

Low fly-by pilot leaked hit list

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A hit list of Cathay Pacific pilots shortlisted for possible dismissal during the bitter 2001 dispute was leaked by a pilot who lost his job nine months ago for a low-flying stunt in a new jumbo jet.

Ian Wilkinson, 55, one of the airline's most senior pilots, was forced to resign after flying a Boeing 777 just 9 metres off the runway on its maiden flight out of Seattle in January.

Mr Wilkinson, a Briton, was a member of the so-called Star Chamber that selected 51 pilots for dismissal in July 2001. Unknown to Cathay, he kept a document listing the 195 cockpit crew from which the 51 were chosen. Eventually, 49 were fired and became known as the 49ers.

After his acrimonious departure, Mr Wilkinson passed the list on to one of the 18 pilots who are taking Cathay Pacific to Hong Kong's High Court claiming unfair dismissal, sources told the *Sunday Morning Post*. The breakaway Cathay Pilots Union, which is supporting the 49ers' legal case after the official Aircrew Officers Association dropped it, last Tuesday sent the hit list along with a donations plea to all the pilots on it, including around 100 serving Cathay pilots.

The document has already been lodged in the High Court as evidence for the hearing, expected to take place next year, and the plaintiffs claim it contains "extremely significant" evidence that the sackings were targeted and a breach of contract.

Mr Wilkinson, who lives in Hong Kong and is jobless, was not available for comment.

He was forced out of his job after the maiden flight stunt in the US\$200 million plane, while chairman Christopher Pratt and the director of engineering, Christopher Gibbs, sat in jump seats behind him.

Investigators found he had twice before been involved in unauthorised

fly-bys over Seattle in new 777s in 2001 and last year. Cathay Pacific management has dismissed the legal implications of the document, but took steps to reassure the pilots who discovered they were on it.

Aircrew manager Richard Hall accused the union of "scare tactics" and of attempting to "unnecessarily raise anxieties". "[Since 2001] a significant number of the 49ers have been re-employed and many others have settled their claims," he said.

"It is unfortunate that the CPU has seen fit to ... unnecessarily raise anxieties ... solely, it would appear, to raise funds for their own purposes."