

Hijacking:

Training *for* Reality

For those readers who have had the opportunity to listen to Captain Leul Abate's chilling account of the hijacking of Ethiopian Airlines flight ET 961 on 23rd November 1996 shortly after it departed from Addis Ababa for Abidjan, they will recall that he, like many other crew members who have been through the hijack ordeal, attested to the value of training in his attempts to ensure minimal injury and loss of life.

Philip Baum looks at some of the factors that influence carriers in determining what type of security training they will offer their crew members.

Training is all very well in theory, however when it comes to security (as opposed to safety) issues, realistic hijack scenarios are exceptionally difficult to simulate. Many carriers do co-operate with governments in organising full-scale exercises. Indeed I have been involved in a number of such exercises myself. Yet these exercises are more often than not geared to benefit the swat team rather than the participating airline personnel. And, a very small percentage of crew members from the larger carriers, which could be said to face the greater risk of a terrorist hijacking, are afforded the opportunity to be involved.

Some companies, such as Manchester Fire Consultants in the United Kingdom, offer airlines the opportunity to send delegates to their simulator in order to be hijacked for the day. Whilst I have yet to witness their exercise many participants have expressed that they have found the experience to be beneficial and fairly realistic. Once again though, it is generally the in-flight security instructors that have the opportunity to attend and few carriers will consid-

er sending their entire crew overseas for such training.

Exercises, be they in-house or in association with the military, police or private security companies, face three key obstacles to their being truly realistic: Threat Appreciation, Time Constraint and Attitude Towards Security.

The Threat

Mention the word "hijack" and most people conjure up images of men aged around 25 with three days worth of stubble growing on their face, bearing Kalashnikov rifles, wearing dark glasses and leather jackets or keffiyahs. In other words, we associate the word "hijacking" with terrorism and, of course, terrorists have to be male. However there are a number of anomalies here.

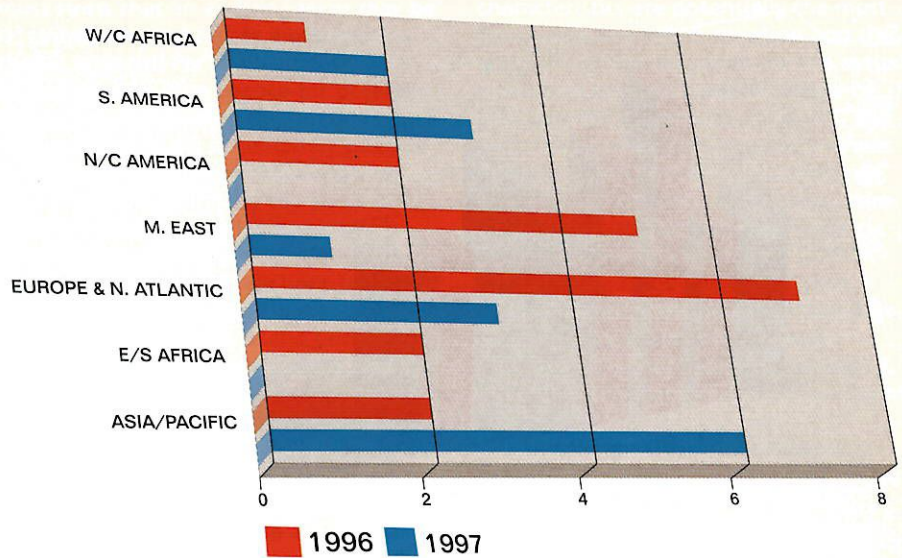
Firstly, at this time, groups like Baader Meinhof, the Italian Red Brigades, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Hizbollah have either suspended operations or chosen other means of getting their message across. Yet the film footage utilised in training courses generally

concentrates on images of Captain Tetrake with a gun held to his head at Beirut in 1985 during the 17 day hijack ordeal of TWA 847, or of the Swiss Police bundling a hijacker down the steps of an Air Afrique flight in 1987. Training appears to have been caught in some form of time warp where instead of reacting to the current threat we live in the past heydays of international terrorism.

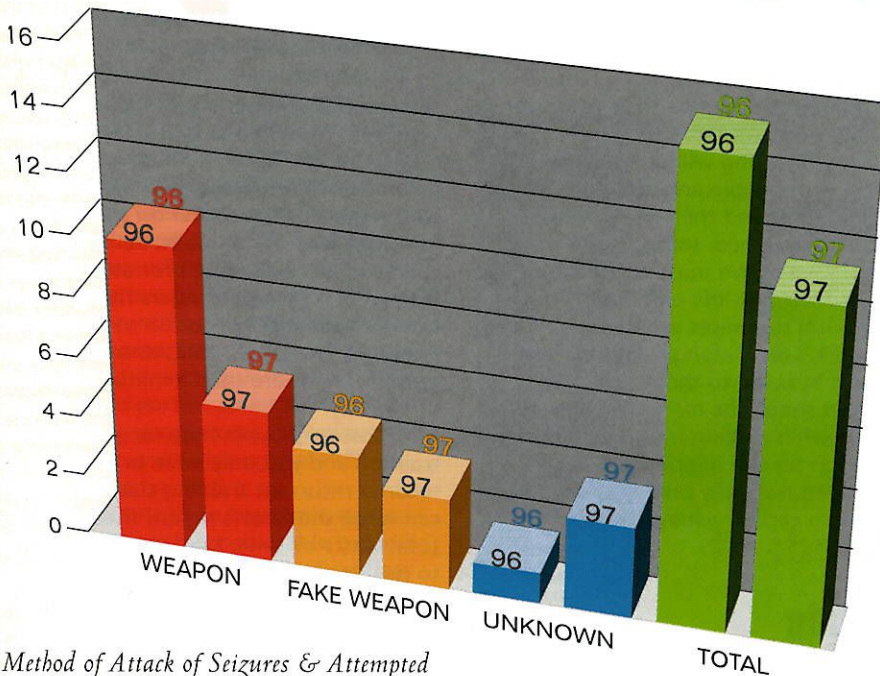
Secondly, many hijack scenarios are enacted by former military personnel, built like tanks and, obviously, male. We recreate the macho image we have of the terrorist hijacker. Yet if one actually looks at the incidents, there have been a significant number of women prepared to carry out terrorist attacks against aviation. Leila Khaled, the glamour girl of Middle Eastern terrorism; May Mansour who probably placed the bomb on TWA 840 in 1986; Kim Hyun-Hui responsible for the destruction of Korean Airlines flight 858 in 1987; the women involved in the Sabena hijacking to Tel Aviv in 1972, the Air France hijacking to Entebbe in 1976, and in the Lufthansa hijacking to Mogadishu in 1977 to name but a few. For those of you who do put

on hijack exercises for your crew, ask yourself the question: when was the last time you had a woman play the role of the hijacker?

I am not suggesting that aviation terrorism is a thing of the past and that it should not be covered on crew training courses. We do, however, need to ensure that our crews are aware as to what the current threat actually is. Terrorism still exists, however as a result of what could arguably be described as the failed (in terms of the terrorists achieving their goals and surviving the incidents) hijack incidents of the 1960's, '70's and '80's, the terrorist's modus operandi has changed. Aircraft sabotage is, perhaps, the more likely choice nowadays. Consequently the emphasis placed on



Geographical Spread of reported attacks against aviation for 1996 and 1997: still very much a global phenomenon.



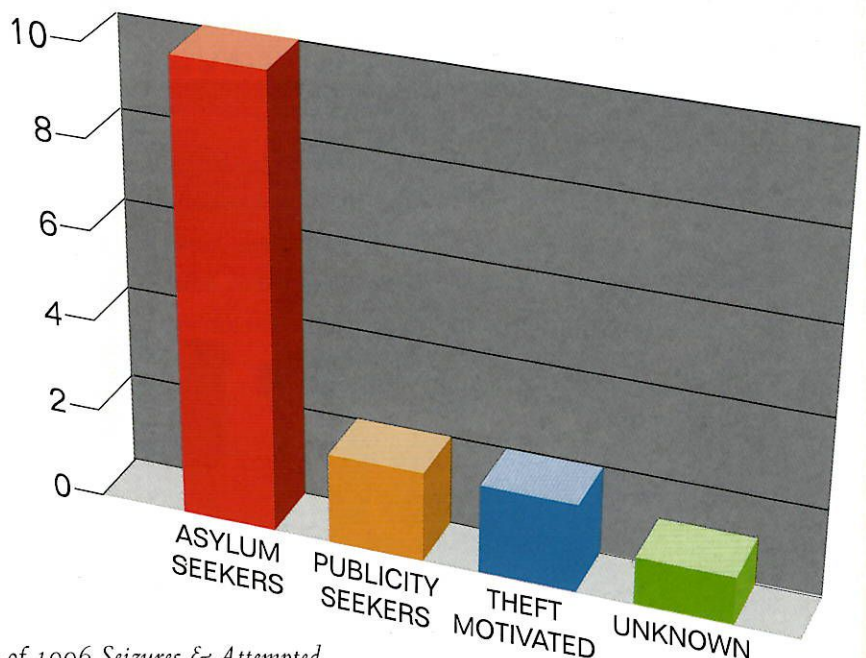
Method of Attack of Seizures & Attempted Seizures for 1996 and 1997: airport screening is geared towards the detection of arms and explosives.

baggage reconciliation, aircraft search and guarding, and security checks on airport personnel, catering, duty free and cargo is the order of the day.

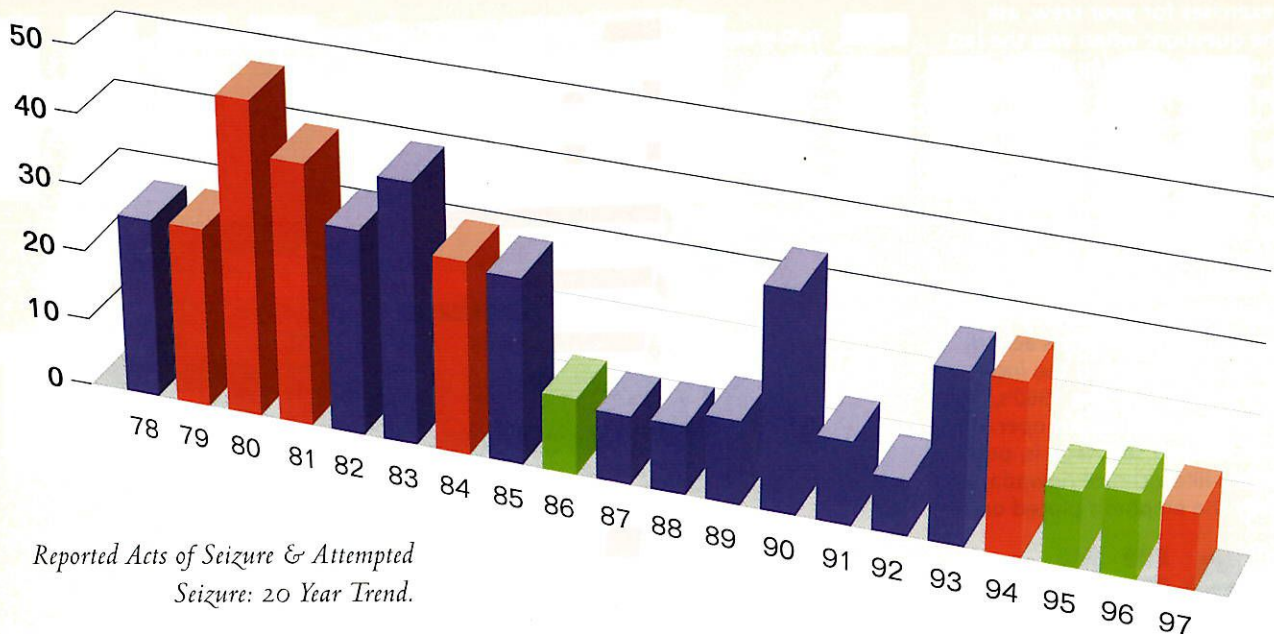
Looking at recent incidents (see illustrative graphs) we can see that attacks against aviation are a global phenomenon and that hijackings are still occurring on both international and domestic flights. The perpetrator, however, is more likely to be an asylum seeker or a disturbed individual than a terrorist.

A hijacking is a hijacking and is, no doubt, a situation that most crews hope that they will never have to face. That said, the threat posed to the safety of the aircraft by an asylum seeker differs significantly from that posed by a terrorist. The asylum seeker wants to get to pastures greener, hopefully without causing injury or loss of life to any of the passengers and crew. He, she or even they may well be poorly educated,

inexperienced fliers and lacking in technical knowledge about the aircraft and its capabilities. Providing the crew comply with the demands they can be reasonably confident in ensuring that the incident will be resolved safely within 24 hours. The terrorist, however, may well be prepared to harm or kill and to sacrifice himself (or herself) if their demands, which may well be unreasonable, are not met. In this case we may be dealing with intellectual, albeit misguided, individuals who have rehearsed and researched their plan thoroughly. One should never assume that an asylum seeker or criminal is no threat - the tragic demise of Ethiopian Airlines flight ET 961 in 1996 bears testament to that.



Cause of 1996 Seizures & Attempted Seizures: asylum seekers being the major threat and no terrorist-motivated hijackings.



Reported Acts of Seizure & Attempted Seizure: 20 Year Trend.

Crew training needs to reflect these differing scenarios in the same way that crews are taught to handle the wide range of safety and mechanical issues they might encounter mid-flight.

Time

Pilots will be able to attest to the degree of realism that a simulator can create. A normal flight plan can be programmed to be interrupted by, say, a sudden loss of cabin pressure; the scenario, realistically, can then only continue for as long as it takes to either land the aircraft or until its fuel runs out. In the case of a hijacking which can last for days or even weeks the emotions and stresses that the crew will experience will alter considerably as time progresses. Whilst the training simulator can be used for a lengthy flight, simulating a hijack usually has time constraints, especially when it comes to recurrent training. How many carriers would actually

be prepared to schedule their crews for a four day hijack exercise?

Every hijacking will differ as we are dealing with people and emotions rather than machines and their known, or rather programmed, responses to a set of instructions. We must advise crews as to what their possible emotional and behavioural responses are to the stresses of a hijack over an elongated period of time and indicate to them how such responses should be managed. This must be done whilst taking into consideration the reason for the hijacking. What would then normally take four days to accomplish can be achieved in a number of hours.

Attitude

We all hate the need for security checks. We feel our privacy is being invaded. Airlines too resent the expenditure required to implement an effective security programme. Training crew in good

customer service generates income, yet security is regarded as a drain on corporate finances. This attitude can filter down from management to those who represent the carrier on a daily basis to the general public. Security checks might well be appreciated if one flies on El Al, yet passengers flying on carriers deemed, by the "oh so knowledgeable" general public, as secure will not tolerate more than a minimal level of scrutiny.

Most employees hate recurrent training and you only have to sit in a security recurrent training class and one can sense that crews regard them as a total waste of time. Many airlines seem to pay lip service to the need for recurrent training and simply see it as an opportunity to run a video. Discussion? You've got to be kidding. Yet, this is highly lamentable as I can tell you, as an experienced security instructor, the debates one can stimulate in recurrent training classes on the year's events can



Training crew in good customer service may be an important aspect of the programme, but one should never forget that safety and security are their primary responsibilities.

be stimulating, rewarding, motivating and educational.

So, to exercise or not to exercise, that is the question? As I stated earlier, I have been involved in a number of hijack exercises, some better than others. The American ones, no doubt fearing possible subsequent legal action by willing participants, have tended to lack any physical or realistic verbal aggression of the type one would expect in the Intimidation Phase of a hijack, despite the Rambo-physique of the perpetrators. Again, one needs to clearly identify who the exercise is designed to benefit. If it is for the military then, however much the "passengers" might like the exercise to be realistic, the hijackers interaction with them is of limited importance, save for the way in which they are able to relate conditions on board the aircraft to the authorities in the event of an early release. If, however, it is for the benefit of the crew then the scenarios need to be constructed in such a way as to demonstrate the types of hijackers one might encounter: lone crazed individuals, terrorist groups, asylum seekers or the criminal. Exercises are of exceptional value as our ability to recall the necessary information in a real situation is improved by previous participation rather than theory alone. I accept that crew scheduling and financial resources may not permit the exercises to form part of an airline's recurrent training programme, however time should be found to incorporate them into ab initio training.

Exercises need to be supplemented by theory. There is considerable benefit in actually running the theoretical class after the hijack exercise as delegates can be asked to recall their memories and build up a picture of how the event progressed. Having not discussed the subject in class earlier, those playing the roles of the passengers will be able to do so more realistically and those playing the roles of the crew members will rely on their instincts rather than training. A second, abbreviated, exercise following the class discussion could then be utilised as a demonstration of some of the techniques that should be employed if a crew does have to deal with a hijacker.

In training we need to ensure that we can distinguish between the three stages of a hijack: The Intimidation Phase where the hijacker(s) seeks to establish control, The Custodial Phase where the hijacker(s) feels in control and starts to negotiate, and The Resolution Phase where the hijack concludes either by negotiation or assault.

The first and last stages of a hijack are reasonably simple to enact as they can be accomplished in a fairly short period of time. The Custodial Phase, however, causes problems as in reality it will be drawn out of quite a number of hours, maybe even days or weeks.

The Intimidation Phase is violent, aggressive and abusive, although we

must stress that an asylum seeker may be less vindictive and rather more nervous than a terrorist. For the trainees, as in reality, there is little chance for boredom to set in and providing the hijackers are well orchestrated it is genuinely possible to create fear and even frozen fear or action paralysis. Similarly the Resolution Phase can be recreated without much difficulty, however the situation is to conclude. Our natural reactions to these stages are nigh on impossible to predict.

The characteristics of the Custodial Phase, when the hijacker feels that he or she is now in control of the situation and the hostages are symbols of the cause or bargaining chips, are those of boredom, despair, communal spirit and, of course, the three syndromes which I shall return to. All of these are dependant upon time and time is what we lack in a training situation. However these

characteristics are potentially the most dangerous in a hijack situation and they are perhaps the only ones we can actually learn to deal with and be aware of, if afforded the opportunity to do so. The first three can be presented to trainees in longer exercises where participants are deprived of food, drink, sleep, stimuli, and air conditioning. From experience, however much it might seem at the planning stage a waste of time, I would suggest that the longer the exercise the more realistic it becomes providing it is professionally presented. The syndromes can only really be taught in theory.

The famous Stockholm Syndrome being:

"An unconscious natural survival techniques whereby hostage and hostage-taker establish a degree of

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empathy with each other as a result of positive contact over a period of time."

London Syndrome, also known as "Suicide by Terrorist", being:

"An unconscious technique employed by a hostage that over a period of time results in the hostage-taker resenting the captive."

And, John Wayne Syndrome being:

"The feeling of helplessness often felt by predominantly male hostages (although I would say all crew members might experience it) in a crisis situation when they wish they could be the hero

but are actually impotent to respond and depression results."

These can all only really be experienced when an individual is faced with a high stress situation over an extended period of time, 'time' that no airline can afford to allocate to security training and 'fear' that I defy any provider of hijack exercises to generate. The psychological problems of captivity from anxiety in its mildest form through to severe psychiatric symptoms including auditory and visual hallucination also cannot be presented in the form of exercises but it is vital that all crew members should be aware as to the reactions that they, their colleagues or the passengers might have

to stress over an extended period of time, and then be able to promulgate methods of coping with such stress.

Whilst physical stress reduction methods, such as progressive muscle relaxation or instant calm breathing, may benefit one given crew member that same crew member may have to deal with a passenger for whom such techniques do not work. Accordingly the crew member needs to be able to suggest alternative approaches, such as distractive methods including study, fantasy, humour and creativity.

Security training needs to go beyond this. Most cabin crew courses tend to concentrate, almost exclusively, on the basic rules of hijack management and possibly an exercise on least risk bomb locations. We do, however, need to ensure that crew members are part of the security web that protects our carriers. I would hazard a guess that most flight attendants consider security checks to be the sole responsibility of the airport screeners. The number of times I have heard flight attendants bemoan security procedures in their discussions with passengers is soul destroying for somebody whose business is aviation security. If one looks back at case histories of hijackings there has often been one individual who has come forward after the event and said that they thought that somebody was acting strangely but did not act on their instincts as it was not part of their job function. The closer a hijacker gets to performing the act of aerial piracy the more likely the chance of their displaying signs of nervousness; the flight attendant in this respect has an advantage over the x-ray operator, providing that they are given some guidance (or training) as to what signs could indicate that a passenger may be about to perform an illegal act rather than simply be afraid of flying. It must be remembered that a significant number of hijacks are performed without the use of real weapons or explosives, consequently there is nothing for the screener to detect and the passenger remains a threat. Also there remains the possibility that weapons may be left for an enplaning passenger and that, once again, when the passenger passed through the checkpoint there was nothing to detect. And remember, the majority of hijackings occur on domestic flights where pre-flight screening is often very limited, if carried out at all. Whilst I am not advocating that security controls become a key function of flight attendants I do believe that they should be aware of the behavioural signs that could indicate a possible attack and be conscious of the ways that a passenger might still be a threat to the flight despite their having been screened.

Whatever our approach to crew security training we need to ensure that it manages to make our crews aware of the threat that they are exposed to, the ways in which such threats can be



When conducting an exercise, one must be clear as to who it is supposed to benefit. Most are geared to the SWAT team rather than the crew members.

Airport screening does not offer any guarantees against hijacking; many attacks are carried out without the use of any weapon or explosive device.



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presented and recommended practices for handling such situations should they arise.

In order to achieve this one needs a combination of both the experience of the exercise and the factual information provided in the classroom. Considerable, and worthwhile, resources are expended

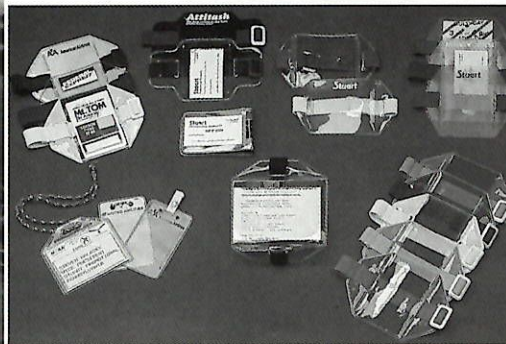
on training cabin crew in ditching techniques. Yet ditchings, like hijacking, are thankfully exceptionally rare occurrences. No one can truly know how they will respond to the reality of an act of aerial piracy, training, however, will at least provide crews with some of the tools that they can employ to

successfully and safely move from intimidation to resolution ●

The author is Managing Director of Green Light Ltd., a London-based aviation security training company specialising in Hijack Management training for aircrew. The statistics were provided by the ACI; they reflect only those incidents that were officially reported.



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