

She Cooks for the Clouds

Miss Lylas Kay, head dietitian for United Air Lines, plans sky meals, says Marlyn Cody

HIGH in the clouds, Miss Lylas Kay, head dietitian for United Air Lines, serves nine meals a minute to hungry passengers on UAL planes. The 1000 different menus she plans in a year assure travelers flying from coast to coast or making more than one trip a week that they will not eat the same meal twice.

Menu recommendations come each week to Miss Kay from head chefs of 10 company-owned kitchens located in such strategic cities as Boston, New York, Chicago, Omaha, Denver, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles and Portland. These kitchens keep a supply of 292 different foods and staple items to use in preparing 5,000,000 meals a year.

A student of Iowa State during the summer of 1940, Miss Kay had previously received a degree in institution management from MacMurray College, Jacksonville, Ill. She gained experience with United Air Lines as manager of its employee cafeteria at San Francisco. Her first position held after graduation was with the Hearthstone House, Winnetka, Ill. She has been dietitian for the Valparaiso, Ind., hospital and for Illinois College at Jacksonville.

Ever increasing the number of foods which may be served in the air is the goal of Miss Kay's present work in her special research test kitchen in Chicago. The first meals served on planes were box lunches with cold sandwiches since the cabins had no facilities for hot food. Then came the era when fried chicken, due to its excellent serving qualities in the air, was part of almost every meal. However, today the variety of food served on planes is, or soon will be, equal to that in the finest hotels and restaurants.

Newly designed mobile units which transport food to the planes and mechanical lifts which raise it to the cabin door have improved the movement of food supplies from ground kitchens. Inside the plane electrically heated containers controlled by thermo-

stats keep food hot until it is served. In the same way special dry cooling units keep cold food cold.

IN addition to planning menus and determining the performance of food in the air, Miss Kay tests new food products and strives to create attractive meals. In her modern research kitchen she tests suggested food combinations by preparing them herself. Often she calls in a group of company employees to act as unofficial taste testers. If they approve new foods, undoubtedly the passengers will also enjoy them.

A duplicate model of a plane cabin is Miss Kay's second Chicago test kitchen. Here practical food problems are ironed out. One such problem is more rapid serving of meals made necessary by increased plane speeds. At present a passenger can be served in three minutes, but Miss Kay hopes to cut the time down to two minutes or less. One solution is to have two stewardesses instead of one on a 21 passenger plane. Another innovation will be changing the buffet from the rear to the center of the cabin to eliminate many steps.

During the war, shortages restricted the amount of food served in the air and the necessity for carrying essential cargo eliminated heavy food containers. Now proposed transports accommodating up to 52 passengers will provide increased room and weight allotment for food service items.

Miss Kay, backed by nationally trained chefs, dietitians, home economists, research experts and designers, will continue her work to improve meals in the air.

Huge air line, company-owned kitchens prepare 5,000,000 meals a year to feed plane passengers. Kitchens serve 1,000 separate menus annually and are supplied with 292 different foods.

