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international

The Journal of Airport & Airline Security

AUGUST 2005 : Volume 11 Issue 4

ISSN 352-0148 USPS 010-807



Outright Terror:

bold and brilliant

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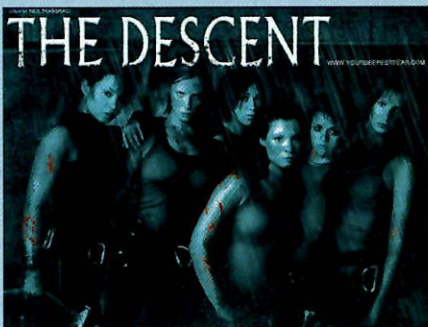
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Outright Terror: bold and brilliant

by Philip Baum



I'm proud to be British....now. I am somewhat embarrassed by my former apathy towards the country of my birth. I've never been one to fly the Union Jack, never been vocal in my singing of God Save The Queen, never supported England when they've played Wales (the country of my mother's birth!) at rugby, and never have anything positive, theatre aside, to say about London. I even, I'm ashamed to admit, backed Madrid to win the Olympic bid!

The 24 hours that commenced around lunchtime on 6th July 2005 changed all that...

I may continue to moan about British weather and I still question how Londoners could ever have elected international terrorism's dream candidate, Ken Livingstone, as their mayor (let alone George Galloway an MP), but the response to both the joyous moment of winning the 2012 Olympics and the sheer horror of the 7/7 attacks the following morning ignited, in me, a hidden pride in my country.

My opposition to the Olympics probably rested on my questioning whether holding a summer games in a country renowned for its unreliable weather was a good idea, combined with my avoiding yet another British sporting disappointment. Yet, thanks to Sebastian Coe and his team, London will host the world's premier event seven years from now. And how London celebrated the news! By early evening, even the most sceptical amongst us were patting each other on the back celebrating OUR success as if we'd been instrumental in securing the verdict.

The following morning, as we made our way to work, the mood could not have been more positive. London had never seen anything like it since the 1966 World Cup Final. Our emotions, little did we know it, were set to yo-yo in the most dramatic fashion. Initial news reports of a power surge on the London Underground were soon replaced with coverage of the atrocity London had long been waiting for.

In typical al-Qaeda fashion, simultaneous acts of terror had been perpetrated in a coordinated fashion across the capital. Three underground trains and one bus had been used as the latest transportation modes to become the vehicles of choice for suicide bombers.

But Londoners really did take it in their stride. Almost everyone I spoke to was determined that it should be "business as usual". There was no panic. No fear. No hysteria. No way that the city would be ground to a halt. London was open for business...and even the tourists continued to visit, save for a few Americans who, as is tradition, opt for the safety of home!

As the dust settled one image (see our front cover) came to symbolise for me the horror of that fateful day. Not the woman in the mask, not the empty streets of London, and not a solemn Prime Minister Blair addressing the nation with Bush and Chirac standing at his side. Rather the side view of the bombed number 30 bus, bearing the tattered advertising slogan for the film "The Descent"..."outright terror...bold and brilliant".

The irony went further still. The film itself is a follow-up to Neil Marshall's "Dog Soldiers"

"A race of fearless, hungry predators, once humanoid but now monstrously adapted to live in the dark"

This photograph was taken seconds after the blast that destroyed the number 30 bus in London's Tavistock Square on 7 July 2005. The bus driver, George Psaradakis, can be seen walking away, whilst surviving passengers on the upper deck rise from their seats. The eerie caption on the side of the bus reads "outright terror...bold and brilliant".

(Credit Matthew Rosenberg/Mirrorpix)

and tells the tale of an all female caving expedition that goes terrifyingly wrong. Seemingly the girls are trapped underground following an avalanche in the Appalachian Mountains and set out, through a maze of tunnels, to escape. They encounter, a review states, "a race of fearless, hungry predators, once humanoid but now monstrously adapted to live in the dark."

And sure enough, beneath London's streets people were trapped in tunnels having become the innocent victims of warped individuals who had spent the previous months and years living in the shadows.

What, you might well ask, has all this to do with aviation security?

Whether the target is an aircraft, train, hovercraft, cruise liner or bus makes little difference. The aim is to strike fear into the hearts of people who might use that form of transportation and to disrupt our daily lives. We'd known such an attack was likely for some time. Londoners had been warned. Yet, it was only after it had happened that people started contemplating what form of security ought to be put in place to prevent it from happening again.

Given the more stringent security checks in place at airports, it is understandable that people were quick to see what lessons those responsible for London Underground security could learn from their colleagues in the aviation industry. Ridiculous public surveys were carried out, with one indicating that 87% of Londoners would like to see airport-style baggage and passenger screening at underground stations! Perhaps it is just as well that we, in Britain, tend to avoid referendums and just allow the population



to vote at general elections when the wider range of issues being debated eradicate the silly votes!

It is simply impossible, given current technology, to screen the millions of people who utilise London Transport each day. Any attempt to do so will only create new targets in the process and grant the terrorists what they desire most, the disruption of our daily lives. Airports are transit points, large in size, for comparatively small numbers of people who arrive, in the main, well in advance of their scheduled time of departure. Train stations and bus stations are miniature terminals designed for the fast processing of customers who expect to be able to arrive and board as the doors are closing!

In a city the size of London, any attempt to do anything else will do little more than identify the odd small-time crook. Intelligence is the key. Supported, as always, by an alert general public.

The British security services have, since 7/7, demonstrated their prowess to the world. The arrests of those alleged to be the perpetrators of the 21/7 attacks bear testament to that. They will not, they freely admit, always win. At the same time, we, the

British public, are more security conscious. There has been a degree of paranoia over every unattended bag, any nervous person with a darker skin tone or any passenger carrying a rucksack, yet calm will be restored. Complacency, however, must not. And therein lies the lesson...

We know further attacks may follow but, as long as we continue with our daily lives as normal, their attacks are futile. It's us that need to be bold and brilliant not the terrorists. Our response to any such incident must not send out signals of the fallibility of the system. We must keep people on the move, stopping only those who give us cause for concern. Civil libertarian activists would prefer we put everybody through the same security processes...and that we will. All people will board flights, trains or buses without impediment, providing they don't generate any negative vibes.

I'm not ready to unfurl the Union Jack yet, nor don a T-shirt extolling the virtues of London, nor beat my breast as I sing Land of Hope and Glory, nor write poems in memory of those who died. Life carries on. Nothing has changed. If we admit it has...checkmate!