



AIRWAY BILL'S BACKPAGE



HE PRETENDS TO KNOW WHAT HE'S TALKING ABOUT



60 Seconds with...

JOHN BATTEN

A record business as a teenager resulted in a career in the air cargo industry lasting over 35 years across the express, airline and cargo handling sectors. He joined WFS in 2015, taking the role of EVP for Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia in 2017. He spoke to Air Cargo Week about how the industry has (and has not) changed, the future of WFS and supporting Chelsea.

ACW: You have over 35 years' experience in senior positions in the aviation industry. In that time, what has changed for the better and what has changed for the worse?

Batten: I have got older and wiser realising that this business doesn't like change or fails to implement changes through a lack of systems or trust. Today we still do not have a universal cargo measurement system or e-AWB and systems still do not talk to each other. It is amazing really as one of my first jobs was with an integrator/express operator and the airlines and forwarders were all fearing them. In reality, the forwarder was actually faster but couldn't prove it. Today, the Amazons of this world are challenging the integrators when the freight forwarders thought they were the gods, so a full circle transition. Because time stands still, technology will overtake you.

ACW: As WFS EVP Europe, Middle East, Africa & Asia, how much of this territory can you actually visit in a year?

Batten: All and more. I have a management team that I trust and rely on them a fair deal. I am not the one that makes the difference although it is always nice to visit an operation and meet the people.



ACW: As EVP EMEAA Cargo, is there anything left for you to learn?

Batten: I learn every day and never underestimate your learning potential. We have some great people in this business and optimisation and technology are 'forever' learning situations.



ACW: Any surprises since you have become EVP?

Batten: The biggest surprise about this business is its inability to move forward as fast as it should. It is very frustrating. We work years on improving technology such as Cargo2000/CargoIQ and people still don't see the real benefits. WFS is working on a new dashboard to allow airlines to drill down on our handling performance to address operational problems and improve overall quality, which will go a long way towards supporting the airlines' performance statistics.

ACW: What do you see as the key requirements to get the most from your staff?

Batten: I try and be a leader rather than manager and as such people are empowered to run the business. I am there to support them. I try to work on honesty and trust! It is good to

incentivise people on performance so they go the extra 10 miles to deliver.

ACW: In terms of WFS, what are the main opportunities you see over the next five years?

Batten: We are about to put a team together to deliver Project 2022, which will be totally different to what a handler has delivered in the past. It captures all suggestions our customers have made over the last few years, and then adds some more. It will be innovative and I also want to be in a position to deliver the first parts in 2020.

ACW: What's the most interesting thing about you that we wouldn't learn from your CV alone?

Batten: It wouldn't be interesting if I told you!

ACW: We finish the interview and you step outside the office and find a lottery ticket that ends up winning £10 million. What would you do?

Batten: Collect the winnings and go back to work. I would still be doing this if I won £100 million.

ACW: Rugby or football?

Batten: I love both and have the ability to watch them together as Rugby is more about the national country view. My football team is Chelsea so I have no expectations these days.

ACW: What was the last film you saw?

Batten: The Darkest Hour - great film, and prior to that Dunkirk was so very inspiring.

ACW: What did you want to be when you grew up?

Batten: I had a record business at 16 and got into airfreight and express through this business looking for innovation to sell my records before my competitors, so I didn't expect to grow up into this field but it is the most enjoyable area to work and this is my second time around.

ACW: Steak or spaghetti?

Batten: Steak.

ACW: Fish & chips or chicken tikka masala?

Batten: Both, I have a passion for fish & chips whenever I am back in London but also adore Indian food, which is easier to get worldwide these days, although not always as spicy as I like!



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