehand, so before going to simulator together, we met and quizzed each other on limitations and emergencies for the Boeing 737-200. On three separate occasions, we met at the hangar, obtained an aircraft that was on the ground, and sat in the cockpit together to run through checklists and emergency scenarios. My thinking was that getting the checklists and flows down before the simulator would save at least one session of stun value for the new responses and calls from the left seat. I also obtained a 19-inch computer monitor and a copy of flight simulator 2002, which I then proceeded to use to go over every single approach at the airports that are used for simulator training. For us, these airports are only New York and Miami, but there are enough approaches at each of these places to fill in hours more of simulator time. For such a small cost, flying a home computer could save messing up one missed approach procedure down in the actual simulator. After being home simulated, quizzed and cockpit-procedures practiced into oblivion, I felt much more confident about the simulator test coming up, which in itself would have been a worthy by product of the preparation. Who knows what good it all did, but we passed, while some who went to simulator failed the upgrade. Maybe those 9 hours of sitting in the left seat of the cockpit at the hangar did some good after all.

A few days after talking to the chief pilot, I showed up for a regular flight at work, and there was a check pilot in place of my scheduled captain. It was my pre-captain training line check! Lucky I shone my shoes and pressed my pants instead of dressing like the slob I normally do. (Just kidding) I made a habit of studying standard operating procedures and operations manuals on longer flight legs, so I was ready for technical questions. After all, what else is there to read in the cockpit? “Non-related” materials like newspapers are forbidden. The line check was a normal series of flights that make up a crew pairing, with some questions thrown in with observations of my flying performance. It is just a check to make sure the captain training program would not be an embarrassment to all involved. Nothing untoward happened and this check was in my familiar, right hand first officer’s seat. Then the next month’s schedule had simulator training blocked in, with a travel itinerary to Miami.

The simulator training starts out with a simple left-seat familiarization. The first day is chewed up doing the correct responses for checklists from the left seat. Even though one has been going through the checklists for the last couple of years, it is surprising how a first officer is conditioned only to the responses necessary on the right side of the cockpit. It takes some mental effort to remember what the captain response is for the originating, receiving, through or before start checklists are. 30 seconds of taxi practice using the tiller is provided, with the next try being with 120 passengers on board on an ice-encrusted ramp. But how hard could taxing the airplane actually be? Not hard at all, I would wager, on a clear day. On a ramp of glare ice in 40 knots, as happens in St. John's, Newfoundland, the challenge is quite different. A couple of routine approaches, two engines, then an engine failure at altitude and a straightforward single engine approach round out the first day.

The second day of training is much more exciting. It starts off with an Easter Egg Hunt, which is to say, a search for all kinds of snags in the cockpit. Circuit breakers will be popped, valves will not test and meters will be wrong. It is your job as a captain to check all of these things before departure time is upon you and you discover, to your chagrin and embarrassment, that the hydraulic fluid is low, or that you really do need a couple more quarts of oil in the #2 engine. Maintenance can fix all of these things easily as the passengers are boarding, without incurring delays, so long as you find them promptly. After the snags are sorted out, the simulator session starts with some start faults. As you start the engines, you can expect a hot start (high Exhaust Gas Temperature), a hung start (no acceleration of the engine), no starter cut out (starter could over speed and explode), a wet start (no ignition) or any of the other things that can go wrong on a start, such as oil pressure, no rotation of low pressure compressor or high fuel flow. After start, again, one must think to ask for the tow bar disconnect, the after start checklist, then the taxi, at the appropriate times, which is all familiar, but only as an observer from the right seat, not the conductor from the left.

The stress testing part of the training is to give multiple emergencies all at once. On a flight test, there is a prohibition against multiple unrelated emergencies. However, there can always be some relation made between emergencies. For example, in my session, we started off sedately with a few after-takeoff faults, such as the landing gear failing to rise, and the flap leading edge in transit light staying on, then a bomb threat. We had just finished clearing the earlier problems and were at altitude, so the first thing to do was depressurize and descend to 10 000 feet for maximum structural strength, while informing the flight attendants of our actions. Naturally, on the way down, the flight attendants, or rather the simulator instructor in a squeaky voice, says that there is a man of Middle Eastern origin, shouting verses from the Koran in the back. (it is really too bad a few fanatics tarnish the image of an entire group) The bomb goes off, causing a rapid depressurization, leading to an emergency descent, which should be done at low speed due to structural failure. Once down at 10, 000 feet, the hydraulics failed as a consequence of the gaping hole the bomb put in the aircraft fuselage. First the "B" system depleted, which causes the "A" system to go to 1.8 gallons. As we are working through the rapid depressurization and emergency descent checklists, we must interrupt ourselves to deal with the loss of B system checklist. Of course, before completing the loss of "B" system checklist, "A" system also springs a leak and we are left only with manual reversion for ailerons and elevator. The manual reversion checklist starts the standby pump for the standby rudder. Of course, the weather at destination is at minimums, so one requests a better field for weather. This is denied on the grounds that the terrorists on board who blew the bomb still pose a threat, so we are ordered to land

at the place with the low weather, while on manual reversion. Of course, fighter aircraft are now on the wingtips, ready to shoot if one strays towards a major population center or national landmark in the USA. There is really no time stress on this exercise, since the aircraft has plenty of fuel, just marginal control. One needs time to configure flaps by the backup electrical system and extend landing manually outside the approach. Of course, the instructors try to rush you into taking an approach right away, to see if you are able to be pushed around as a captain. They also try giving you a hold far out away from the airport, over the water at low altitude-obviously that does not work for control problems such as manual reversion, especially after the leading edge devices, with all their drag, are deployed. Once all the gear and lift devices come down, they can not be retracted, so the fuel consumption skyrockets, severely limiting the range of the aircraft. One has to have a concrete plan to land before throwing out all the drag devices. In fact, taking your time about it, the approach is not so bad to do manually; it just takes a lot of muscle without hydraulics. My ILS approach on manual reversion turned out fine, which was a good thing, since the instructors may choose to liven things up with an engine fire or failure thrown in on short final. Of course, the correct thing to do on short final with an engine fire on manual reversion is...nothing! Land, then put it out. Once the fire does not go out, it is evacuation time, which completes the exercise. The remainder of the training time is spent of routine engine fires, seizers, electrical failures and flap problems-all the routine problems that simply require following standard operating procedure, rather than prioritizing and practicing triage as one does with multiple emergencies.

Another variation on multiple emergencies, provided for my simulator partner, is the complete electrical system failure, at night, in hard instrument conditions. After takeoff, there are the routine warning lights and small problems solved by quick reference handbook checklists. One of these is the Constant Speed Drive (CSD) overheating, which means that the generator must be disconnected. Then, to assure a secondary source of electrical power for the now-dead electrical bus, the Auxiliary Power Unit (APU) is started. Except, of course, that it does not start. While this checklist is being run, a cabin fire starts, which could be related to the electrical problems. To stop from choking to death, the cabin smoke evacuation memory actions and checklist must be done before completing the checklist to restore electrical power. While in the mist of the procedures to get rid of the cabin smoke, the other generator fails, leaving only the battery to power the standby instruments. This is a time stressed exercise, since the battery only provides 30 minutes of power on a good day. Some checklists may have to be truncated, and Air Traffic Control (ATC), in the voice of the simulator instructor, will try to have you accept a hold clearance far away from the airport, or be delayed in some other way. For example, flight attendant who demands more and more detail may keep you in the air long enough to run out of battery power. Just say "standby!" Focus on the checklists and everything can be done and the aircraft put on the ground in only 15 of the 30 minutes available. It worked for us, so it can for you as well.

At the end of the simulator session, as the sweaty candidates make their way out of the simulator, the senior instructor will generally say something to the effect of "wait a bit while I go and print the tapes." Back in the briefing room, the instructor spread out a computer printout of the ILS in plan and profile views, along with squiggly black line that tracked the airplanes progress across the imaginary sky. The instructor, after talking for a short spell of various minor errors pilots generally make when flying manual reversion, suddenly said, "well, just look a this!" I looked. The printout had "Walter- manual reversion" scribbled across the top. That meant I did the approach with no hydraulic

power to the ailerons and elevator controls, just cables connected to the balance tabs. The planes control is very slow and ponderous under these conditions, so some overcontrolling is expected, but I seemed to remember doing an accurate approach. To me, it had all seemed to come together, and the squiggly line on the plot of the approach, to me, looked like it was nearly right on centerline the whole time, and right on the glide slope nearly the whole way down. Yet, the instructor seemed to want me to find some fault. Could he care about going 20 feet high on the glide slope while in the landing flare? What I was missing, I did not know, so I remained silent and nodded with a pensive expression on my face. Apparently satisfied with this non-response, the instructor continued by saying "I have seen way worse than this with EVERYTHING operating!" Oh. So it was an example of something good. Marvelous.

Debrief from the training sessions was informative. All these bits of trivia seem so mundane after the event, but they are the difference between a passable session and a graceful simulator ride. For example, after an engine failure, the fuel must be balanced, since one engine is no longer using any fuel from the tank on one side. Balance it a bit more than just equal when you open the cross feed. That way, as the good engine uses fuel, there is more time to do other things before the fuel gets out of balance again. On the cockpit pre-flight checks, you should finish one thing before doing the next, such as finishing the wing anti ice test before rushing off to test the engine anti ice. Want to start up the APU? The left hand forward pump is the most beneficial to have on for running the auxiliary power unit on the ground, not some other pump that is plumbed to the right hand side of the aircraft fuel system. If you get a bomb threat, the procedure is to depressurize, then go to 10,000 feet, not the other way around. The call at 14,000 feet after a rapid depressurization and emergency descent is "flight attendants resume duties", not "in charge to interphone", as I said. If you hear some funny thumping noises, they may be compressor stalls—check the engine instruments. If you have had a bomb on board, once on the ground, evacuate: there may be more than one bomb. You do not need a brace call for an emergency like a simple engine failure. Try putting in 1.6 Engine Pressure Ratio when flying around single engine instead of chasing the airspeed around to stay around minimum maneuvering speed. Read and do the after take off checklist for a bleeds off take off – do not just perform the actions from memory. Got a hold clearance? Make sure you get an "expect further clearance" time that checks with your fuel remaining. Did you exceed the red radial for exhaust gas temperature on takeoff? You may as well return for landing, even if the temperature is fine now. This trivia will help you pass your simulator ride. Hopefully the day will never arrive that the trivia will be needed to solve a real emergency.

My day for a real emergency did arrive. A week before simulator training, on takeoff from Toronto, at about 500 feet, the right engine suddenly failed. It just shut down like the start lever had been placed in cut off. I said "Huh! Engine failure!"...not exactly a standard call to start out with. Then we simply followed the standard operating procedures, with standard calls and standard replies, just like down at the simulator. In fact, real life was easier than the simulator because the weather was visual and the controllers were helpful. In a way, real life emergencies should be easier.

After passing the simulator captain upgrade training, one does not just start flying with regular first officers. Instead, one flies with a check captain for a month or so of "Line Indoctrination". Actually, in my case, I just went back to flying as a first officer until a check captain was available to fly with me. My first day of line indoctrination was a non-

event. I showed up for a regular flight as a first officer, but the captain happened to be a check pilot. I asked which seat I was sitting in this day, and he said, "You passed your ride? Then I guess it will be the left seat." I chatted with the flight attendants about the weather, flight times, turbulence and the lack of anything special or wrong with the aircraft, or indeed the lack of anything really special about the day in general, save for Air Force One closing off the airspace at the places we wished to fly to. All that meant was that a bunch of government men were driving around the airport looking for terrorists, while "Marine One", the presidential helicopter, hovered around. Incidentally, the president takes his Boeing 747 plus a Boeing 757 for the press team on his jaunts to Canada. Add that to the couple of C17's stuffed with spooks to crawl around the bushes by the approach end of the airport, and you have yourself the makings of an expensive trip to see your neighbor. Oh, well, the president gave me something interesting to talk about in my pre flight briefing.

The left seat felt a little awkward in the first few minutes. I kept on reaching left for the approach plates instead of right, and trying to transmit with my right hand instead of my left. However, the receiving cockpit flows, pre start, pushback after start and pre takeoff checks all seemed very familiar. I was just calling for them instead of doing them now. Taxiing was something new, with the steering tiller only being on the captains' side. The steering tiller can make some jerky motions for the whole plane if you move it a centimeter each way quickly. The 737 did not speed up as quickly as I thought it would at idle thrust while taxiing; in fact, idle seemed to give just about a perfect speed on the taxi. Only hills required a bit more thrust. The fun part is that the nature of beast changes with weight. A light airplane wants to gallop away at a great speed, but a heavy one will lumber along at a slow shuffle.

On my first approach from the left seat, at 500 feet up on the approach I was thinking, "wow, I have never landed from the left seat before, maybe I should warn the check pilot; maybe he does not know." But then I thought: why make him nervous? The check pilot solved my little dilemma by asking, "Is this your first landing as captain?" I said, "Sure, you are not nervous, are you?" "Just a bit" was his reply. The landing worked out great and I saw the check pilot sag into his seat with relief. The plane is the same, the landing flare is the same, and to me, the center line looked just about the same as from the right. No problems so far. There were even compliments from the wonderful flight attendant in the back when we got to the gate.

Leaving the runway, I consistently forgot to turn off the landing lights and runway turnoff lights, which have a 5-minute limit on the ground. No problem, though, since on my fourth landing, I was remembering. Still, I was a little too hard on the brakes when slowing down for sharp turns, leading the flight attendants to say that a passenger almost got a free lap dance on one of my turns. All right, slow down a bit. Not everyone is strapped in to a seat; the flight attendants are standing up and waving their arms, giving demonstrations. Other than these minor points, the whole day of 4 flights went out on schedule, without any big issues or problems. A good day, and I was feeling comfortable being a captain and looking forward to my next flight.

Of course, after being king of the whole world for a day, the next day, I was just nobody again. All the check pilots went down to simulator, so I was destined to change back to being co pilot for a while. My big concern is switching back and forth between right and left seats and looking like a fool in the left since I have not flown as captain for a couple

of weeks and have gotten used to being a first officer again, while forgetting my once-experienced captain flows and calls. The pilots who transitioned to the newer 737-500 complained about flying the old 737-200 from time to time, so there is a sort of policy now to keep them on one type, to avoid them mixing things up. Well, maybe keeping a person in one seat instead of switching back and forth is good as well. Or maybe we are all a bunch of wimps, whiners and complainers. What happened to the days when pilots maintained proficiency on several different aircraft types at once? Maybe those days went the way of 30-hour working days and high accident rates.

My second day of pretending to be a captain, the weather went down in St. John's after the ATIS indicated a visual approach. Moderate turbulence en route had sent the flight attendants flying around the cabin and tipped over their trolley food, so they were already in a high state of excitement when we bounced onto the snow and slush covered runway. After planning a visual approach, finding a snow squall had created a runway visual range of 1600 and a half an inch of slush was a bit of a surprise, but this particular aircraft had something a little off with the controls as well, making landings a bit more guesswork, as it took a bit more force than usual to get a landing flare. The bounce meant that we ate up another 500 feet of runway, but then the brakes went into antiskid mode when the slush provided no traction. The plane slid sideways, so I cancelled reverse thrust and tried to straighten out. When the check pilot told me to put the brakes on, they were already to the floor, full on, just without anything much happening. We needed to put reverse thrust back on just to slow down. The red and white lights were going by, indicating the last 3000 feet of runway, when we came to a stop. Not exactly a close call—there was plenty of room left—but having no braking was certainly disconcerting and educational. Never trust a slush-covered runway. The automated terminal information service was calling it “thin snow”.

After a few days of line indoctrination, the check pilot said that my flying was fine, very good, in fact, but he had a few concerns. Chief among these was that I was “a little eccentric”. Which is to say, I walk fast and carry my bag instead of using the little wheels that are on the bottom of the bag. Well, I find those little wheels slow me down and have the bag flop around like a fish on a line, so why not get a little arm muscle exercise and carry the bag? Plus, I like hiking and walking, which puts me out in front of the rest of the crew going through the terminal. The point was that I should herd the rest of the crew around a little more, part of that one crew concept. Otherwise “they might think that you do not like them or something, if you always walk in front.” Well, point taken. Around this time, I started thinking about how hauling freight had its high points as well. After all, when hauling containerized cargo at 02:00 am in coveralls, nobody cares if you hop around on one foot and start making chirping noises. What you wear under the coveralls and what kind of running shoes you have on are not big issues either when everyone on the crew is so wiped out with fatigue that they are fighting just to stay awake.

There was also the standard debrief and warning from the check captains about seducing, smiling at, joking with, or looking at, flight attendants, most who are very pleasant to look at. Of course, being in a position of leadership as a captain opens up all kinds of problems if one romances more than one flight attendant. Even with only one flight attendant, if you happened to break up, you still may be paired together by crew

scheduling. Crew scheduling will not appreciate a call from some flight attendant announcing that she is not flying with certain pilot anymore. This is probably just a standard warning given to all the guys, but did I really need the warning? After all, one flight attendant called me “weird Walter”, and a male flight attendant asked me whether I had a boyfriend or not. Obviously, seducing co-workers is not a problem for me with stuff like this going on. My girlfriend thought all of this was hilarious.

There were some other little, helpful points on line indoctrination. There are two logbooks in the cockpit, both of which fit in a little slot behind the pilots seat. Log #1 is the journey log and log #2 is the maintenance log. I happened once to put log #2 in front of log #1, which triggered the debriefing point that if log #1 is always put in front of log #2, then a person would be able to reach for the correct log without actually reading the labels that say “#1” and “#2”. Another pilot I was flying with prompted me to squeeze my little plastic speed bugs together tighter. These little plastic markers are on the outside dial of the airspeed indication and are used as a memory aid for decision, rotation, takeoff safety and flap retraction speeds at a particular weight. The bugs are set up before every takeoff and landing, then squeezed together when not in use so that one is not lured into thinking that some valid speeds are set. I had left a small space between the bugs so that I did not break my fingernails when prying them apart to set them up again. I thought that since I was the only one looking at the bugs, I could see if they were squeezed or not, but with the one crew concept, the other pilot has to be happy to see that your bugs are squeezed as tightly as his. This, of course, has nothing to do with the bugs squeezed on the windscreen after a summer evenings’ approach.

In Toronto on Christmas day, we found that the contract ground crew had parked our plane in the middle of the infield all night in -11°C with the front passenger door open. I guess on Christmas Eve, the boys were a little lax. All the potable water on board was frozen and frost covered the interior counters. No problem, as far as safety, right? Sure, all 115 people who are locked up inside for the 4 hour flight to Florida will probably be upset without any coffee, tea or lavatory water to wash their hands with, but we could still go. I tried to thaw the water system out on the ground by closing the outflow valve in the tail and warming up the cabin, but not a drop came from the frozen lines. I reasoned that down in Florida, things would thaw out, if not in flight. I was right. 1.5 hours into the flight, at 35,000 feet, a little old lady tugged on the flight attendants sleeve to report water flooding out of the forward lavatory. The fitting near the shutoff valve had split open when the water froze, and now there was no way to turn off the flow. We could shut off the cabin pressurization system, since it also supplies pressure for the water, but then we would have to descend, burn more fuel and possibly land short of destination. We opted to situate a flight attendant at the lavatory, collecting the water spraying out in a garbage bin and mopping up until all 40 gallons were gone. Eventually, all the water was gone, with just air hissing out. Problem solved? Not quite. The electronics and equipment bay is right below the forward lavatory and with the water making its way down, various radios began to fail. As the water arc and boiled off, then the radios and navigation aids would come back. So, by the time we got finished for the day, everything was working again and all we could do was write up the problems and hope the mechanics took us seriously. I guess they did not, or maybe they were short staffed, since the next day, nothing had been done to fix the problems, and the crew who picked up the plane had a 6 hour delay after all the warning flags dropped out when they taxied out to the runway.

Back at home base, we landed in a snowstorm at midnight on the one runway with no approach lighting. Apparently the B747 that crashed on takeoff a few months ago destroyed the approach lights and nobody had got around to fixing them yet, so when the localizer-only approach brought us on top of the airport before the lights of the runway appeared, the descent rate was enough to set off the ground proximity warning system. Now, that should be a go around, at least in instrument conditions, but since we could see what was going on, the check pilot, who was flying, continued to a great landing in a gusty 30-knot wind. I guess the lesson to be had was to be practical and safe. What could we have changed? The other runway was beyond limits for crosswind with the snow and slush making the runway slippery. Missing the landing on the runway without approach lights would make a diversion necessary. So, if one is visual, with the GPWS going off once, continue if sink rate is acceptable. The conflict here is that conservative thinking is to execute a go around for any GPWS warning, even in visual conditions. It is one of the debatable, grey areas, of captain decision making, of which there are many.

One area that was certainly not grey was the way I screwed up a couple of days later. Usually I take my own grocery bag into the cockpit to serve as a garbage bag, saving the company money and contributing to profit sharing. At the end of the flight, the little bag of snack wrappers and tissue papers is taken to the forward garbage container. On this particular day, we were flying the one aircraft that was configured without a forward garbage can. I knew that the cleaning and catering people were due to arrive in a minute, and that we were late, so I placed the bag on the floor on the forward galley and went to start the walk around. Wrong! Exits have to be kept clear, even of grocery bags with a couple of napkins and empty soda cans in them. Now, garbage is not placed on the jet bridge either, so the correct course of action is to carry the bag around until finding a suitable garbage container. I was suitably chastised, several times.

Another time, in Toronto, I saw a light dusting of powder snow on the cold-soaked aircraft wings. At -10°C, it was certain that the snow was going to blow off, and I checked with my hand to make sure there was no ice underneath. With de icing fluid at \$5 a liter and 1000 liters easily used, a “PR spray” just to satisfy the passengers would eliminate profit, delay us and also degrade aircraft performance by putting a contaminant—the de icing fluid—on the wing. The rules say no takeoff with any frost or snow adhering to the aircraft. Well, to prove it was not adhering, I taxied a little closer to the heavy jet in front of us in the take off line up than I normally would. Those big engines blew all the snow off our little airliner, all right, but I was educated not to follow so close to the planes ahead that the exhaust fumes are sucked into our cabin ventilation system. It was smelly. This whole de icing business has gotten a little crazy on the conservative side ever since a few people had accidents by taking off with frost and snow. These days, we deice for just about anything; not because we think that the aircraft performance will be degraded, but to satisfy passengers, especially those lawyers and transport Canada inspectors on board with seats over the wings. The way I read the law now, if a fully loaded Boeing 747 attempts to take off with a single snowflake adhering to its wing, this is an illegal act. It wastes a lot of money and time, but I guess a few people with type A personalities and poor judgment ruined the age of

reason.

On my captain line check with the manager of 737-200 training, our debriefing followed the standard pattern of first starting with large problems and areas of improvement, then, once the basics were debriefed, moving on to the finer details. Item one on the debrief list was the color of my socks. You see, I was wearing a charcoal-grey colored sock. The uniform pants are more dark blue. This had to change. Next up were my eccentricities, such as the time that I changed my pants on the flight deck. Well, why not? It was -30 in Ottawa and +25 in Florida, we had 4 hours of flying and I had to get rid of the thermal underwear. There was a line of seniors in front of the forward lavatory. Besides, I was wearing a tasteful pair of long, flowered Bermuda shorts underneath, suitable for going to the beach. All right, next time I will wait for the lavatory. Lesson learned.

Some of the flight attendants finked out on me and mentioned that my French announcements did not have the right accent. I thought that I had it all together when I flew with our token French check pilot and wrote down a little script for the welcome aboard and in flight announcements. Maybe the rural Quebec area he comes from has a different idea of proper French than the Montreal girls working as flight attendants. Again, hauling freight has some advantages. Not that I would go back to flying in the middle of the night, when reasonable people are at home sleeping. After pronouncing my flying as "marvelous", the check captain handed me a pair of 4-strip epaulets and said that my pay would be raised starting that very day. He said my challenge would be trying to blend in with the rest of the crew, not flying the airplane. Well, I suppose that is true.

Of course, there is always one more thing to do. A new captain is restricted to a half a mile visibility for take off until having 100 hours of pilot in command after line indoctrination. Of course, I was sent into St. John's, Newfoundland, repeatedly, during my first 100 hours. St. John's in winter is foggy, so naturally, we ended up waiting on the ground for the runway visual range (RVR) to twitch upwards to 2600 feet so we could leave. Meanwhile, passengers are fidgeting in the back and watching other airlines depart, since their pilots have 100 hours pilot in command and can take off in RVR of 600 feet. It was embarrassing waiting a couple of times, but even worse was running out of duty day and having to deplane all the passengers back at the gate so that they could catch another company flight out. Of course, once passing 100 hours pilot in command, none of my flights went to St. John's and the weather was always above a half a mile visibility when we took off. Not to worry: there is another line check coming up, so there is always one more thing to do, one more test, one more requirement. However, at the end of a few months, it certainly appears that my decision to try for the left seat was a good one. Go for it!