

Trip to China, 11/30-12/6/01

Well, the purpose of this trip was to break in the new leader for the Joint Air Traffic System (JATS) program Boeing has had with the Chinese for the last 8 years. I had been the leader for the last 3 years or so, but since I moved from Air Traffic Management, a new leader had to be appointed. Note: I just bought a new digital camera and so I've integrated a few pictures into this report.

We have traditionally taken Horizon Airlines to Vancouver and then a direct Air Canada flight to Beijing. It was an easy transfer, with about a two hour layover. It was probably an inauspicious start, but the new security measures introduced since 9/11 made our travel a little less convenient. I was "selected" for an extra security screening by Horizon Airlines. That meant that I got physically searched just prior to boarding and my hand carry-on stuff gone through. Not too much of a hassle compared to what happened later. When we got to Canada, we found out that we had to "enter the country". That meant we had to stand in line for immigration and go through customs. It was a big hassle. I think next time we'll go through Narita in Japan. To top it off, someone was in my seat (because they wanted to sit next to a travel mate. I said, "fine" and moved to their seat, but the person next to me was a woman who must have weighed 400 pounds. She took up all of the room. My heart goes out to folks like her. It was obvious that she didn't eat her way into that situation, it's just the way it was. When she slept, she "encroached" on my space, but that was okay. I talked to her and went out of my way to be nice to her. God probably put me there in order to make her feel comfortable. It was inconvenient, but I didn't mind being her seat mate. Oh, and the food sucked. I had to get off of my diet as the only edible food was the rolls. They made a salad and put it on preserved ostrich. I've had ostrich and it's okay, but this was inedible. Nobody ate it.

Well, it was stinking cold in Beijing. As soon as we got off of the airplane, we could smell the coal being used for heat. It makes the city quite smoggy, even then they don't allow the burning of coal near the city center. I was traveling with Ray Zazzetti, Kent Fisher, and Charlie Gu. Charlie had been born and raised in Beijing. We were met by his younger brother (who had enough pull to get through security and meet us at baggage claim). He drove us to our hotel. (Note: Charlie's dad was a professor and must have been pretty high placed in order to have more than one child without getting punished. Charlie was sent to his grandparents to be raised when his brother was born and so the professor was smart enough not to flaunt his defiance of the one child rule.) Now even though I said that it was illegal to burn coal inside the 5th circle (inner city) of Beijing, Charlie's brother took a wrong turn near our hotel and I can guarantee that folks were burning coal.

We had a low-profile night and a day of rest the next day. We decided to take a day trip to the Great Wall as Kent had never been to China and I had not been to the Wall. As I stated, it was stinking cold. It was about 20 degrees F with a 30 knot wind. As soon as we got to the wall, I decided to buy a hat. There were a lot of shops there, I was cold, and ended up buying one for 50 yuan (about \$8). The other guys bought a little different hat and got them for 20 yuan and so I was picked on a bit...but the hat was warm.

Ray and I pleaded age and took the cable car up to the top of the wall whilst the younger folks hoofed it. I was glad that I didn't have to take any more steps than I did. It was at least as brutal as climbing to the top of Diamond head. When we got there, it was even colder. Here is a picture of me and Ray at the top of the wall.



Don't say it, I know it makes me look like a Russian. The wall was spectacular, here is another picture of it disappearing into the mists.



Whilst we were waiting for our hiking friends, we were stopped by folks who wanted their pictures taken with us. We could have made 1000 Yuan. It was great. They especially liked Ray and I because he has white hair and I have a white beard. It was fund.

After the trip to the wall, we stopped at a "Friendship Store" and had lunch at their restaurant. It was a good bit of Chinese food. Charlie said that he and his wife drive to Vancouver to get "real" Chinese food. On the way back to the hotel, we stopped at the Ming Tombs. This is a set of 30 or so tombs which were build during the Ming Dynasty (~1400 AD). Unfortunately, they had been robbed so many times, there wasn't much to see. One of the high points, however, was getting Kent on a camel so we could get his picture. This picture has made it's rounds at Boeing.



We spent the evening at a western restaurant close to the hotel. It was just too cold to go very far. The food was marginal, but okay. The next day we went to visit the ex head of the Chinese Air Traffic Management Bureau, Chen Xuhua. He is a good friend and we had a nice visit. He invited us out to lunch and we had a magnificent spread: Fresh fish, Peking Duck, fresh shrimp, and lots of other good stuff. We decided that we needed to take Kent to the open air market. We had a blast. There is lots of good stuff there and it is a kick to bargain with the shop keepers. They each have their own strategy to make the sale:

- Shopkeeper: "Will you just answer one question for me? Would you like to buy a scarf to match the hat?"
- Shopkeeper: "Please buy a shirt from me. My boss is so hard on me and I haven't made a sale today (said with a tearful expression)."
- My favorite, to Kent: "Buy a coat or I will kill you (brandishing a hanger). Here is a picture of that."



In all seriousness, the open air market is great. They open up the bidding at 5 times the actual price. You work with them, threaten to walk away, they cry, and finally you pay only 2 times the actual price and they are your friends. We have been there so many times, they recognize us and we have a great time. You could tell that the entry of China into the World Trade Organization has had some effect. There were no DVDs or CDs for sale (openly that is).

The next day, we had a meeting with Vice Minister Yuan Yuan Yuan (aka Y cubed) to tell him what we were doing relative to Air Traffic Management. We have known him for a while and so it was a good meeting. We will probably get some projects started with him, but it will take some time. Everything takes time in China.

That afternoon, we went to Tianimin (sp?) Square. That is where the freedom movement started about 10 years ago. I've been there before, but it was more interesting this time as Charlie had been a student leader during that period. He spent about 2 months sleeping in the square and organizing the students. He said that the shooting was surreal. They saw the blood and stuff, but it didn't really click that folks were being killed. At the beginning, the soldiers were from Beijing and so they didn't really crack down on the students. The Government figured that out pretty quick and brought soldiers from Western China. They had no problems with shooting the students. Charlie was lucky to get out of this. Here's a picture of Kent standing in Tienamen with the Forbidden City in the background.

We had to be somewhat careful. There was a tremendous police presence in the square due to the Falon Gung cult. They are a meditation group which has been repressed by the Chinese government as subversive. They tend to sneak out into the square, demonstrate, and get arrested. I wanted to make sure that I was aware of what was going on because if you have a camera out during an "event", it will be confiscated. Luckily, nothing was going on today...probably because it was too cold.

We took Kent shopping so that he could buy some gifts. He ended up spending about 1,400 yuan on some bronze statues. Charlie told him that was more than Charlie's yearly salary when he was an assistant professor at Beijing University.



We finally had our big meeting with the mucky-mucks. The problem was that the big Kahuna had gone to Europe and meeting him was the whole purpose of the meeting. We waited for two days and then he was called off at the last minute. We had to meet with his lucky. The meeting went okay, but we didn't accomplish much. Here are some pictures of our counterparts. The lady in the middle (Lu Xiao Ping) is very political and difficult to work with.



The meeting rooms are interesting. They look more like a living room. There are chairs around the perimeter of the room and no tables. Basically, you drink a lot of tea (w/ the leaves floating around) and chat.

Beijing has really grown and modernized. Here is a picture from my hotel room. You can see the big buildings and the smog. It is pretty impressive.



The trip home was uneventful. We had to enter Canada again, but had a lot of time to do it. I was glad to get home.

I hope this file wasn't too big for most folks, but I wanted to share the pictures.