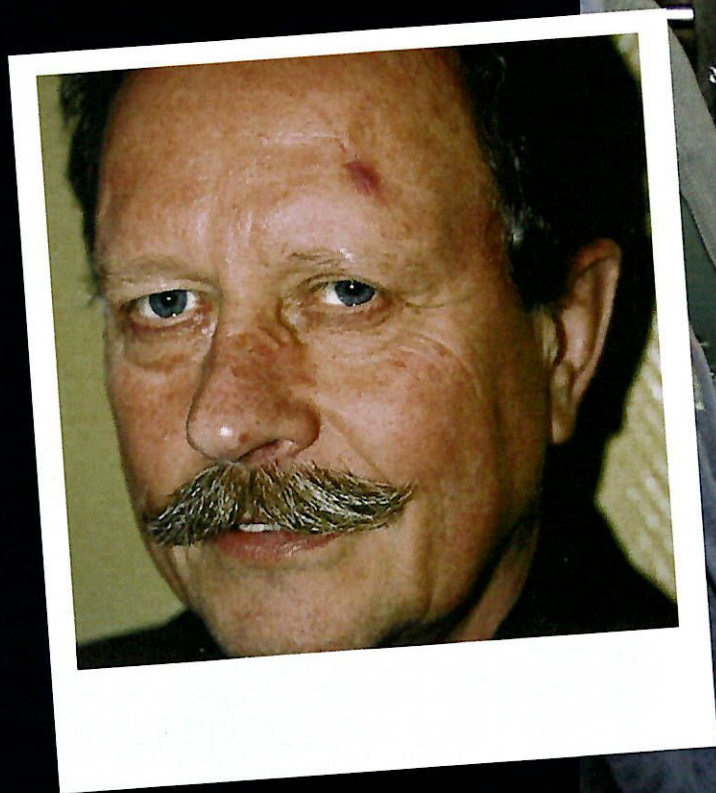


KATO AIRLINE HIJACK:

axe attack in
the cockpit



On the morning of 29 September 2004, a Kato Airline Dornier 228 departed the Norwegian town of Narvik on one of its daily flights to Bodø. Shortly before landing, a man, armed with an axe, charged into the cockpit and attacked the Captain and First Officer in an apparent suicide bid. Given that only 18 months have passed since a similar attack on a Qantas flight to Tasmania, the industry now has to recognise that such suicidal hijackers are the latest challenge to the aviation security system. They can strike any airline, anywhere, and there is unlikely to be much in the way of intelligence to help prevent such an incident. Indeed, the two latest incidents, on opposite sides of the world are a far cry from the high-risk routes we tend to focus much of our attention on. **Philip Baum** travelled to Stavanger to interview **Captain Stein Magne Lian**, the pilot-in-command of Kato Airline flight 605, about the incident...

PB: What was the actual flight routing that day?

SL: It was between Narvik and Bodø on the west coast of Norway. It is a journey that normally takes 35 minutes.

PB: How many passengers and crew were on board?

SL: There were seven passengers and we are always two in the cockpit. We don't have flight attendants given that our maximum load is 19 passengers.

PB: What types of passengers normally fly between Narvik and Bodø?

SL: Every kind of passenger. From students to old people going to hospital. Even asylum seekers who are sometimes accompanied by security people.

PB: When passengers are boarding the flight, do the flight crew see the passengers?

SL: Yes. The first officer is always stands outside and welcomes the passengers on board. After the last passenger has boarded, the first officer closes the door, checks everybody has their seatbelt fastened and only then takes his place in the cockpit. There is no door to the cockpit. The Captain remains in the cockpit and completes the load sheet during the boarding process.

PB: Was there any indication of there being anything untoward that day? What did the first officer tell you about the passengers?

SL: Well actually he said that we had a guy sitting on the right side, reading an Arabic book. We didn't think more about that at the time, even though people reading Arabic books are not the norm.

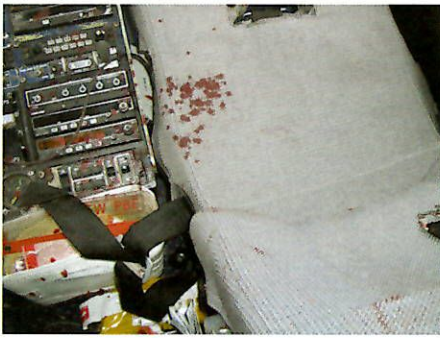
PB: Was there anything strange about this person's behaviour?

SL: No, nothing. He was sitting there in the third row, on the right side. There's only one seat on each side of the aircraft.

PB: What security procedures were in place to screen passengers in Narvik?



Facing page (right): The cockpit of the Kato Air Dornier 228 after the incident. Blood can be clearly seen on the first officer's seat (Credit: Politiet, Norway).
Facing page (left): Captain Stein Magne Lian.
Right: Norwegian policeman shows the axe used by the assailant (Credit: Photograph by Jon Hauge/Scanpix, Camera Press London)



Left: First Officer's seat. Centre: The Dornier 228 in Bodø. Right: Captain Lian exited the aircraft on arrival in Bodø. Blood staining is clearly seen on the side of the aircraft. (Credit: Politiet, Norway)

SL: There was nothing. Nothing at all.

PB: At the time of the incident what was the status of the flight?

SL: We had just got the last vectoring. We were told to turn and were cleared for approach. Just after that it happened, as we were descending from 6000 to 5000 feet.

We were actually IMC [Instrument Meteorological Conditions]; we were in the clouds.

PB: When did you first realise that something was actually wrong?

SL: That was when I was hit on my head. Maybe 1/10th of a second before that, I heard deep breathing

behind me, but certainly not enough time in which to react. I thought I was only hit once, but afterwards it turned out that he'd probably hit me two times very quickly. He had the axe in his left hand, which was lucky for me as I was sitting in the left seat. After he'd hit me, with the back of the axe, he hit the first officer, Kristian Markus Andresen, two or three times with the sharp side. I was able to grab the assailant's wrist, and I held that wrist for the whole time afterwards. He couldn't do anything more with that hand thereafter. I couldn't believe how strong I could be.

PB: What did he say?

SL: Nothing. He didn't say anything during the entire flight or afterwards.

PB: So newspaper reports about him shouting as he entered the cockpit are wrong?

SL: They are not true.

PB: From the moment you were hit, what happened?

SL: After I was hit, my head went to the left and hit the side window. I still have a scar there on my forehead. I brought my head up and I saw he was attacking Kristian. He was using the sharp side. He caused a deep wound and, as I said, I grabbed his wrist. By now he was on his knees over the centre console of the aircraft. He was bending forward on the stick of the first officer pushing forwards and to the right. Even though we didn't realise it at the time, the master switch was actually off and we had electrical trim. So we went down and it was really hard to get the aircraft up again. I tried to trim but nothing happened. I couldn't see that the master was off. The man was almost on top of me too.

PB: Could the first officer do anything?

SL: For two or three seconds he was out of it. But then he really woke

Flight Bomb Killer

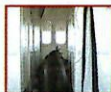
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up again. I tried to stop the aircraft rolling as we were in a steep spiral spin, heading down at high speed. I had to stop the rotation. What I had to do, as I couldn't do anything with the stick, was to use the left rudder pedal and I pushed it in with both my legs. I stopped the rotation and then I yelled, "pull" to Kristian. Then we were both really trying to pull the aircraft up, using a lot of force. I had only one hand, as my other hand was still holding the hijacker's wrist. If I let go, I knew he'd kill me. So it was a very special situation.

PB: What was the response from the passengers?

SL: The first passenger to get involved was about five seconds after I was hit for the first time. It was before we went into a dive. It was Odd Eriksen, who is actually a well-known public figure in the north of Norway, involved in politics. He is not so big, but when he saw something was wrong, he rushed to help.

PB: Where was he seated?

SL: On the left, towards the door. Probably ten rows back. He had to run the whole aircraft, not that it's such a big aircraft.

PB: There was another passenger involved?

SL: Yes, Trond Frantzen, a car salesman who has a big company in Narvik and is well known there. He was sitting with his teenage daughter. He was really afraid to leave her alone, so waited a bit. Then he realised he had to act. He was behind Eriksen and, by the time he got to the cockpit, the aircraft was already in a dive. In fact, afterwards, you could even see his footprints on the ceiling of the aircraft, such was the position he found himself in. There was no space to pass Eriksen, so he went over the top.

PB: Meanwhile you could see the ground fast approaching?

SL: Yes, it was closing in very fast. We calculated afterwards that we were descending at 300 knots and the aircraft's maximum cruise speed is 223 knots. The factory established, after the event, that the speed was far too high, but we were OK as there was not too much in the way of G-Force. This was borne out by the fact that even though there were old people in the aircraft cabin, they didn't get hurt at all.

PB: It was reported that you missed the ground by 100 feet?

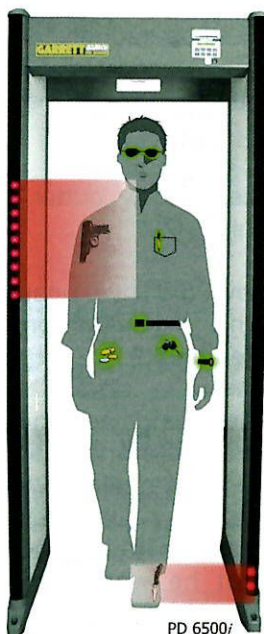
SL: I think it was actually closer than that. By the time we did start to pull up, I was afraid the tail would hit the ground. It was really low. It was as if we were in a ditch. We could see the ground on both sides of us.

PB: When the flight landed in Bodø, what happened?

SL: In the situation, we'd lost all communication. Everything was bro-

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Philip Baum (right) talks with Captain Stein Magne Lian, the pilot-in-command of Kato Airline flight 605, in Stavanger on 1 December 2004.

ken and we couldn't contact ATC. I just took the plane and went straight in to land. As we normally travel in at fast speed and a B-737 reduces speed well ahead of landing, I knew it was safe to proceed for landing and that nobody could have caught up with us. I landed close to where I could leave the runway and went straight towards the control tower. I stopped, exited the door under the propeller and waved to the control tower as they didn't know anything. They just knew we'd disappeared from the radar scope, that we hadn't squawked anything. They thought we'd crashed. And then we just came up from the sea...

PB: Where was the hijacker as you landed?

SL: On the floor behind me, held by the two passengers.

PB: How long did it take for the police to come to the aircraft?

SL: A long time. Maybe eight to ten minutes. The fire brigade came first, but they didn't understand what had happened. I told them that they had to take care of the crazy person who two people were holding down in the aircraft. Being fire fighters this was a somewhat unusual situation for them, especially in Bodø. But eventually they did go in and dealt with him. The police were still on their way from the town.

PB: What is actually known about the assailant?

SL: He was interviewed recently on TV and told reporters that he cannot remember anything about the incident. I can remember everything and I was hit! He wasn't hit and he remembers nothing! I don't know his name and I don't care. I will go to court in January and hear then.

PB: But we do know he was from Algeria?

SL: Yes, aged 34 and an asylum seeker with no identification papers at all.

PB: Why did he chose that flight?

SL: It was easy. There was no security in Narvik. There was no way he could be caught.

PB: I understand he had other weapons?

SL: Yes, a box cutter and a hunting knife.

PB: How did the passengers describe his behaviour on board prior to the attack?

SL: They said he spoke on his mobile telephone, but afterwards the police said it was only to a friend. They had a recording of the message he left the friend saying that he was leaving the country that day.

PB: In Norwegian?

SL: No, he didn't speak Norwegian. He spoke in Arabic

PB: What injuries were sustained?

SL: I injured my head and back. The hijacker was on my right shoulder much of the time, causing the nerves in my lower back to be compressed. It was the same with Mr Eriksen, who also injured his leg. Nobody broke anything. We spent one night in hospital and were released the next day. I had 20 stitches and my first officer had many more. I was fit enough to speak with the newspapers the next day, as did Mr Eriksen. One of the passengers had nervous problems afterwards but has, since, flown with me. All the passengers and crew are able to stay in touch with each other; it's a small group of people.

PB: What support have you and the other passengers received?

SL: I haven't had any but I haven't needed it. If I wanted it, it was available. Actually it was my wife who reacted a bit. As she saw me in the media spotlight, she realised just how close she had been to losing her husband and, I think, she found that quite hard to deal with.

PB: How do you feel about security in the absence of a cockpit door?

SL: I told the engineers at Kato that I should like to have a mirror installed in the cockpit so that I can see behind me. It's cheap and easy. When it's dark you can use the instruments as mirrors. Times have change. We have to act in a different way.

PB: What is your attitude towards aviation security measures?

SL: It's OK to have security, but the way we act in the western world doesn't help. We have to stop this fight and fight and fight attitude. After 11th September, America just started fighting. That's not the way to do it. We have to use our brains and try to

speaking instead of fighting. If we continue building up security the whole time, we won't be able to go anywhere. We'll end up staying at home the whole time. Now, we need security on the airport, security on the bus, security outside the home. We do need security, I agree with that, but we have to start to do more to improve the world through peaceful means.

PB: Yet this incident had nothing to do with international terrorism?

SL: I don't know. I'm not sure.

PB: But he was an asylum seeker?

SL: Yes, but he'd heard of what they'd done in other places, like on September 11th. Maybe he was a copycat, sympathetic to the cause.

PB: What is the current status of the legal process?

SL: He has been charged and could face 21 years in gaol. He tried to kill us. It was attempted murder. He tried to crash the plane.

PB: When is the trial?

SL: On the 24th or 25th January. I'm afraid that he may get off due to his mental state. He could then do it again.

PB: What have the Norwegian authorities done to improve security?

SL: A few days later they started screening. Now all airports are screening all passengers. They are using hand-held magnetometers at the moment. They have the archway metal detectors, but insufficient people to man them. By January 1st 2005, they are supposed to start using the archways, but it might take two or three months longer than planned.

PB: How quickly were you back in the skies?

SL: Three weeks. The first officer took one week more. He flew with me.

PB: What changes has the airline made to its security procedures?

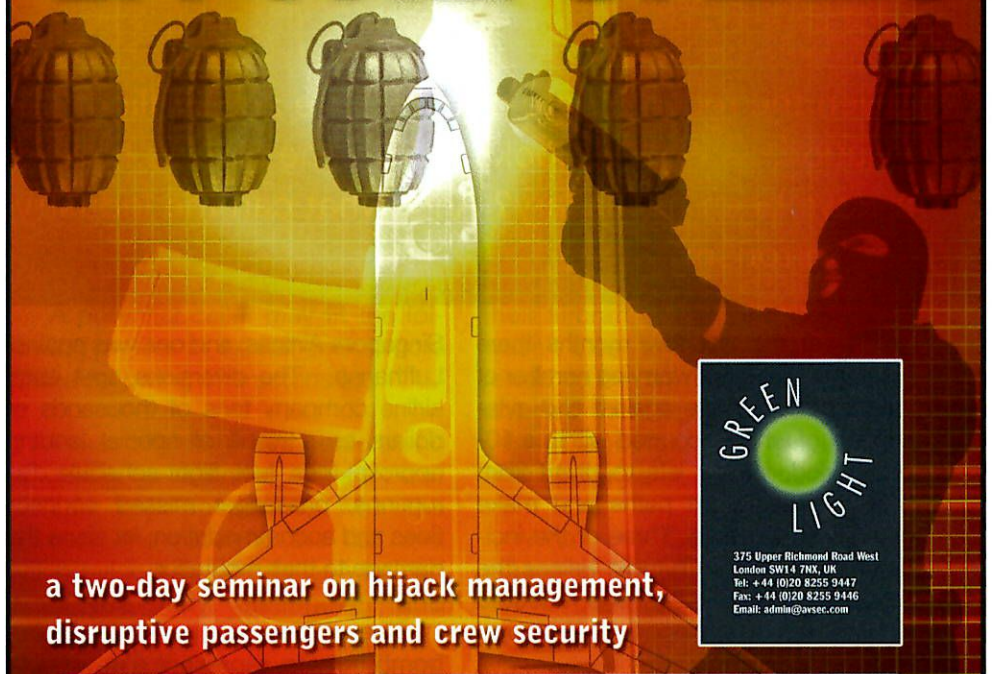
SL: If people don't have identification they can't board. We are the only carrier demanding identification on domestic routes. Even today. Also, we seal aircraft when they are left overnight or unguarded. And we check the seat pockets much more carefully now.

PB: Would you describe this incident as a hijack?

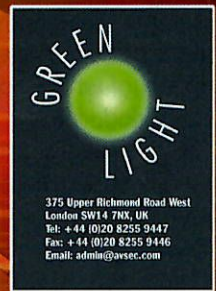
SL: No. It was not a hijack. It was an attack. He just attacked me first. He wanted to die. "I'm finished and being thrown out of this country and I just want to die", was his mindset. Why he felt the need to take so many other people to their deaths with him, I cannot understand. ■

Kato Airline, based in Narvik, operates flights between Narvik and Bodø and between Bodø and Rest. It employs 20 pilots and operates two Dornier 228 aircraft for passenger flights and two Cessna 208Bs for postal flights.

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