

AVIATION **security** international

The Journal of Airport & Airline Security

OCTOBER 2002 : Volume 8 Issue 5

• GRL781

• LV224



Norman Mineta
U.S. Secretary of
Transportation
an exclusive interview

X-ray:
exploring the risks

Biometric Airports:
do the eyes have it?

Behaviour Pattern Recognition:
the new age of profiling

American Air Transport Security:
the year in review

Arkia's Cockpit:
a no go zone

ISSN 1 352-0148 USPS 010-807



Ground Zero Revisited

by Philip Baum

0530hrs. September 11, 2002. It was an eerie feeling. The taxi collected me from an apartment in Somerville, a Boston suburb, and made its way through the quiet streets towards Logan Airport. A year ago, others would have departed for the same airport scheduled to fly to the West Coast, but they were never to reach their destination.

I was bound for New York's La Guardia airport, scheduled to fly at 0730, almost a year to the minute after the first of those fateful flights had departed. I arranged to arrive for my Delta Shuttle flight early anticipating extensive security checks. I realised I was likely to be a selectee considering that I was travelling on a one-way ticket - and so I was. Despite that, I was offered the chance of boarding the 0630 flight. Passenger loads were, perhaps unsurprisingly, extremely light.

I was one of 11 passengers on board. We were told to use the restrooms before departure as there was a ban on passengers leaving their seats on this route. Whilst I grudgingly accept even the most illogical security measures normally, this was one measure that defied common sense and any security basis whatsoever. A true candidate for re-analysis under the "stupid rules" review.

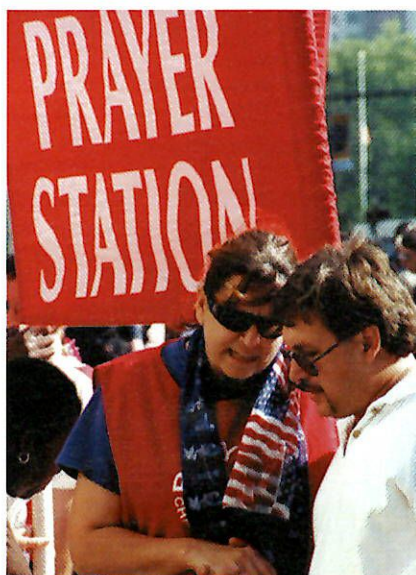
Strapped into my seat, and with the promise of warm bagels "as a special treat today" from the crew, we took off for an uneventful flight to New York.

Uneventful, that is, save for the final approach to La Guardia. In my window seat I gazed out in search of landmarks that I might identify, secretly hoping for a distant view of the Manhattan skyline. As we descended, I realised that Manhattan, far from being a distant view, was directly beneath us. A "No Fly" zone? No, we were over-flying Central Park, heading south.

Within a few seconds we were above the Empire State Building. I felt I could reach out and grasp it in my hand it was so close. Suddenly, a moment of irrational fear. Was the pilot in control of the aircraft? The cabin crew came to look out of the windows as we approached Greenwich Village and then...Ground Zero. We banked left towards La Guardia, affording me an even clearer view of the former site of the World Trade Center.

An hour later, after a cab ride to Manhattan and a subway ride downtown, I found myself standing at the tomb I had been above 60 minutes earlier - Ground Zero. The memorial service was just commencing. The mood was reflective and emotionally charged. The noisy streets of Manhattan were, once again, silent as a city paused to remember. The names of each of the victims who had died in New York City were read out one by one.

I too paused to reflect, but not only for the lives lost but on what we have done since then to prevent such a tragedy occurring again.



It is easy to criticise and many have done so unfairly. Considering the state of the aviation security system in the United States prior to September 11 2001, the achievements are truly impressive. Deadline after deadline has been met. The infrastructure for an invigorated security system is in place. Security checkpoints across the nation appear more professional. Cockpits are more intruder-proof. And, most important of all, the will is there to see the standards continue to rise.

Those who wish to publicly demonstrate the weaknesses of our aviation security system do nothing for the cause they espouse. As journalist after journalist goes "undercover" to smuggle weapons on board aircraft and regurgitate their exploits in the mass media, far from aiding the fight against terror, they are actively battling for the opposition. They succeed in further weakening public confidence in the transportation industry. They provide encouragement to terrorist organisations by increasing their faith in the fact that their operatives will evade detection. They destroy the confidence of screeners who, as a response, end up looking for the next media hack searching for an exposee, rather than focusing on the real enemy. And, perhaps worst of all, they provide an excuse for a genuine threat passenger who can, upon detection, simply say he was researching a story.

Governments around the world need to take steps to criminalise such journalistic tactics and the courts need to back up such convictions with harsh sentences.

I, like many readers, travel frequently and notice weaknesses. I'd like to think that most of us quietly report them to the security management of the airport or airline involved. I'd also like to believe that

such management personnel accept the criticism as being constructive rather than being oneupmanship. ASI frequently receives letters and e-mails from passengers with their latest sob stories about their experiences at airport X or on airline Y and some of the stories do have serious security implications. They are never published but, when deemed appropriate, are forwarded to the airline or airport concerned for their own review.

Criticism of policy is, however, a different matter. And, when it is wrong, it is our moral duty to alert the lawmakers to the fact. One of the many downsides of aviation security not being a profession, is that those who manage it, in many parts of the world, have little detailed appreciation as to the limitations on its effectiveness. And, it's these people who advise the lawmakers.

So as governments debate their strategies for combating criminal acts against transportation, re-evaluation of "stupid rules" is incumbent upon us all.

In the short time that I had with Secretary of Transportation, Norman Y. Mineta, on September 12 this year (see interview on p. 6), I was impressed by his personal desire to rid the industry of "stupid rules". (That said, I would not have included questioning passengers about their luggage in this category as they were never designed to identify terrorists, only those being used as unwitting carriers by them. And the questions themselves are not wrong, only the way in which they are asked.)

Mineta was also realistic about the threat posed and our ability to counter it. Profiling, he refreshingly acknowledges, is an essential element of the security process. The development of CAPPS II will aid in the identification of trusted passengers and will significantly redress the balance from our previous search for weapons rather than people. There is a serious risk, however, in our attempting to make the parameters of trustworthiness too wide. Frequent fliers, credit card holders and legal residents of a country can also be terrorists, as September 11 demonstrated. In our rush to provide a technology-based solution, I fear that, in poorly trained hands there will be a tendency to rely on what the computer is telling us should be



the case rather than what signs the actual passenger is presenting in terms of their appearance and behaviour. Terrorists can keep ahead of the technology but rarely their nerves.

Yet Mineta's approach is proactive and the "stupid rules" review has at least enabled us to carry nail clippers again, even if it has yet to allow us the use of knives on meal trays or the option to use the toilets on flights near Washington. Hopefully the random search procedures and trusted shipper programmes will be reviewed as part of this process too.

Classic examples of stupid rules leading to idiotic decision-making have been aplenty in this anniversary season. Take, for example, this report from Los Angeles:

An action toy, GI Joe, caused a security alert because its two-inch (4.4cms) plastic gun was considered a dangerous weapon. A British passenger had the gift in her hand-baggage. The gun was confiscated and the toy placed in her check-in luggage. A spokesman for the airport said, "We have instructions to confiscate anything that looks like a weapon or a replica. If GI Joe was carrying a replica then it had to be taken from him".

Or, perhaps, this report from Philadelphia on September 12 this year:

A National Airlines flight bound for New York was diverted to Philadelphia after a

Chinese woman stood up to use the toilet after she felt she was going to vomit. Regulations in place for the anniversary of September 11 required all passengers to remain seated whilst flying in the vicinity of Washington and New York.

Back at Ground Zero I continued to contemplate.

A year ago, I stood on the same spot unable to take in the enormity of the disaster and choked by the public outpouring of grief. Grief that will continue to affect the tens of thousands who lost family and friends that day, or who had to come face to face with the horrific scenes that terrorism creates.

In England, as November approaches, children start to chant rhymes to recall Guy Fawkes' attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament some 400 years ago.

*Remember, remember the 5th of November
Gunpowder, treason and plot
We see no reason why gunpowder treason
Should ever be forgot.*

In years and centuries to come, September 11 will be remembered in a similar vein. Whilst the last thing we would do is "celebrate" such an anniversary with firework displays (as is done in the UK - but then Guy Fawkes failed in his attack), hopefully we will be able to turn tragedy into resolve. It will forever shape our industry and our lives, but the best tribute we can pay to those who died is to remember and take every step we can to prevent future atrocities by taking a sensible, calculated, common sense approach and meeting the threat with the intelligent solutions required to combat a sophisticated enemy.

In the harsh world of economics there are other realities we must face. We know all too well the economic effects of September 11 on the aviation industry. It is estimated that passenger loads will not reach pre-2001 figures until 2004. But, there is a proviso to that... providing it doesn't happen again. ☺

Pictures: Manhattan, September 11, 2002.