

AVIATION **security** *international*

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Surface to Air Missiles *a bolt from the blue*

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a security ohana**

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Team Talk

by Philip Baum

Ipswich Town were one goal down against Helsingborg, playing away and facing an early exit from European soccer – for this season at least. “There are lots of shots on target”, said the match commentator “yet no team co-ordination. Unless they start playing as a team, the game is lost”.

That’s the problem, I thought, my mind quickly switching back to the aviation security arena. We’ve got loads of solutions being promulgated but little in the way of coordinated effort.

In the frenetic attempt to reassure the flying public, we’ve started shooting from the hip in all directions. In the same way that, post-Lockerbie, we became fixated on the search for a technology that would identify explosives in checked luggage, we’re now engaged in a campaign against suicidal terrorists carrying blades.

Although it’s not the done thing to admit we failed on September 11th, that’s exactly what happened. We failed because we knew the threat of suicidal terrorists existed and we did nothing about it. We knew of the weaknesses in our security system and we took a chance. We opted to be reactive rather than proactive... And we are already beginning to make that mistake again.

I’m not criticising the manufacturers, many of whom will now find markets for products that will considerably enhance aviation security, products which probably should have been developed and deployed years ago.

I’m not criticising any individual airline, airport or any of their representative bodies. Many of them have taken active steps to enhance their security programmes and, for once, have been able to use heightened

security measures as a marketing tool.

Governments, however, do need to take a far more professional outlook. Yes, they must respond to the threat of the suicidal hijacker, but what is really needed is a return to the drawing board and a consideration of the whole gambit of threats facing the industry. One thing is certain. We face an exceptionally professional enemy and our response needs to match, and even better, that professionalism.

Al Qaeda exploited a series of much publicised weaknesses. They exploited the limitations of the screeners, the technologies in place and the absence of inflight

“...we’ve got loads of solutions being promulgated but little in the way of coordinated effort...”

security in all its forms. Furthermore they exploited our misguided belief that hijackings, and even aircraft sabotage, were no longer a threat to civil aviation... in the United States at least.

Following the anthrax attacks in America, and the repeated threats of retaliation for the assault on Afghanistan, the whole world is wondering what will happen next. But, are we in the aviation security industry considering that question seriously enough? And if we are, are we responding appropriately?

Certainly there have been a wide range of positive and praiseworthy initiatives. A few governments, including those of Australia, France and Germany have started deploying sky marshals, US and British carriers have taken significant steps to ensur-

ing the sanctity of the cockpit through cockpit door reinforcement and the worldwide increase in the number of bags being physically inspected has benefited security, if only by screener motivation.

However, to what extent have we improved in other well known areas of weakness? Take airside access control and in particular the degree of trust placed on airport-based employees when entering restricted zones. There is a huge variation in the extent of such security controls, ranging from staff controlling their own access via doors and/or gates that do not prevent tailgating to manned checkpoints

where staff are screened and positively identified. If one can enter a restricted area with ease, the positive benefits of enhanced passenger screening have been negated.

Take cargo as another example. Deemed unscreenable by many, the result is that whilst we’ve made significant steps towards achieving 100% screening of checked baggage in certain parts of the world, the majority of the contents of most passenger aircraft holds actually remains unscreened. Norman Shanks, at the recent International Cargo Security Seminar in Hong Kong, rightly described cargo as the “Cinderella of the aviation security industry”. He went on to say that “it took Lockerbie to get us to realise that hold baggage screening was actually possible”

which begs the question as to what it will take for us to apply appropriate screening techniques to cargo.

Whilst we are on the subject of cargo, we must also consider the possibility of such flights being hijacked. Often the target of stowaways and granted the reduced security requirements pertaining to pure cargo flights, it is important to remember that those aircraft can also become flying bombs with the wrong person at the controls. The same is true for private jets, light aircraft, sightseeing flights and other general aviation.

Crew security awareness training in biological and chemical threats, especially in the light of the anthrax attacks, is being addressed by very few carriers and is not even a subject for discussion by most governments. Crews continue to train extensively for ditching at sea, and I'm pleased they do. I only wish that they would treat security issues with similar respect, especially granted the extreme rarity of aircraft ditchings and the relatively high frequency of aircraft hijackings. But no, most airlines

resort to a quick training video and many fear frightening crew members by too much talk of hijacks and aerial sabotage. The reality is that crew should be part of the security web. The latest cop out phrase is that "there's nothing the crews could have done on September 11, so why train?" As if all future hijacks are going to be of the September 11th ilk.

Even in respect of checked luggage screening we need to be a little more realistic and not accept 100% hold baggage screening as 100% security. We have some great technology, yet the more sophisticated technology is rarely the Level 1 screening system. If a threat item is not detected as a possibility at the first stage, it will simply go straight to the plane. So, as with passenger screening, we need to incorporate the human brain into the screening process.

We also need to consider the security integrity of our air traffic control systems, especially as certain governments move towards the privatisation of such entities.

As task forces meet around the globe to

discuss national and international responses to the day of infamy, perhaps they would consider what a coach might say to his team when they're a goal down.

"OK guys, you're playing well. There's lots of individual initiative there. Yet, if you want to win this game, you're going to have to start playing as a team. Lone, unsupported breaks are going to have little effect. You need to consolidate your defences and move forward together. And, whatever happens, don't leave yourselves exposed to a counter attack."

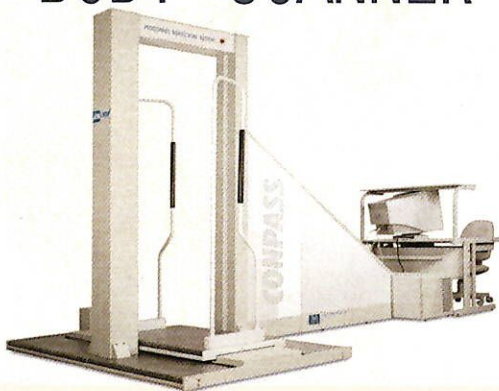
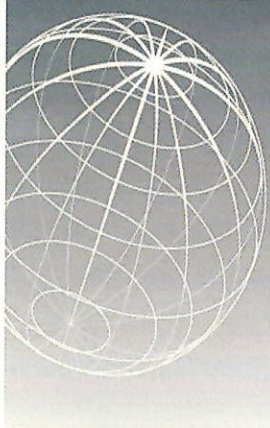
There is our lesson: to play as a team.

...and in case you were wondering, Helsingborg 1, Ipswich Town 3. Ⓞ

NOTE: There is no Air Watch in this issue. All October and November incidents will be reported in the February 2002 issue. This is due to there having been only three weeks between the production of the October and December issues this year, resulting from our participation in a number of international exhibitions. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.

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