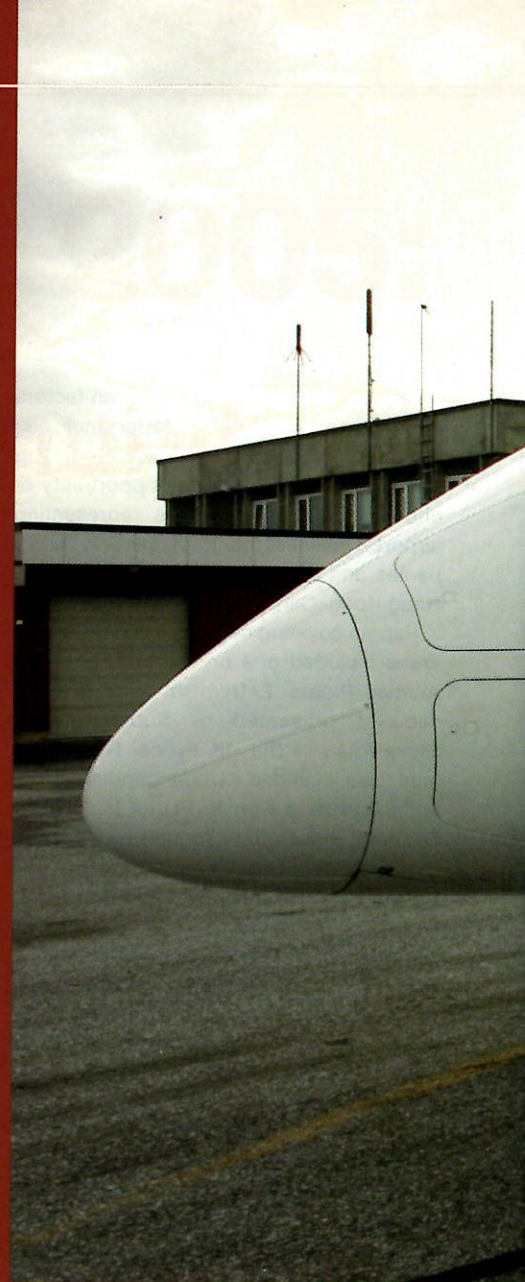


# Widerøe: security for short field operations



**T**he hijacking of the Kato Airline Dornier 228 en route from Narvik to Bodø in September last year may have failed to grasp the attention of the international media. In Norway itself, however, the story had a significant impact. The reality that such a carrier could be targeted, and on a flight between towns unheard of by almost all non-Norwegian readers of this publication, was a wake-up call to the domestic aviation industry, let alone a lesson the rest of the world could well learn.

Swiftly, after the event, and some two to three months before it was originally planned, the Norwegian authorities put into effect the 100% screening of passengers and their baggage. No longer were domestic routes to be considered "safe". Given that air transportation is fundamental to Norwegian life, offering a life line between remote settlements, Philip Baum spent a day with one carrier,

Widerøe, to examine the impact of security on a Norwegian airline that specialises in quick hops between short-field airports.

Where better to begin than Bodø itself, scene of the dramatic end to last year's hijacking. The coastal town, home to some 45,000 residents, is also headquarters of Widerøe, a member of the SAS Group.

Widerøe transports 14.5% of Norwegian domestic travellers and, last year, in excess of 1.8 million passengers boarded Widerøe flights either domestically to one of 35 destinations or internationally to five airports in Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom. With a 70-year history, Widerøe is actually Norway's oldest airline. It is also the largest regional airline in Scandinavia, employing some 1,300 personnel. Its fleet consists of 17 Dash 8-100s (seating 39 passengers), 10 Dash 8-300s (seating 50) and 3 Dash 8-Q400s (seating 76), the latter being the only aircraft to utilise two flight attendants.



The most significant impact on the carrier since the Kato Airline hijack last year has been the requirement for its passengers to undergo security screening on domestic flights. Recommended check-in time has now been extended to at least 30 minutes prior to scheduled departure. This might sound on the short side, yet given the size of the aircraft and the short distances in most airports between the check-in counter and boarding gate (a few metres in many cases), it is sufficient.

In most locations crew are screened too, yet there appears not to be a standard policy in this regard. In Bodø, for example, the crew can make their way directly to the aircraft from their crew room without undergoing security checks. Elsewhere crew were screened as if they were passengers.

I spent a typical day with the crew of one of the Dash 8-100s. Our Captain, First Officer and Flight Attendant met up with one another

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in the Bodø crewroom an hour before departure. They (and I) were to fly Bodø to Evenes, Evenes to Svolvær, Svolvær to Bodø, Bodø to Skagen, Skagen to Bodø, Bodø back to Skagen, Skagen to Andenes, and finally Andenes to Tromsø. In effect 8 flight sectors! And, if you have not heard of most of these places, nor had I until this trip...

No sooner had we arrived than the schedule changed due to a bird-strike on another aircraft in Leknes. A mechanic was needed there as soon as possible, so Leknes was substituted for Evenes. Apparently, granted the Arctic climate, passengers are used



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to sudden changes in schedule. Certainly few Evenes-bound passengers at the gate expressed any surprise that their flight had been cancelled. There was no hint of any anger.

Pre-board screening was certainly thorough, although there was no requirement for passport (or other ID) checks at either check-in or the gate. According to the Captain of the Kato Air flight hijacked last year, Kato Air is the only Norwegian carrier effecting such checks.

Our flight attendant, Kari Jakola Müller, acted as my guide for the day. Whilst security issues were the focus of my attention, what shone through our entire discussions was her pride in the airline for which she worked. Widerøe was a Norwegian success story; it was more than a pay cheque, rather a way of life and one that she was keen to promote and protect.

Kari actually lives in Geneva, Switzerland, and travels to her Oslo base for her (very approximately), one-week on, one-week off schedule.

Taking off and landing eight times a day might, for some, be an excuse for short-cuts on safety briefings and security searches. Not so on Widerøe...and I am reasonably convinced that the textbook operation was not simply because I was on board!

Widerøe operate a free seating policy, although the flight attendant does sometimes have to re-distribute some of the weight when the flights are not full. The cockpit door remains open until the boarding process has been completed.

The flight attendant has little time to relax. With most flight sectors being around 30 minutes duration, by the time the aircraft has taken off, the drinks service been effected and the cabin prepared for landing, inflight “quiet time” is extremely limited. Widerøe crew sell drinks, snacks and polar (reindeer) sandwiches and do make some commission on the sales achieved. On the ground, the same flight attendant is acting as cleaner, security cabin searcher and liaison with the ground handling personnel. It’s a multi-functional role to fulfil.



Interestingly both Kari and her colleagues made continual reference to "profiling passengers". In many respects, it's an easy task to perform on such a carrier given the fairly standard passenger types. Few, apart from I, stood out from the crowd as being different. Yet, that said, it was extremely encouraging to hear that Widerøe crew do even consider the appearance and behaviour of those passengers boarding a given flight.

Widerøe does carry cargo but not dangerous goods, and the airline plays an integral part in the Norwegian postal service.

Crew security training is taken very seriously. Hege Berg is responsible for all cabin crew training and, quite rightly, comments on the fact that so much of the training material being produced and content of conference papers presented at international symposia presupposes that airlines have teams of flight attendants working each flight. Widerøe is certainly not alone in having to rely on a single crewmember to manage every type of inflight incident.

Take, for example, the issue of disruptive passenger restraint. Whilst many advocate a team-based response, the training in airlines such as Widerøe must emphasise that the other passengers are the rest of the inflight

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security team should the need arise. All the more important, therefore, to actively identify able-bodied passengers, during the boarding process, that may be called upon.

Again, thinking back to the Kato Air incident of 2004, one must recall that on that flight there was no flight attendant, nor any cockpit door. It was left to the Captain and First Officer (who, interestingly, has recently joined Widerøe) to both defend themselves and fly the plane.

Widerøe is intent on providing quality in all areas of its operation. This is not only to secure a good name with the travelling public, but critical to maintaining its government contracts to operate certain routes in sparsely populated areas of western & northern Norway. Some routes are subsidised by central government given the importance

of air travel in a harsh climate; these routes are usually put out to tender and the successful bidder will then operate them for a 3-year period. On time performance is one factor that is reviewed and in Oslo, Norway's busiest airport, Widerøe has been the most punctual airline for the past four years.

Widerøe is certainly not high on anybody's list of potential targets for a terror attack. Then again, neither was Kato Air. What is both critically important and blatantly apparent, however, is that Widerøe personnel are not quick to underestimate the threat. Nobody is using the "we do not have that type of problem" excuse.

As John McKenzie, the airline's Security Manager, said, "We are not an obvious target, but we are under no illusion. It can happen to anyone."