



The Air Traffic Controller

January/February 1998, Volume 12, Issue 1

Controller catches the Hollywood buzz

Two years ago, Southern California TRACON Controller Bob Marks never dreamed he'd be involved in a major Hollywood production – much less appear in one. But he was, and he did. If viewers looked closely, they saw him in one of the opening scenes of *Blackout Effect*, which aired on NBC, Sunday, Jan. 4.

A month or two after Oakland Center experienced a significant outage a few years ago, producer Barry Rosenbush called Los Angeles Center, where Marks was the fac rep at the time, to tour the facility and ask questions about the air traffic control profession. “The incident sparked my imagination,” said Rosenbush. “I wondered what it was like to be in that room when the equipment went down, what kind of people do that work. No one really knows what kind of pressure crucible it must be when there are planes in the sky and the equipment fails. I felt this was an interesting story about a unique group of individuals who do an extraordinary thing.”

When Rosenbush's production company sold the movie to NBC, they again contacted Marks and asked him to be a technical consultant on the film. Screenwriter Matthew Bombeck relied on Marks for accurate phraseology and language. “Accuracy was one of their main concerns,” said Marks. “People don't always understand issues like inadequate equipment and staffing shortages when they read about them in the newspaper, so they wanted to weave them into the script.”

To illustrate a point about the aging equipment in the air traffic control system, the screenwriter used a story Marks had told him. “My father, who worked with air traffic control equipment when he was in the Air Force, came to visit me at the facility one day back in 1989 or '90. He told me the equipment he saw in our facility was obsolete when he retired in the early sixties. Somehow this story, though slightly edited, ended up in the script.”

Although Marks was integrally involved in the movie, he did not have input on its creative direction. “We wanted to make the film as realistic as possible, but of course we needed to take some fictional license for entertainment purposes,” said Rosenbush. This includes the part of the plot where a controller builds a ray gun and threatens to shut down the system.

Marks was on set for only four or five days, but one of those days, he actually appeared on camera. Instead of hiring someone from an airline to tell the actors playing the pilot and co-pilot of the ill-fated airplane, which buttons to push in the cockpit, Marks, an experienced pilot, offered to handle the task. “Someone behind me in the meeting said, ‘Bob, I envision you playing the co-pilot,’” said Marks. “I thought he was kidding, but not long after, I received a call from wardrobe to come in for my costume fitting.” He received an exemption from the Screen Actors Guild to play a speaking role and made his movie debut.

What does Rosenbush think of air traffic
continued on page 6

Human factors study irons out STARS issues

The STARS human factors work group plunged into a week-long test of the Standard Terminal Automation Replacement System at the Federal Aviation Administration Technical Center in Atlantic City, N.J., in December. NATCA's STARS Representative Tim Helsing and his team of controllers from all types of terminal facilities worked closely with the FAA's Dr. Mark Rodgers and other human factors professionals to define the problems associated with the Raytheon equipment, and identify the impact they would present to working controllers.

U.S. Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., took matters into his own hands late last year by mandating the FAA perform a human factors study on Raytheon's already developed STARS. He also ordered FAA to take additional steps and institute a process for including early controller involvement in all future procurement and development of air traffic equipment.

When the evaluation was commissioned, NATCA was assured the union would be an active participant and counted on to provide its expertise and experience – so far this has been the case. The
continued on page 7

Inside

Presidential Perspective	2
Feedback	3
One on One	4
Engineers Update	5
OCCP	7
NATCA in Washington	8
Tax Tips	9
Newswire	10
LR Report	11
Bulletin Board	12

Dear Friend and Member:

It's almost dizzying how quickly years pass off the calendar. With the better part of another one ahead, we can only begin to imagine the opportunities to participate in NATCA's future. Already, crucial issues are percolating to the top here in Washington. Of consequence to us are imminent congressional elections, contract negotiations for public and private sector controllers, planning a national convention in Seattle, and hosting the International Federation of Air Traffic Controller Associations' regional meeting in Miami.

With modernization and equipment, staffing and managing human or financial resources at the forefront, we must prioritize to avoid juggling too many projects in the air - jeopardizing all. First, we will finish reclass. Now that the Federal Aviation Administration has agreed to abandon its ill-advised attempts to include pay in controllers' contract negotiations, we can devote our full attention to the nuts and bolts of ensuring fair compensation.

We'll also complete three private sector contracts, as well as the one for FAA controllers - further freeing us to be more proactive on other items near and dear to you and your families. Among them will be fixing the retirement system so ours will be equivalent to federal firefighters and law enforcement employees; funding second career options; and guaranteeing your voice is heard and heeded early in development of new technology.



Where do you come in? On a day to day basis, you can play a large role in our success, because organizing at the person-to-person level is most persuasive. The backbone of our strength is our numbers. Remember, only NATCA is keeping your interests in front of the people who influence your career and profession. Our clout - a whopping 70 percent of controller membership and, after only weeks, 20 percent of engineers - speaks volumes on Capitol Hill, as well as with reporters and aviation leaders. This year, we'll aggressively pursue non-members from all bargaining units. When you meet controllers and engineers who are not "NATCA family," make it a point of asking why, then reinforce how we need each other - now, more than ever!

Throughout the year, check out relevant sections of the web site, read our publications to stay current of provocative issues, activities nationwide and implementation of National Executive Board or convention policies. Keep in touch with your regional vice presidents, legislative and safety representatives for guidance about when to contact members of Congress, agency officials and the media. Opportunities for participation with your brothers and sisters are available, if you make the commitment to lend a hand. From my experience, I have discovered rewards in service greatly outweigh sacrifices; I trust you'll find likewise.

Constitutional amendments requested

1998 is here and it's time to make plans for NATCA's biennial convention in Seattle, Wash. Send all proposed constitutional amendments to the national office to the attention of the Constitution Committee by May 8, 1998. Proposed amendments will be sent to all members by July 6. All constitutional amendments MUST be submitted in advance.

Proposed resolutions may also be submitted by May 8 and will be included in the package with the amendments; however, resolutions may also be submitted during the convention.

In solidarity,

Michael McNally
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Vol. 12, Issue 1, January 1998

The Air Traffic Controller (ISSN 10555994) is published monthly by the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, 1150 17th Street, N.W., Suite 701 Washington, D.C. 20036. 1st class postage paid at Washington, D.C. Postmaster: Send address changes to NATCA, 1150 17th Street, N.W. Suite 701 Washington, D.C. 20036.

Controllers and engineers working together

I just wanted to share with my fellow NATCA members what a pleasure I had today. I went to a meeting to plan the cut-over of a new communications system. When the lead program engineer gave me his card, it proudly displayed the NATCA logo. I passed it on to the operations manager and remarked that the engineers were on our team. After the meeting, the engineer also told me when they were planning the meeting, there was some discussion of whom to call at the facility prior to the date. They decided they should call the air traffic manager and "their NATCA brothers." We agreed on some things that are going to add a great deal of inconvenience for the installation crew but make it a lot easier for the controllers to work during the transition period. I couldn't help but wonder how it would have come out without the engineers on our side.

Mike Snyder
Portland TRACON

NATCA member encourages controllers to be their own PR team

With the recent successes that our national office has had in public relations, I hope many of our members see the interest being generated in our profession. I have long felt educating the American public about what we do and the conditions we work under will only serve our profession better. I am very proud of the job controllers do. I believe the public would be just as proud, and appreciative, if only they knew more about our work.

Many of us look to the national office to carry our messages. To a large degree, it is their job. They set the tone, develop strategy and provide direction. But the public doesn't live in Washington. They live in your town. You have access to the public that the national office can only dream of.

Many of you are probably going "huh?" about right now. Let's do some comparisons.

Suppose you want to get a story on the evening news. Look at what you have to compete with nationally, and the networks only have a half-hour. On the other hand, watch the local news. Less competition for air time and it goes on (and on) for a least an hour, and sometimes two. You've already got better odds. The same principle applies to the newspapers. The Washington press is overrun with stories. Your local reporter is praying he doesn't have to cover the local spelling bee competition (again).

Say you want to talk to a member on the aviation subcommittee. Call his or her Washington office as the president of NATCA and try to get 10 minutes. You're going to stand in line with corporations, lobbyists and every other interest group. Now let's go to your home town and call your congressman. You're not just a NATCA member, you're also a voter. If you're stuck on what to talk about, try aviation safety. I assure you that your local congressman is a frequent flier. He is as concerned about his safety as any other flier.

If you're like me, you're now looking for an excuse not to do something. Sorry, I'm not going to let you off the hook. If your congressman isn't on the aviation subcommittee, how about appropriations? civil service? defense? He or she does vote. If you're a center type and in the middle of nowhere, that is no excuse. There are at least three congressmen on aviation committees within the boundaries of Atlanta Center. Call members in the area and tell them you live in ZXX but work airplanes into their airport everyday. I guarantee it grabs their interest. I've done it.

Talking to the real public is just as important. Who is that, you ask? The local flight school, aviation colleges, chapters of other aviation groups. Each and every one of them would love to have a real, live controller speak to their group. There is no excuse. You talk to pilots all day long. You can do it without a microphone.

Don Brown
Atlanta Center

What's new on NATCA's home page

- The members' only site has a new look! Members in good standing may gain access to the private area of NATCA's web page by calling their regional office, Cheryl Cannon or the Field Services Team at the national office.
- Looking for the latest updates on reclass? Find them in the members' only area of the web site, including the

NATCA and Federal Aviation Administration pay and compensation proposals. (<http://home.natca.org/privateweb/pvtlegislation/reclass/present.html>)

- Monthly automation updates are posted on the Safety and Tech home page. (<http://home.natca.org/privateweb/safety/autoupdate.html>). Direct questions to Mitch Coleman at tmcoleman@mindspring.com.

MITRE's role in air traffic issues reaches beyond the STARS

When air traffic controllers hear of The MITRE Corp., they may immediately think of it as the company tasked by Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., to work with NATCA and the Federal Aviation Administration to identify human factors problems inherent in the Standard Terminal Automation Replacement System. But, NATCA's relationship with MITRE dates back several years. Dr. John Fearnside, MITRE's senior vice president and general manager and director of the Center for Advanced Aviation System Development, spoke to *The Air Traffic Controller* concerning STARS, the company's involvement with the National Aviation Research Institute and the role it plays in other air traffic projects.

***The Air Traffic Controller:* What role does the MITRE Corp. play in the research of air traffic control issues?**

Fearnside: We are a federally funded research and development center – a not-for-profit company chartered in the public interest with the specific charge of providing independent and objective advice to the government. The two words *independent* and *objective* are very important.

We tackle air traffic issues every day. MITRE has two federally funded research and development centers. One supports the Department of Defense and the other is the CAASD, funded by the Federal Aviation Administration.

***The Air Traffic Controller:* What are the biggest challenges MITRE faces while researching/studying air traffic control issues?**

Fearnside: Technology is easy. The challenge is to develop technologies which may be used properly by controllers and others while improving performance of the air traffic control system. The important thing to us is to have user-friendly technology for the people who have to work with it daily while improving system performance.

***The Air Traffic Controller:* Describe your working relationship with the FAA.**

Fearnside: The FAA pays MITRE/CAASD, but that does not keep us from being independent. Sometimes we tell the agency things they don't like. But, by and large, we are a well-respected organization and our advice is always taken seriously.

***The Air Traffic Controller:* Describe your working relationship with NATCA.**

Fearnside: We've been working with NATCA controllers for a very long time. MITRE worked with 15 active controllers for a dozen years on the development of the User Request Evaluation Tool (currently being tested in Indianapolis and Memphis). The fact that URET is successful in the field shouldn't be a surprise because controllers helped us invent it. The FAA tasked us to work with controllers on this project. Most of these controllers, if not all, were NATCA members. We specified that individuals working on the project all had to be active working controllers — if they were promoted into management they weren't on the team. We wanted people who were doing the job and we received cooperation from the FAA to make that happen. We've also had controller teams work on issues such as Datalink, oceanic topics, and converging runway display aid — which we refer to as ghosting.

***The Air Traffic Controller:* Please describe the progress you have made thus far in resolving human factors issues involving STARS.**

Fearnside: Rep. Wolf, chairman of the House of Representatives transportation subcommittee, asked if we would facilitate a solution to human factors issues occurring between NATCA and the FAA. He asked us to have a report by Dec. 15, but it turned out that to address some of these issues we had to conduct testing at the technical center in Atlantic City. We just finished testing the second week of December and are now in the process of evaluating those results.

We met with Wolf, along with representatives from NATCA and the FAA, Dec. 19 and gave the chairman an interim report. We're now promising Wolf a complete report by the end of January. This will include resolution of STARS human factors issues and a jointly agreed to process for accepting new systems and technologies that we can all buy into – FAA, NATCA and Professional Airway Systems Specialists.

We told Wolf testing had taken place, 98 issues had been identified and will be evaluated, and no apparent technical showstoppers were recognized. The fact that 98 issues exist shouldn't be of overwhelming concern. When testing is conducted, there are always a lot of little issues found. There may be a couple larger problems but nothing looks

continued on page 6



NATCA Engineers, The Beginning

Floyd Majors,
NATCA Engineers National Director

Approximately 200 Federal Aviation Administration engineers have submitted applications to join NATCA. The engineers bargaining unit was certified on Nov. 10, 1997, by the Federal Labor Relations Authority as the exclusive representative for FAA engineers and architects. This includes approximately 1,100 eligible bargaining unit members.

The planning, strategizing, and hard work that went into the successful election was accomplished by many people – both air traffic controllers and engineers. The Organizing Committee did an excellent job. In addition to the many controllers who supported the engineers and contributed to our success, a special “thank you” goes to the following NATCA members: Rich Phillips, Kevin Christy, Jim Poole and James Ferguson. Thank you also to NATCA staff members, Christine Neumeier, Carol Poole, Jim Morin and Sherrod Shim.

Many challenges face the bargaining unit in the near future. The agency is planning several different restructuring proposals affecting all bargaining unit members – some more severe than others. As the proposals stand, some employees will be forced to move, some will be forced to downgrade, and some will be converted to technicians in the Professional Airways Systems Specialists bargaining unit. The agency is taking advantage of our situation as the “new kids on the block.” It is implementing the restructuring proposals in the regions one small step at a time without notifying the NATCA regional representatives or NATCA’s

national office. We are challenging them whenever we catch them.

The regional representatives confront the day-to-day issues, problems and management challenges. They are doing an excellent job with their limited experience and labor relations background. The representatives are: Jerry Marshall, Alaskan; Scott Lueckert, Central; Tom Bayone, Eastern; Jim D’Agati, Great Lakes; Mark McLaurin, New England; Curt Howe, Northwest Mountain; Doug Hintz, Southern; Jim Frascione, Southwest; and Mike Martin, Western Pacific. I respect and appreciate each of these individuals for their eagerness to step forward and lead their regions in establishing, defining and cultivating a successful NATCA engineers’ local. I also appreciate their efforts and personal contributions in making the election so successful!

Although we have many immediate issues to address, we are looking forward to getting involved in and working with NATCA’s Political Action Committee and other legislative affairs efforts to provide more strength and a greater voice for the union in Congress. The Safety Committee is another area where I believe engineers can make a significant contribution to NATCA’s current, successful efforts.

Speaking on behalf of the NATCA engineers, we look forward to working with our air traffic brothers and sisters on design teams, tower programs, safety teams, service improvement teams and other forums in which we can work together to improve the environment we work in and the equipment on which we rely.

Controller Viewpoint

NATCA members who responded to last month’s question overwhelmingly supported the bill introduced by U.S. Rep. Connie Morella, R-Md., allowing federal employees to contribute the Internal Revenue Service maximum to their Thrift Savings Plans, eliminating the rule restricting contributions to 10 percent of base pay.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

“I believe the government should stop treating us like children who don’t know how to handle our own money. There should be NO limit on how much a person can contribute to ANY retirement account.”

Kevin Brandon
Anchorage Center

“As a CSRS employee, I am more concerned with maximum ability to contribute rather than matching funds. IRS rules should apply to all citizens – not all except those of us in government service.”

Hal Huber
Bay TRACON

“This proposal is long overdue and should have absolute support from NATCA. This would allow controllers that aren’t GS-14s to put away as much as they can possibly afford while working their way up the ranks. Why should retirement be unfairly limited because of an assignment to a small facility? If you can afford to put away the maximum, then more power to you. I would definitely take advantage of this if available.”

R. Mardis
Fort Worth Center

continued on page 9

Hollywood buzz

continued from page 1

controllers now that he's completed the film? "I've learned about the great ability controllers must have to deal with a job that can transition from normalcy to sheer terror in just a matter of seconds," he said. "Most of the time it's the people that make the system work – not the machines. It takes a very unique person to deal with the problems of this delicate network held together with chewing gum and paper-clips. Somehow controllers can do this."

Due to the extremely tight production schedule, the film is not 100 percent technically perfect, but overall, Marks thinks it was a job well done.

"Bob really crystalized how we understood controllers and their jobs," said Rosenbush. "He put a real human face on it for us. He was our guide and our beacon, and then he became our friend."

One on One

continued from page 4

unfixable. We told Wolf we had a draft process for involving controllers in acquisition decisions that we expect to have completed by January. The large problem we still have to address is what system will be installed at National Airport and what systems will be implemented nationally.

***The Air Traffic Controller:* How difficult was it to act as a facilitator between FAA and NATCA? Were the two groups willing to work together?**

Fearnsides: Both groups were absolutely open and willing. We told the chairman that we've witnessed a remarkable spirit of openness. Everyone would like to see a more satisfactory process for accepting new technology and systems.

***The Air Traffic Controller:* Why did you feel it was important to provide the National Aviation Research Institute with a \$25,000 grant to research human factors issues? What do you hope NARI will accomplish?**

Fearnsides: We thought NARI was a wonderful idea. Human factors is a very crucial part of what we are doing now and what we will do in the future. Air traffic control is obviously a very human intensive operation. We like the idea of having intensive controller communication with our engineers and scientists. To the extent that there is an organization like NARI that we can have a professional relationship with, we think it is a wonderful idea. We hope to have a long relationship with the organization.

***The Air Traffic Controller:* Where do you think the future of the aviation industry, particularly air traffic control, is headed?**

Fearnsides: The future of air traffic control is going to be one of greater collaboration between controllers, pilots, dispatchers and the like. I think we see an emerging, almost Internet like communications among them. There is new technology, which we call collaborative computing, which enables people with computer skills, like controllers, to communicate with each other, making the best use of equipment.

Someone made a terrific observation the other day about the Internet. They said the Internet is not just a network, it is a set of relationships. That's where I think air traffic control is headed. I think we are going to have

a highly interactive communications system with many groups working together. My vision of the air traffic control system is one that is highly interactive.

***The Air Traffic Controller:* What major projects does MITRE have planned for the future?**

Fearnsides: One item we are looking at is the effect of such things as regional jets on the air traffic control system, another is how air traffic control affects the operations of airlines, scheduling, etc. We are also working on Global Positioning System, next generation radios, and collaborative decision making.

A Closer LOOK

Hobbies

Music, reading, golf

Favorite authors

John Updike and John Irving

Most interesting aspect of your job?

Making things happen

Favorite Quote

"This is the true joy in life – the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one, the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap, being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

George Bernard Shaw

OCCP strives to make workplace better

A labor/management initiative in the Eastern Region aimed at improving air traffic employee morale and foster teamwork kicked off its pilot program with two facilities in January. The goal is to have in place a possible model for all of the Air Traffic Service and possibly the entire Federal Aviation Administration when the tests are completed.

The Organizational Cultural Change Process addresses the poor results of the 1995 employee attitude survey and fulfills a charge by the director of air traffic to eliminate hostility in the workplace. Labor and management leaders hope successful implementation of OCCP will result in a decrease in grievances, equal employment opportunity complaints, as well as improve communications and increase teamwork.

A steering committee identified six areas it felt were necessary to create a positive work environment and empowered six ad hoc committees to create strategic plans for each. The issues addressed were: education, human relations/interpersonal skills, equipment (for the program, not air traffic operations), resources, teamwork and accountability.

To ensure diversity, the ad hocs included two managers, four bargaining unit members (two each from NATCA and the National Association of Air Transportation Specialists), one staff person, an administrative employee and one supervisor. "This is a grassroots project where employees have been involved from the beginning," said Eastern Region OCCP Representative Melissa Kinker, a Washington Center controller who has worked closely on the process. "The region hasn't dictated any of this to us. One of the overall objectives is to improve morale and a good way to do this is to give

employees input on workplace issues."

Work on the strategic plans began in May 1997 and were completed in October. The groups determined how the objectives would be accomplished and what resources would be needed to carry them out. Once these items were identified, four cadre facilitators – two management, one from human resources and one from air traffic, and one each from NATCA and NAATS – developed a workshop to present to fac reps and other leadership. Strategic planning for individual facilities is the focus of the classes. In addition, all employees will participate in an introductory briefing on OCCP.

"Every facility will take the guidelines learned and develop individual strategic plans custom fit for its specific work environment," said Kinker. "The method presented by the facilitators is merely a template. Every workplace is different and the process should reflect that diversity."

The pilot tests began in January at the Millville Flight Service Station, Wilmington Tower and will soon begin at one other facility not yet determined at press time. Eastern Region is confident of OCCP's success. Its business plan states it fully expects to create a change in the organizational culture at all facilities. The region hopes to build an environment that values trust, respect and pride and rewards teamwork.

"This project shows that labor and management can collaborate and gain positive results," said Eastern Region Vice President Joe Fruscella. "OCCP is definitely a starting point for improving the work climate in all FAA facilities. I think we'll see how valuable our efforts were once the pilot is complete. I look forward to its implementation in other facilities in the region."

STARS issues

continued from page 1

study involves three groups with at least one NATCA representative on each. Helsing sits on the human factors work group; Jon Ramsden, Atlanta Center controller, is tasked to the future process group; and NATCA's National Technology Coordinator Dick Swauger serves on the steering committee. Representation on this committee will be turned over to a national officer with authority to express the union's position when the process issues are completed and the decision making group gets down to business. Associated departments of FAA headquarters, several human factors professionals and the Department of Transportation inspector general's office are also involved in this project. Dr. Agam Sinha is moderating the proceedings for MITRE Corp.

"The procurement and development process group began its work in earnest on Jan. 14," said Swauger. "The importance of its work cannot be emphasized enough because they will set down the rules determining how the FAA buys and develops any tool to be used by controllers. Those rules can and must state clearly that air traffic controllers shall be a necessary part of any consensus agreement about future work projects from the original concept to deployment to the field."

Results of the human factors study will be distributed to the membership when made available by the FAA.

NATCA in Washington

The 1998 congressional elections are coming up and there is no better way to become involved in the political process than volunteering on a campaign. Not only is it a fulfilling experience, but it also helps to build strong relationship with legislators and their staffs. The approximately 300 NATCA members coming to Washington, D.C., on Feb. 22 for *NATCA in Washington '98: Campaign for the Future* will arm themselves with the tools they need to become effective campaign volunteers and build influence on Capitol Hill.

"The 1998 congressional elections afford us an opportunity to build relationships with our legislators," said National Legislative Committee Chair Alan Clendenin. "Volunteering on a candidate's campaign lets him or her know that we are willing to go the extra mile for them. It gives our members a chance to create associations at a different level. When you call your congressperson to discuss an issue, you'll be remembered as someone who helped them when they needed help. It is through these well founded, trusting relationships that we can induce change."

In addition to learning about political campaigns, *Congressional Quarterly* will provide two workshops, a "101" class on the legislative process for first timers and a more advanced session for experienced members. Participants will hear tips and techniques for developing working relationships with congressional delegates and their staff as well as learn how to frame issues and find a champion for their cause. Ideas on how to develop an effective grassroots strategy will also be addressed.

"NATCA in Washington is one of the most valuable tools this union provides its members," said NATCA President Mike McNally. "People in the field really make a difference. This is how we educate them on how best to frame NATCA's message and approach legislators. Many of our past successes are due, in part to skills learned in these programs. It has helped us build the strong presence we have today on Capitol Hill. I hope participants carry what they learn back with them and share with others in their facility who did not attend."



NATCA in Washington '98
Campaign for the Future

And the Winner Is...

Denver Center is 1997 Leader

The 1997 drives are over and the numbers have been tallied. The result? Denver Center emerged as the facility that recruited the most new members during organizing drives. (The following only lists locals that recruited members during recruitment blitzes in 1997 held in conjunction with the national Organizing Committee.)

Denver Center	45
Houston Center	41
Southern California TRACON	39
Fort Worth Center	38
New York Center	36
Washington Center	36
Los Angeles Center	31
Boston Center	25
Cleveland Center	24
Kansas City Center	18
Atlanta Center	15
New York TRACON	15
Albuquerque Center	12
Phoenix Tower/TRACON	12
Minneapolis Center	11
Palm Springs Tower	10
Miami Center	9
Honolulu Tower	9
Cherry Point	7
Cleveland Hopkins	7
Salt Lake Center	7
Salt Lake TRACON	7
Honolulu CERAP	6
Stockton Tower	6
Louisville Tower	5
High Desert TRACON	5
San Francisco Tower	5
Meridian RAPCON	5
Aspen Tower	4
Houston TRACON	4
Dallas TRACON	4
Houston Tower	4
Livermore Municipal Tower	4
Orange County Tower	4
New Orleans Tower	3
Maui Tower	3
Newport News Tower	3
Sacramento TRACON	3
Camarillo Tower	3
Austin	3
Kona Ke Ahole Tower	3
Islip Tower	3
Oakland Tower	2
Pasco Tri Cities Tower	2
Santa Ana Tower	2
Beaumont/Port Arthur	1
Lafayette Tower	1
Omaha TRACON	1
Total	543

Tax advice for controllers

Martin A. Kapp, C.P.A., E.A.

As tax season approaches most people do their best to find ways to save themselves from giving hard earned cash to the United States government – air traffic controllers are no exception. Many controllers approach completing tax returns the way non-pilots perceive landing airplanes in low clouds – just push the nose over and pray. Recently, both Congress and President Clinton officially agreed to allow many controllers to take the same travel deductions as pilots.

The Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, signed into law Aug. 5, 1997, greatly expanded travel tax deductions to include all individuals “subject to Department of Transportation hours of service limitations.” These include “certain air transportation employees such as pilots, crew, dispatchers mechanics, and *control tower operators* under Federal Aviation Administration regulations.”

Ready for more good news? The 1997 tax act also increases the deductible percentage of the cost of food and beverage consumed while away from home by individuals subject to the DOT hours of service limitations to 80 percent (over a 10-year period). The U.S. Senate Tax Committee went on to officially say “these individuals are frequently forced to eat meals away from home in circumstances where their choice is limited, prices comparatively high and the opportunity for lavish meals remote.”

The “applicable percentage” will be 80 percent for tax years beginning in calendar year 2008 or later, but will be phased in as follows:

- 55 percent for tax years beginning in calendar year 1998 or 1999,
- 60 percent for tax years beginning in calendar year 2000 or 2001,
- 65 percent for tax years beginning in calendar year 2002 or 2003,
- 70 percent for tax years beginning in calendar year 2004 or 2005,
- 75 percent for tax years beginning in calendar year 2006 or 2007, and
- 80 percent for tax years beginning in calendar year 2008 or later.

(Code Sec. 274(n)(3)(B))

Don't be afraid of an Internal Revenue Service tax audit. The IRS officially notified ATC employees more than two years ago they could safely deduct these meals on tax returns without saving a

single receipt. This is spelled out in IRS Notice 95-50 which announced a significant change for employers and employees by raising the requirement for many business receipts from \$25 to \$75 beginning Oct. 1, 1995.

How do you compute your allowable meal allowance? The IRS provides this answer in the rather long Revenue Procedure 96-64 which allows taxpayers to use either the published continental United States meal rates covering the lower 48 states or outside continental United States meal rates for those working in Hawaii or Alaska. By using the government provided meal rates and procedures, qualified tax deductions will be approved. Ask a tax professional if you are qualified.

For a more detailed discussion on Revenue Procedure 96-64, Notice 95-50, and/or the 1997 tax act, contact your tax professional, visit **WWW.WWERKS.COM/CLIENTS/MKCPA** on the web or call (800) 728-1040.

Air traffic controllers may also safely take an income tax deduction for the approximate \$6,000 cost of acquiring a private and/or instrument pilot license. Controllers who already have a pilot's license can deduct the cost of some of their pleasure flying. Stand by for further information in the next issue of *The Air Traffic Controller*.

Martin Kapp is a certified public accountant in California; a credentialled college tax and accounting instructor at Pepperdine University and Los Angeles City College; licensed tax specialist by the Internal Revenue Service (E.A.); and a former IRS tax auditor. He has published several articles on aviation related tax issues and is an FAA approved speaker/lecturer. Kapp is also a licensed pilot.

Controller Viewpoint continued from page 5

THIS MONTH'S QUESTION

The National Civil Aviation Review Commission report recommends massive facility consolidation to save money and make the Federal Aviation Administration more efficient. An example is the proposed Potomac TRACON which will combine four air traffic facilities in the Washington, D.C., area. How do you think facility consolidation will affect the air traffic system?

Selected answers will appear in a future issue March issue of *The Air Traffic Controller*. Send all responses to Kelly Kennai at the national office by U.S. mail, email (kkennai@natcad.org), or fax (202/659-3991) by the 25th of each month. Please include name and facility with responses.

■ Four air traffic facilities in the Washington, D.C., area will become one in a move the Federal Aviation Administration says has potential to produce significant efficiency and safety benefits for users of major airports serving the nation's capital.

The new Potomac TRACON will consolidate the airspace responsibilities, management functions, automation and controller work forces of existing TRACONs at Dulles International Airport, Washington National Airport, Baltimore-Washington International Airport and Andrews Air Force Base.

"A single control center for the Washington metropolitan area will let our controllers handle arriving and departing traffic much more efficiently," said FAA Administrator Jane F. Garvey in a recent press release. "Having this 'seamless' airspace will help us meet the ever-growing demand for air traffic services while maintaining today's high safety standards."

NATCA Executive Vice President Randy Schwitz says the consolidation may streamline efficiency, but issues such as staffing and pay must still be evaluated.

■ The national office received several calls from locals looking for their dues rebate checks. Major computer and printer problems prevented them from being sent on time, but they are now fixed. The checks were put in the mail Jan. 5 and 6, so if a check hasn't arrived, it's on its way.

■ NATCA's newest bargaining unit members are signing up with full force. To date, approximately 200 Federal Aviation Administration engineers have joined NATCA.

■ A comment in the Nov. 7 issue of *Federal Times* inadvertently offended members of the Professional Airways Systems Specialists. In a response, NATCA President Mike McNally said, "It is in the best interest of both unions to maintain a positive and constructive relationship, as well as respect for each other's professionalism. PASS members play a truly significant role in making this country's aviation system safe and controllers appreciate and understand the skill with which they do their jobs. By working together, our two unions can accomplish individual objectives and mutual goals. We must both strive to do so."

■ Aviation enthusiasts can quench their thirst for information on their favorite subject with the launch of a 24-hour aerospace-related television service on April 2. *Wingspan: Air and Space Channel* will include news and current events programming as well as historical, educational and entertainment features.

Initially, *Wingspan* will be distributed via

satellite to viewers in North America and Europe. Media General Cable in Fairfax County, Va., is the first announced U.S. distributor of the service. The channel will be available to a worldwide audience within 14 months of its kick off.

Wingspan is best known as the producer of the popular *Wings* series on The Discovery Channel. The company is the world's largest producer of aviation-related television, with programming seen on The Discovery Channel, Discovery Europe, The History Channel, Arts and Entertainment, PBS and France's Canal Plus. To date, *Wingspan* has produced programs translated into 11 languages and seen by millions of viewers in 39 countries around the world. *Wingspan's* news division has played a major role in aerospace television news coverage, producing weekly shows seen throughout the United States in more than 10 million homes.

■ Controller Don Oliviera, Binghamton Tower, is the proud papa of a world-class athlete. Oliviera's daughter Nicole, 14, placed second in the French Alps in her first international luge competition. She is among 12 girls, ages 14 to 16 who are candidates for the U.S. Junior Team. Based on her performance last year, and in pre-season training, Oliviera was one of three girls chosen from the 12 to compete on the European Junior World Cup circuit which culminates in late January with the Junior World Championships in Latvia.

■ Everyone with e-mail is bombarded by countless jokes, stories and other oddities on the internet. A list of new words for the '90s, sent around late last year, actually included phraseology attributed to controllers. "*Midair passenger exchange*: grim air traffic controller-speak for a head on collision. A midair passenger exchange is quickly followed by *aluminum rain*."

■ Golfers should save March 2 and 3 for the Las Vegas Tower Golf Classic. The tournament is played at the Badlands Golf Club, a fun and exciting desert course with many interesting challenges. This year's entry fee is \$220 per person. Call for hotel reservations now, there is a NASCAR race nearby the day before. Deadline for entries is Feb. 14. For an official entry form, contact Ron Masse via email at OOneputt@aol.com or call him at 702-436-0177.

■ NATCA's release distributed by the North American Precip Syndicate, *How to make air travel safer*, generated 484 newspaper articles in 30 different states with a readership of 33,248,880.

Based on the 1997 clips, the article appeared in 25 of the top 50 markets, 35 of the top 100 markets and 55 of the top 300 markets. The cost of buying space with this much exposure would have been \$123,413.19.

New ULP Regulations

New unfair labor practice regulations effective Oct. 1, 1997, do not change current filing procedures, yet they do alter the pre-hearing stages after a complaint is issued.

The Federal Labor Relations Authority transferred control of ULP hearings from the regional director to the administrative law judge, giving him or her control over amendments, motions, and subpoenas; in other words, making him or her the decision maker, as well as the sole judge throughout the case.

New regulations also require pre-hearing disclosure to foster a more open presentation of evidence. Information, defenses and remedies must be exchanged 14 days prior to the hearing and disclosed to the administrative law judge to exhibit the facts and allow a more open delivery of evidence presented.

DSR update

When NATCA asked for negotiations on Display System Replacement training and transition issues in early November, the Federal Aviation Administration ignored the request, but then proceeded to send an Article 7 (change in working conditions) notification the following month. Negotiations were scheduled for December, but the FAA canceled the day before the meeting. At press time, the meeting was tentatively rescheduled for the week of Jan. 12.

Locals should not take part in DSR negotiations until an agreement is reached at the national level. At that time, local bargaining over those issues should be driven by the agreement between NATCA and FAA. Center facility representatives should have notified facility managers of NATCA's position.

New memoranda of understanding

Two memoranda of understanding were signed in December. The first concerns the FAA's implementation and deployment of the National Airspace

System upgrade A4e2.1, and the second addresses the January 1998 pay increase for air traffic control specialists. See the labor relations home page (<http://home.natca.org/privateweb/laborrelations/>) for the full text, or contact Shannon Grant in the national office for a copy.

ARTSIIE training to begin soon

Training for the Automated Radar Terminal System IIE project will soon begin in Pensacola and Atlantic City, the first facilities to receive the new equipment. The Federal Aviation Administration responded to many of NATCA's concerns regarding the upgrade from ARTSIIA. The upgrade will make the equipment compatible with ARTSIII until the Standard Terminal Automation Replacement System project is complete.

Contract tower update

NATCA members ratified the collective bargaining agreement between the union and Robinson-Van Vuren and Associates, Inc. by an overwhelming 90 percent. The contract took effect Jan. 1, 1998, and will remain in effect for two years.

After almost a year in negotiations, NATCA and Midwest ATC Service, Inc. are approaching agreement for a first collective bargaining agreement between the parties. Company representatives were in Washington Jan. 25, to sign a tentative agreement to be reviewed by NATCA members employed by the company for ratification. The contract could take effect as early as March.

NATCA and Barton ATC International, Inc. held their first negotiating session in Philadelphia the first week in December. The company is approaching its new relationship with the union in a very positive manner and a completed contract is expected by spring. The next bargaining session is scheduled for late January in Phoenix, Ariz. NATCA represents controllers in Barton's Molokai, Hawaii, Glendale and Williams Gateway, Ariz., and Hailey, Idaho, towers.

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Bulletin Board

February

1-6, NATCA Southwest Region, 11th Annual Skifest, Summit County, Colo.

9-11, National Executive Board leadership training, Atlanta, Ga.

19, National arbitration, disreputable and disorderly conduct.

22-25, *NATCA in Washington: Campaign for the Future*, Washington, D.C.

27, National arbitration, medically disqualified employees.

27, National arbitration, staffing the "A" side position.

March

2-3, 11th annual Las Vegas Tower Golf Classic

9-12 NATCA Safety and Technology Conference, Crystal City, VA.

12, National arbitration, official time.

30-April 3, 37th annual IFATCA Convention, Toulouse, France.

April

8, National arbitration, PATCO rehires pay rate.

23, Arbitration in the Northwest Mountain Region, shift change.

May

8, Proposed constitutional amendments due to the national office.

19-20, Communicating for Safety Conference, Orlando, Fla.

25, Memorial Day, office closed

September

5-9, NATCA 1998 Biennial Convention, Seattle, Wash.

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