

VFW Wants Military Exempt From Airline Baggage Fees

Aug 08, 2008

WASHINGTON — A Texas newspaper article last week about an airline charging a young soldier heading to Iraq \$100 for a third piece of luggage has prompted the national commander of the Veterans of *Foreign Wars* to ask an airline trade association for help to establish a set baggage policy for all military personnel traveling on official orders.

In a letter sent today, [\[Read Letter\]](#) George J. Lisicki asked the Air Transport Association to negotiate an agreement with its member airlines to exempt military personnel traveling on official orders from paying baggage fees on a third piece of luggage.

All major U.S. carriers currently waive baggage fees for up to two bags for military traveling under orders. However, a \$100 fee for checking a third bag appears to be the industry norm, unless you are flying first class or are an elite frequent flyer.

"I completely understand the financial constraints the airline industry is in," wrote Lisicki, a Vietnam combat veteran from Carteret, N.J., "but I also know the military traveler is an extremely small fraction of the total passengers carried. Those who wear the uniform today are a special class of citizen who enable everyone else to enjoy every liberty our great country holds dear. They deserve special treatment because they have earned it."

According to the Air Transport Association, higher fuel and labor costs increased first quarter 2008 operating costs by almost a third over the same period last year. In an effort to remain in business, airlines have raised prices and curtailed, eliminated or are now charging for a number of free inflight services, such as meals, that were commonplace for decades. Next on the target list will be movies, beverages, snacks, pillows and blankets.

Despite the higher ticket prices and reduction in amenities, U.S. carriers continue to set annual passenger records.

The U.S. Department of Transportation Bureau of Transportation Statistics reported that U.S. airlines carried more than 769 million domestic and international passengers in 2007, almost 25 million more than in 2006. Of that total were 5.8 million Defense Department passengers, according to the General Services Administration. That equates to less than

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eight-tenths of one percent of total passengers.

“I am not asking the airlines to open up their first class lounges or to provide executive perks to military travelers, although that would be well received,” said Lisicki. “What I am requesting is for the airlines to begin allowing all military personnel traveling on orders to check a third bag without being charged.

“This should not be a difficult decision to reach, but it is one that needs to be made.”