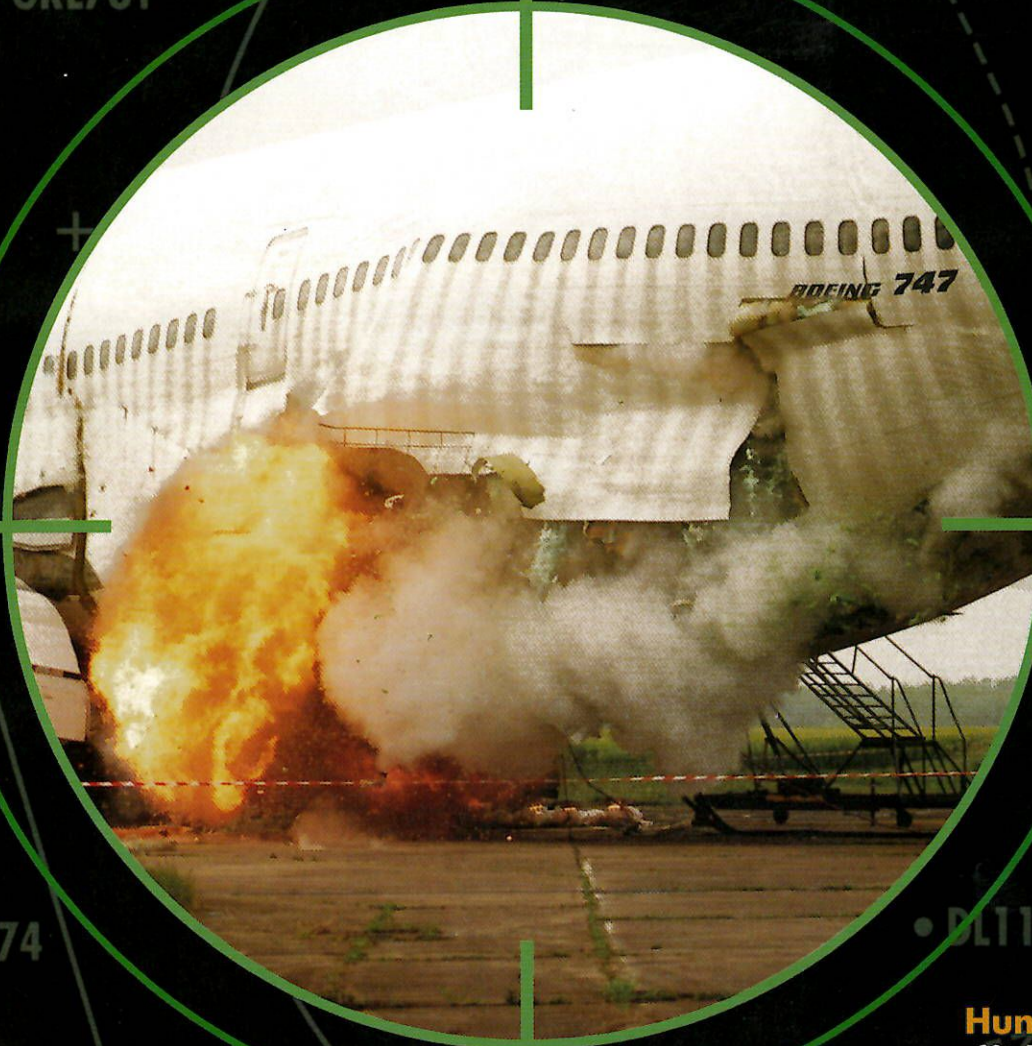


• FI326

AVIATION **security** *international*

The Journal of Airport & Airline Security

• GRL781



• LV224

• BA074

• DL11

AVIATION SECURITY AWARDS:
The Winners

Human Cargo:
trafficking by air

Annex 17:
security standards

Aircraft Hardening:
advances and prospects

Airport Policing:
training issues and challenges

ISSN 1352-0148 USPS 010-807

• RK595

DECEMBER 2000
VOLUME 6 ISSUE 6

Xavier To The Rescue

by Philip Baum

Have you ever found yourself to be guilty of air rage? I have to admit that I was close to it when returning from AVSEC World. And it wasn't the booze, the smoking ban or the claustrophobic atmosphere that caused it either...

My outbound journey went smoothly and it was not until I reached Miami that things started to go wrong.

Firstly the item of baggage, containing many of the magazines for distribution at AVSEC World failed to arrive. In itself that wasn't a problem - we'd sent some separately and we'd arrived two days before the show, enough time for the discovery of the missing magazines.

The next day I telephoned baggage services. An answerphone message informed me that all the operators were busy, but to leave a message and they would call me back. I did. They never called. I left a second message. No response. By the next day I was calling the 1-800 (free phone) number, as well as leaving more messages on the local number. 30 minutes of waiting and I hung up. I called reservations, where I assumed the response time might be quicker. I was right. I demanded to speak to the supervisor who told me to call baggage services. I said I'd been trying to. The supervisor said he couldn't help me and before I could ask another question, he put the phone down.

I returned to the 1-800 number. 40 minutes later Josh answered and is on the receiving end of a rare event - me, losing my cool. At this point I'm told the reason that they haven't called is because they haven't managed to trace the missing item. He says he'll look into it and ask somebody to call me back. We arrange for more magazines to be sent from London for the show.

Later that day I return to my room - there's a message from the airline - to call the 1-800 number. I do. After 1 hour 5 minutes I hang up.

Two days later, I've given up with 1-800 numbers and the airline concerned. I arrive at the airport for my return flight allowing sufficient time to let the Station Manager know my views. No Station Manager on site, but Xavier was. Xavier salvages the situation. He was anything but confrontation-

al; he offered me an immediate \$150 refund for the inconvenience; he gave me a pass to the business class lounge and, most importantly, he agreed that the lack of information provided was unreasonable. Xavier also confirmed that my missing item was still missing!

The return flight was marred by two, in themselves, minor incidents. At the screening checkpoint, a screener, arms crossed, rudely demanded "Boarding Pass". I showed her my pass and walked through the AMD - it alarmed. "Empty your pockets". I removed the cause of the alarm - a give away pen from Nice Systems! Oh the irony, especially coming so soon after listening to Mel Littler's lecture on Manchester Airport's "Service with a Smile" initiative. She nodded, then yawned and I went to the lounge. In-flight, I quickly fell asleep - yes, even in economy - until meal-time when I was awoken by a flight attendant who moved my chair to the upright position, whilst I was still asleep, in order to serve the woman behind me. She quickly apologised, but all Xavier's efforts were undone and I had to bite my tongue in order to avoid being featured in my own Air Watch! A small trigger, but as part of a greater chain of events, nothing short of bankrupting the company would satisfy me.

In transit, I go straight to the gate for my next flight. 10 minutes before departure there's an announcement that, due to industrial action by the pilots, the flight has been cancelled. It was a case of laugh or cry. I opted for the former and I watched a series of incompetent personnel mismanage an already delicate situation. Apparently many of the passengers had already missed a number of flights due to the strike. There was pandemonium at the counter. I took out my camera and opted to photograph the incident. No staff reassured passengers or explained what was happening. Those who forced their way to the front and were the rudest, received boarding cards for the next flight, whilst the more patient passengers had to wait even longer and pay the price for adhering to gate agents' requests for calm. No queues were created, no system was implemented, no information was given.

Tempers frayed, especially amongst those who were transiting from trans-Atlantic flights and lacked sleep. My only way of dealing with the situation by now was to treat it as a work study and forget that I was a victim.

Eventually another plane was chartered and I made it back to London. At baggage services I requested a claim form. On checking my papers, they found that the bag tag number entered into the system was that of the case I'd actually received - not the lost one. By now, I'd lost it too!

Why tell this personal tale? Well I consider myself to be an understanding individual, conscious of the pressures under which airline personnel operate and aware of the very real problems that can be encountered by every airline. However, if I, being very much on the side of the industry and generally acknowledged as even-tempered, can find myself close to breaking point, then it is perhaps all the more understandable that others, less sensitive to the practicalities of day to day life in the aviation industry, can find themselves losing their temper mid-air. Whilst training programmes generally focus on training crew to respond to such situations in the sky, there are those who acknowledge that air rage incidents are often the result of a combination of comparatively minor incidents occurring on the ground and advocate training to ground staff accordingly. I support their call. Lost baggage is always going to be a problem, but how the airline responds to the victim is going to effect how the victim responds to the airline next time he flies. Answerphones, voicemails and recorded messages can infuriate all but the most patient of people. Security screening is generally a minor inconvenience, but performed by rude personnel can set a passenger off on his journey in the wrong frame of mind. Flights can be delayed or cancelled, but disappearing supervisors and permitted mayhem only make the passenger reaction worse. Mistakes happen...but how we respond can change the perception of that mistake to anything from a minor inconvenience to an utter disaster. We need more Xaviers!

...