

# Stockholm Syndrome et al!

## Hijack Psychology

The aviation security industry's primary concern is to prevent acts of unlawful interference with aircraft. That said, our crews must be prepared for any eventuality. Studies of previous kidnap incidents have demonstrated that certain syndromes are often experienced by people who have been kept hostage for a period of time. **Philip Baum** looks at three varieties of response which may develop in hijacked aircrew.

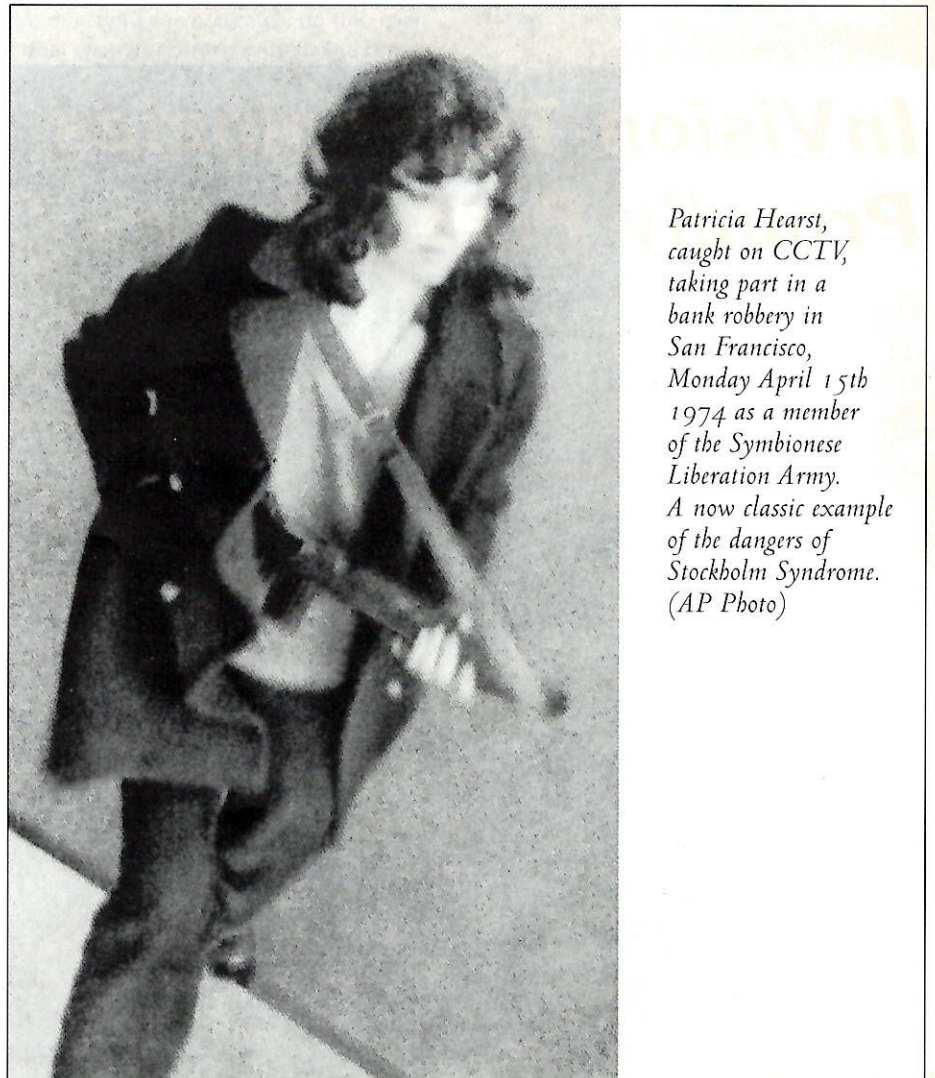
There are numerous booklets available providing useful instructions on how to survive being kidnapped. Often published by governments for their diplomats and those stationed abroad on business, the guidelines generally outline preventative measures in all aspects of one's daily life and end with a few 'tips' on how best to cope in captivity.

Airlines also have both a moral and, in some cases, legal obligation to provide their crews with the necessary information to assist them should a hijack occur. Many agencies, including the Federal Aviation Administration in the United States, and some airlines have produced video presentations that form part of the crew training programmes; in Europe many carriers utilise the Lufthansa production.

However, unlike other inflight emergencies, advising crews on how best to handle a hijack situation is complicated by the fact that they are actually being taught how to relate to individual(s) rather than machines.

Temperament comes into play; the reality is that every hijacking is different. There are an infinite number of 'causes' that might be the reason for the hijack and that, combined with the complexities of the personalities involved, make the development of a standard response plan nigh on impossible to achieve.

Training however needs to emphasise the fact that each situation is different and there will come a time when the individual will have to take a decision based



*Patricia Hearst, caught on CCTV, taking part in a bank robbery in San Francisco, Monday April 15th 1974 as a member of the Symbionese Liberation Army. A now classic example of the dangers of Stockholm Syndrome. (AP Photo)*

on their own initiative rather than from a checklist. Probably the most important aspect of such training is to pre-prepare crew for the mixture of emotions that they may have to deal with in themselves, in the hijackers or amongst other passengers and crew.

In an earlier article, I discussed the different stages of a hijack, from the intimidation phase through the custodial phase to resolution. It is within the custodial phase, where time is also the enemy, that there may be the greatest fluctuations in the emotions of all those involved. Whereas the crew member responses may be difficult to control in both the intimidation and resolution phases, a well trained crew may be able to ensure that they do not succumb to what have been termed as 'The 3 Syndromes'.

By far the best known is Stockholm Syndrome. It was so-named following a siege at the Stockholm Kreditbank in August 1973 that lasted for six days. Three women and one man were held captive in the bank vaults, and eventually the bond that had developed between the hostages and their captors became so strong that the hostages started negotiating with the authorities on behalf of their captors. One of the women, who suffered from claustrophobia, was allowed fresh air providing that she went out on all fours and remained on a chain. Despite the fact that she was treated like a dog, her gratitude towards the captors for allowing her such luxury was so great that when the siege finally ended she, together with the other hostages, insisted on forming a human shield to prevent the police shooting at their captors. One of the women held hostage actually managed to fall in love with one of her kidnapers and, after the event, she divorced her husband and married her kidnapper!

Stockholm Syndrome will only set in, after a period of time has elapsed, if there has been a minimum use of violence exerted by the hostage-takers against the hostage. Any physical harm will prevent the possibility of a bond developing, and the syndrome can only really be said to be established once the hostage is sympathetic to the kidnapers cause. Indicative of the fact that the hostage has succumbed to the syndrome is their distrust of the authorities who are negotiating with the kidnapers on their behalf. There may be some questioning amongst crew and passengers held captive in a hijacked aircraft as to why the authorities are not simply conceding to the hijackers demands and securing their speedy release. Delays can be misinterpreted as something sinister and deemed by the captives as evidence that the authorities care little for their welfare. The hijackers may even tell their captives that the only thing preventing their release is the authorities delay tactics.

*Olympic Airways'  
flight attendant,  
Sofia Mastelou,  
being held by  
Ethiopian hijacker  
Shamsu Kabret  
at Athens Airport  
Thursday November  
9th 1995. The  
hijack was over  
before any of the  
classic hijack  
syndromes set in.  
(AP Photo/APTV)*



Perhaps one of the most famous examples of Stockholm Syndrome developing in a captive is the case of Patricia Hearst. Hearst was kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army in Los Angeles on 4th February 1974. Within two months of her kidnapping she became sympathetic to the cause, became an active member of the organisation and even participated in a bank robbery. Although arrested a year later and gaoled for her involvement in the robbery, it became apparent that Hearst was herself a victim; she was afforded an early release in February 1979.

Poorly trained crew may be unaware that their succumbing to Stockholm Syndrome could jeopardise their chances of survival, whereas allowing it to develop in the minds of the hijackers could mean the difference between life and death. In the hijacking of TWA flight 847 in April 1985, the purser, Uli Derickson managed to gain the respect of the hijackers that ultimately ensured both her own survival and the survival of many others on the flight. This was as a result of her positive interaction with the hijackers over an extended period of time. More symbolic of the traditional view of Stockholm Syndrome is the case of Brigadier General James Dozier.

Dozier, from the United States Army, was abducted by members of the Italian Red Brigades from his home in Verona, Italy in December 1981. Initially held in chains and with his head permanently covered, he was perceived by his kidnapers as a legitimate target and symbol of their cause rather than as a human being. Gradually, however, Dozier persuaded his captors to communicate with him, remove his hood, manacle him by one hand only and even play card games. When the authorities finally launched a rescue mis-

sion 43 days later, his guard did not kill him and when the guard was interrogated later he admitted he had become sympathetic to Dozier's plight as an individual. Stockholm Syndrome had worked to his advantage.

Although we train our crews to avoid succumbing to Stockholm Syndrome and even to attempt to use it to their advantage by positively creating a persona for themselves by discussing their family and their interests (outside of politics and religion), it must be remembered that it is an unconscious natural survival technique that the captive may have little control over. There have been comparisons made between the empathy displayed by the captive towards the kidnapper and the way that some people are stimulated by physical and sexual abuse; the feelings of guilt and low self-esteem being masochistically expressed.

London Syndrome, on the other hand, is almost the reverse of Stockholm Syndrome. Here, instead of the captive warming to their captor over a period of time, the captive attempts to create a negative atmosphere. So-named following the Iranian Embassy siege in London in April 1980, when one of those kidnapped failed to play the role of the 'good' hostage. Instead of being cooperative he became argumentative and, to exacerbate the situation even further, decided to debate the finer points of the Koran with his Iraqi captors. He was the only hostage to be executed by the Iraqis, which is why London Syndrome is also referred to as 'suicide by terrorist'; in other words, the hostage actively encouraged his captors to execute him.

Like Stockholm Syndrome, London Syndrome is also an unconscious response to a high-stress situation, but its presence in one of the captives can turn an already

precarious situation into a deadly one. The aim of all captives and, in the case of an aircraft hijacking, especially crew, should be to move from the high tension of the intimidation phase to the relative calm of the custodial phase. Whilst London Syndrome might only develop during the custodial phase, the antagonism displayed may quickly revert the situation to the intimidation phase. It must be remembered that during the intimidation phase the hijacker is at his/her most dangerous and is keen to exert his/her authority over the passengers and crew. The presence of London Syndrome is a direct attack on their 'moral' authority to be in charge and, as a consequence, the situation can rapidly deteriorate.

Finally, John Wayne Syndrome. In childhood many of us, and especially the boys, played games where we were the hero of a situation: Cops and Robbers, Cowboys and Indians, Robin Hood, Thunderbirds, Spiderman, Batman. We were the man of the moment, we saved the day, we restored law and order. And, even in later life, many may have fantasised about how they would have dealt with any act of aggression perpetrated against them. So too there may be airline crew members who have secretly formulated a plan to assume the heroic role should their aircraft ever be hijacked. They would be the John Wayne and return the passen-

gers to earth safely and soundly. After all, the crews first responsibility is the safety and security of all on board. However, once the reality of an actual hijacking is presented to them, many will suddenly realise that they are not going to be the hero at all and, furthermore, they may feel that they have failed in their duties to ensure the safety and security of their passengers. Such impotence to respond to the situation can result in a feeling of helplessness and even depression.

Although the childhood fantasy games may have been played by the boys, the syndrome can present itself in crew members of either sex as all will feel a sense of having failed in some way to perform the duties required of them. The important point for crews to remember is that, once again, it is perfectly normal to experience a sense of guilt and to feel that they may have been able to prevent the hijack occurring in the first place. Yet, it is equally important to now play the good hostage. The knight in shining armour is not a role expected of any crew member, indeed quite the opposite. Allowing the negotiators outside the aircraft to handle the situation and ensuring that the hijack remains in custodial phase and does not return to the intimidation phase should be their primary concern. Hopefully, and usually, the incident will be resolved by negotiation.

It is impossible to fully prepare our crews for the horrors of a hijack. Fortunately, most are carried out by asylum seekers who, once they have reached their chosen destination, release their captives without injury or loss of life. However there are, albeit infrequently, hijacks that are perpetrated by terrorists or others with a 'cause' to publicise. In such situations, and especially when the incidents become protracted over a period of time, we owe it to our crews to ensure that they are, at the very least, acquainted with the whole gambit of emotions that they could experience. Some carriers, whilst willing to discuss potential safety scenarios, are prepared to advise their crews on standard hijack procedures but are reluctant to discuss the possible emotional responses. It is important to note that such training is not geared towards the crew member managing only their own responses to a high-stress situation, but also equipping them with the information that might assist other crew members, passengers, and even the hijackers, in coping with their reactions. Like all safety training, it is training one hopes crew members will never have to use, but at least they have the awareness should they actually be faced with a hijack •



*Brig. Gen. James Dozier, kidnapped by the Italian Red Brigades, managed to turn Stockholm Syndrome to his advantage. When being liberated his guard perceived him as a human being rather than a symbol of their cause.*



(MIL 2) MILAN, DEC. 27 (AP) Closeup of the black and white snapshot released by Red Brigades showing U.S. Brig. General James L. Dozier under the Red Brigades five-pointed star symbol and holding a Red Brigades communique which reads in the first two sentences: "the crisis of capitalism breeds imperialist war. Only anti-imperialist civil war can bury war!!". War to imperialist war is an essential passage for the transition to communism!!" (AP-Wirephoto) ( /2240/h.o.) 1981.