

OFF duty

CONSUMER WATCH

# Precious cargo

## Shipping pets safely to your next duty station

Stories by Karen Jowers  
kjowers@militarytimes.com

When retired Cmdr. Molly Judge moved her horse from Germany to the U.S., she contacted other horse owners to ensure she had a reputable transporter and began arranging the move five months in advance.

"Often, we in the military sort of expect the base to do the research for us," but pet owners need to take that responsibility

on themselves, she said. "You may not realize how much involvement you need to have," she said. "This is a family member. I took just about every precaution available to me."

The move went fine, Judge said. Airlines say animal deaths, injuries and illnesses occur at low rates compared with the number of pets actually shipped.

Continental Airlines, for example, has shipped about 550,000



ROB CURTIS/STAFF

pets in the last five years and reported 62 incidents of animal deaths, injuries or losses over that time. Alaska Airlines has shipped about 175,000 over that period, with 39 animal deaths.

Still, among the hundreds of thousands of military families on the move each year, some tragedies have been documented. Losing a pet is heartbreaking

for anyone, said Col. Gary Vroegindewey, assistant chief of the Army Veterinary Corps. "Permanent change-of-station moves are very stressful on the family anyway, and pets are part of the family."

But even if such incidents are relatively rare, "you want to do whatever you can to mitigate potential problems," he said.

If you're facing a reassignment move that will involve shipping a pet, consider the following advice from Vroegindewey, the Transportation Department, the Air Transport Association, the Air Force's Air Mobility Command and Continental Airlines:

**Plan ahead.** If possible, move your pet when the weather is mild. If shipping in the summer, consider early-morning flights. Talk to friends and colleagues about successful options others have used for shipping pets. Check online for reviews of airlines, and check the monthly reports of animals that were lost, injured or died on commercial flights at <http://airconsumer.dot.gov/reports/index.htm>. If you're using a commercial airline, try to get a direct flight. Or ask a friend to pick up the pet at the transfer point, walk it and give it water before the next leg of the journey.

**Decide whether your pet rides in the cabin or in cargo.** Some airlines allow small pets to travel with owners in the aircraft cabin. Pets also can travel as "accompanied



## Cautionary tales expose pet travel dangers

The news of seven puppies dying aboard an American Airlines flight in early August has resulted in a nationwide discussion of the dangers of shipping pets. Two military families shared their experiences with Military Times.

### A family devastated

Melanie Allen moved from Belgium to Alaska ahead of her soldier husband, children and pets. The Allens had made arrangements to ship the pets — a pair of 3-year-old Newfoundland dogs and four cats — aboard Continental Airlines from Amsterdam to Anchorage, with a layover in Houston, last October.

Allen hired a bus and driver to pick up the animals and drive the five hours to North Pole, Alaska.

At 9 a.m. on the day the animals were to arrive, the bus company called with devastating news: Duke, one of the dogs, had died on his flight — under circumstances the airline has never fully explained, Allen said.

Continental officials are researching the circumstances surrounding Duke's death, but indications are that he did not die as a result of Continental's handling,

said spokeswoman Christen David. Allen's veterinarian said indications are that Duke died before his airplane landed in Anchorage, although the exact cause of death could not be determined.

David said Continental's Pet-Safe shipping program "is regarded as one of the best in the business, with extensive training for animal handlers."

When transit time for animals exceeds 18 hours, she said, Continental requires a transit stop. At Houston, where Allen's pets had a layover, they were given food and water, walked and placed in the air-conditioned kennel, she said.

It is standard procedure that if an animal is ailing in any way, an emergency veterinarian is called in, David said. Such instances are relatively rare among the estimated 2 million pets and other animals shipped each year, including many of the hundreds of dogs flown to dog shows each year.

Since a change in law required commercial airlines to begin reporting these incidents, 122 dogs and 22 other pets died while being shipped as cargo on commercial flights, according to data the Transportation Department

released in July. Another 88 had been lost or injured.

There is no information on how many of those animals belonged to service members, but troops who move from one base to another over the course of a military career may ship pets multiple times.

### Gravely ill

Coast Guard wife Kendra Parks bought her Great Dane, Tucker, before she met her husband-to-be. "I didn't choose this enormous dog

so I could ship him around the world," she said.

But, she said, Tucker was worth the \$1,800 that it cost to ship him to Hawaii, and \$850 to ship him back, along with a \$500 custom-made crate. But when the 6-year-old dog arrived June 7 in Seattle on a flight from Honolulu, he was gravely ill and dying.

"He was covered in feces, blood, saliva, was extremely dehydrated and couldn't even stand on his own. He wouldn't take food or water or respond to our voices," Parks said. "He was healthy on Sunday, June 6." Tucker was cleared by a veterinarian a few

days before he was shipped. The dog had flown before, from Seattle to South Korea and back to Seattle, and then to Honolulu.

Like Allen, Parks said she had trouble getting in touch with Continental officials — until a news outlet reported on Tucker's death.

Continental officials are working with Parks on the issue. They contend the dog didn't die as a result of the transit, David said.

Allen said she still thinks about Duke every day. "My biggest dream is to get a Newf... with the bloodlines that Duke carried, so I can have a piece of him here with us again," she said. □

## INCIDENT RATES BY AIRLINE

Rates of animal incidents reported by the major pet-shipping commercial airlines compared with total domestic human passengers over a similar time period:

Airline	Passengers*	Incidents**	Rate per 1 million passengers
Alaska	78,107,704	39	0.5
Continental	182,042,159	62	0.34
Hawaiian	37,430,087	9	0.24
Delta Airlines	345,167,909	33	0.1
American***	477,168,925	42	0.09
Northwest****	206,778,234	15	0.07
United	279,718,613	17	0.06

\*Total domestic passengers in the 64 months from January 2005 to April 2010. \*\*Total reported animal deaths, injuries and losses in the 62 months from May 2005 to June 2010. \*\*\*Includes American Airlines and American Eagle. \*\*\*\*Northwest Airlines no longer reported independently after completing its merger with Delta Airlines in 2010.

SOURCE: TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT DATA AT [HTTP://AIRCONSUMER.DOT.GOV](http://airconsumer.dot.gov) AND [WWW.TRANSTATS.BTS.GOV](http://www.transtats.bts.gov).

MARCIA STAIMER/STAFF