



# Captain's A

## Exercising Good Judgment

By John Perkinson, Staff Writer

# Authority

**Much has been written about the importance of captain's authority. Some pilots highlight safety concerns, recognizing the value of having the captain—with full knowledge of the aircraft, the environment, and the circumstance—weigh the facts and make a carefully considered decision. In other instances, the captain can simply be in the best position to make a smart business decision and help a passenger in need. This example is one of those latter occasions.**

**E**dith Ching's life-long dream was to visit Angkor Wat, the internationally famous 12th-century temple in Cambodia, noted for its elaborate architecture and extensive history. She almost didn't make it.

"I've wanted to go visit there since I was 20," says Edith, a 64-year-old teacher/librarian from the Washington, D.C., area.

Edith is no stranger to air travel, as she attends school library conferences around the United States and makes an annual trek to Japan to teach English to Japanese students in an accelerated, summer program.

So after 34 years of marriage, Edith talked her husband, Wally, and two former neighbors, who now live in the Charlotte, N.C., area, into making the journey with her.

Edith and Wally would fly from Washington to San Francisco, where they would meet their friends, Bob

and Laura. From San Francisco, the four would travel to Seoul, Korea, and then on to a city near the temple in Cambodia.

However, when the Chings arrived at Washington, DC's Dulles International Airport in late July, they learned that their United Airlines flight was delayed. To make matters worse, Edith had only allotted 3 days for her visit to the historic temple, not considering the potential delays sometimes associated with such a long trip.

"The employees at Dulles were pre-occupied with lots of passengers trying to straighten out other problems, so we took the delayed flight and hoped to work out alternative arrangements once we got to San Francisco," she recounts.

Edith says that when they arrived in the Golden Gate City, by some twist of fate, their outbound flight was still listed on the departure board, so they raced through the terminal to get to the gate.

When they arrived, the United B-777 was there, but the door had been closed. The Chings pleaded with the customer service agents, explaining their circumstances and begging to be allowed to board. Their appeals fell on deaf ears.

"There were flow-control delays in San Francisco," says Capt. Kim Kropat, flying the San Francisco-to-Seoul flight. "Passengers had been trickling in by ones and twos.

"The jetway was pulled back, but we were still loading bags. I saw them come into the gate area and observed what appeared to be a heated dia-

logue between [Edith] and the ticket agents," says Kropat, a 23-year veteran of the airline and a member of the "570 Group" (the 570 new-hire pilots in the United Training Center in Denver, Colo., who bravely honored the 1985 United pilot strike, which they were hired to break).

Edith says that she could see the pilots in the cockpit preparing for the trip. Having run out of ideas, she went to the plate-glass window and raised her hands in supplication.

"The pilot, to the astonishment of everyone at the gate, opened the cockpit window and gave me a thumbs-up," she says.

"Actually, I opened the window and gave her the 'T for time' sign with two hands," says Kropat. "We contacted Zone, told them to put the jetway back, gave her an 'O.K.' sign, and she and her husband got on," said Kropat. Fortunately, the Ching's friends had previously boarded.

Edith reports, "I wanted to give the pilot a gift, but he said that all he wanted was my thanks. He has that and my eternal gratitude and renewed faith in the kindness of others.

"And the plane arrived in Seoul early," says Edith.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Edith, Wally, Bob, and Laura had a fantastic vacation. Edith took lots of photos of the beautiful temple and of her traveling companions. In addition, Edith is telling everyone about the incredible experience she had with United Airlines. An aside: Edith is enrolled in United's Mileage Plus Club and has reached Premiere status. 🌐