

КАРМАННОЕ ЧТЕНИЕ НА АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

Arthur Hailey

AIRPORT

Артур Хейли

АЭРОПОРТ

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Город, где находится крупнейший аэропорт, не-
ожиданно накрывает снежный буран, поэтому все
службы работают в экстренном режиме. Переживания
и конфликты героев, находящихся взаперти, по своей
силе оказываются сравнимы со штормом, бушующим
снаружи.

Для удобства читателя текст сопровождается ком-
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AIRPORT
by Arthur Hailey

PART ONE

6:30 P.M. — 8:30 P.M. (CST)

1

AT HALF-PAST SIX on a Friday evening in January, Lincoln International Airport, Illinois, was functioning, though with difficulty, because of the meanest, roughest winter storm in half a dozen years. The storm had lasted three days.

A United Air Lines food truck, loaded with two hundred dinners, was lost in snow somewhere on the airport perimeter. A search for the truck in storm had so far failed.

Out on the airfield, runway three zero was out of use. It was blocked by an Aéreo-Mexican jet—a Boeing 707. Its wheels were deeply mired in the ground beneath snow.

In the main passenger terminal, chaos predominated. Terminal waiting

areas were jammed with thousands of passengers from delayed or canceled flights.

The wonder was, Mel Bakersfeld, airport general manager, reflected, that anything was continuing to operate at all.

At the airport, maintenance snow crews were nearing exhaustion. Within the past few hours several men had been ordered home over-fatigued.

At the Snow Control Desk near Mel, Danny Farrow—at other times an assistant airport manager, now snow shift supervisor—was calling Maintenance Snow Center by radiophone.

“We’re losing the parking lots. I need six more Payloaders and a banjo team.”

“Sure, sure. Six more Payloaders. We’ll get ‘em from Santa Claus.” A pause, then more aggressively, “Any other stupid notions?”

Glancing at Danny, Mel shook his head. He recognized the speakerphone voice as belonging to a senior foreman who had probably worked continuously

since the present snowfall started. Usually, after a snow-fighting winter, airport maintenance and management had a party, which they called “kiss-and-make-up night”. They would certainly need one this year.

Danny said reasonably, “We sent four Payloaders after that United food truck. They should be through, or almost.”

“They might be—if we could find the truck.”

“You haven’t located it *yet*?”

“Listen, do you birds in the penthouse have any idea what it’s like out on the field? Maybe you should look out the windows once in a while.”

Mentally, Mel Bakersfeld filtered out most of the exchange, though he was aware that what had been said about conditions away from the terminal was true. And removing snow from the airport’s operating area was equal to clearing seven hundred miles of highway.

The maintenance foreman’s voice came on the radiophone again. “We’re

worried about that truck too, Danny. The driver could freeze out there.”

Mel said, “That United flight took off, didn’t it? Without food.”

“I hear the captain told the passengers it’d take an hour to get another truck, that they had a movie and liquor aboard, and the sun was shining in California. Everybody voted to get the hell out. I would, too.”

Mel nodded, resisting a temptation to direct the search himself. Action would be a therapy. At the same time, Danny was already doing the right thing — intensifying the truck search. The missing driver must be saved first.

Between calls, Danny warned Mel, “We’ll hold up all the other food trucks till we find the guy.”

Mel nodded. There would be a flood of protests when other airlines realized their food trucks were not getting through.

With one hand, Danny was using a red telephone; with the other, leafing through emergency orders—Mel’s

orders for occasions such as this. The red phone was to the airport's duty fire chief.

"And when we locate the truck, let's get an ambulance out there. But better not go until we know where exactly. We don't want to dig you guys out, too."

The sweat was gleaming on Danny's balding head. Mel was aware that Danny disliked running the Snow Control Desk and was happier in his own department of airport planning, discussing aviation's future. Such things were comfortably projected well ahead, with time to think. Just as there were people who lived in the past, Mel thought, for Danny Farrows, the future was a refuge. But, unhappy or not, now Danny was coping.

Mel picked up a direct line phone to Air Traffic Control.

"What's the story on that Aéreo-Mexican 707?"

"Still there, Mr. Bakersfeld. They've been working a couple of hours trying to move it. No luck yet."

That trouble had begun when an Aéreo-Mexican captain, taxiing out for takeoff, mistakenly passed to the right. Unfortunately, the ground to the right had a drainage problem. Within seconds of its wrong-way turn, the hundred and twenty ton aircraft was deeply mired in the mud.

When it became obvious that the aircraft could not get out, loaded, under its own power, the passengers were disembarked and helped to hastily hired buses. Now, more than two hours later, the big jet was still stuck, its fuselage and tail blocking runway three zero.

“Right now we’re holding ten flights for taxi clearance, another dozen waiting to start engines.”

It was a demonstration, Mel reflected, of how urgently the airport needed additional runways and taxiways. For three years he had been urging construction of a new runway to parallel three zero, as well as other operational improvements. But the Board of Airport

Commissioners, under political pressure from downtown, refused to approve.

“The other thing,” the tower watch chief said, “is that with three zero out of use, we’re having to route takeoffs over Meadowood. The complaints have started coming in already.”

Mel groaned. Though the airport had been established long before the community, Meadowood’s residents complained bitterly about noise from aircraft. Eventually, after long negotiations involving politics and publicity, the airport had conceded that jet takeoffs and landings directly over Meadowood would be made only when essential in special circumstances.

Moreover, it was also agreed that aircraft taking off toward Meadowood would—almost at once after becoming airborne—follow noise abatement procedures. This produced protests from pilots, who considered the procedures dangerous. The airlines, however, had ordered the pilots to conform. Yet Meadowood residents were still protesting,

organizing, and planning legal harassment of the airport.

“How many calls have there been?”

“Fifty at least, we’ve answered; and there’ve been others we haven’t.”

“I suppose you’ve told the people who’ve called that we’ve a special situation—the storm, a runway out of use.”

“We explain. But nobody’s interested. Some of ‘em say that problems or not, pilots are still supposed to use noise abatement procedures.”

“If I were a pilot, neither would I.”

“I guess it depends on your point of view. If I lived in Meadowood, maybe I’d feel the way they do.”

“You wouldn’t live in Meadowood. You’d have listened to the warnings we gave people, years ago, not to build houses there.”

“I guess so. By the way, one of my people told me there’s another community meeting over there tonight.”

“Whatever they are planning,” Mel predicted, “we’ll hear about it soon.”

Changing the subject, Mel inquired, “Is my brother on duty tonight?”

“Affirmative. Keith’s on radar watch—west arrival.”

West arrival, Mel knew, was one of the tough, tense positions in the tower. It involved supervising all incoming flights in the west quadrant. “Is Keith all right?”

There was a slight pause before the answer. “Yes, he is. I wish I could let him take things easier. But we’re short-staffed and everybody is under the gun.” He added, “Including me.”

“I know you are, and I appreciate your watching out for Keith the way you have.”

“Well, in this job most of us have combat fatigue at one time or another. When it happens we try to help each other.”

“Thanks.” The conversation had not eased Mel’s anxiety. “I may drop in later.”

“Right, sir.” The tower chief hung up.

The “sir” was strictly a courtesy. Mel had no authority over ATC. But

relationships between controllers and airport management were good, and Mel saw to it they stayed that way.

Any airport was an odd complexity of overlapping authority. No single individual had supreme command, yet no segment was entirely independent. As airport general manager, Mel was closest to an over-all authority, but there were areas where he knew better than to intrude. Air Traffic Control was one, airline internal management another.

Mel remembered about the note delivered to him fifteen minutes before.

M -

Thought shd warn u—airlines snow committee (on demerest's urging ...why does your bro-in-law dislike you?) preparing critical report becos run-ways & taxiways snow clearance inefficient... report blames airport (meaning u) for flight delays... also claims 707 wouldn't have stuck if taxiway plowed sooner, better ... and

*where are you?... buy me coffee
soon.*

luw t

The “t” was for Tanya—Tanya Livingston, passenger relations agent for Trans America, and a special friend of Mel’s. Mel read the note again, as he usually did messages from Tanya, which became clearer the second time around.

The Demerest in the note was Captain Vernon Demerest, also of Trans America. As well as being one of the airline’s more senior captains, Demerest was a campaigner for the Air Line Pilots Association, and, this season, a member of the Airlines Snow Committee at Lincoln International.

Vernon Demerest also happened to be Mel’s brother-in-law, married to Mel’s older sister, Sarah. However, there was little cordiality between Mel and his brother-in-law, whom Mel considered conceited and pompous. Others, he knew, had the same opinion.