

# AVIATION **security** *international*

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# Back to the Future

by Philip Baum

Probably the one event that has affected the aviation security industry more than any other is the destruction of Pan Am flight 103 on 21st December 1988.

As we approach the 10th anniversary of the disaster, there will be a whole spate of television documentaries, remembrance services and personal reflections on the Lockerbie incident.

There have been other equally catastrophic, and even larger, disasters which have occurred within the industry, caused by terrorists, so why is that Pan Am has left such an indelible impression on our minds?

Of course, any attack against a United States carrier was guaranteed to be big news. One carried out over British soil and on a flight number that originated in Germany was only going to increase the impact it would have. That might easily explain the media coverage, but does it justify the response of those within the industry? The Federal Aviation Administration in the United States and Department of Transport in the United Kingdom certainly have a vested and valid interest in securing the skies in which their aircraft fly; they have spent time and money, stimulated debate, and played a significant role in encouraging other states to re-examine their own programmes. But, to what effect? Are we, in global terms, any safer than we were a decade ago?

No one can underestimate the technological advances that have been achieved. The latest X-ray screening systems are light years away from those installed in the 1980's and the development of other baggage examination techniques, such as InVision's CTX 5500DS, have dramatically

increased the probability of our detecting explosives hidden in luggage subjected to such inspection. So too in the field of vapour and trace detection technologies. The training afforded X-ray operators in some locations, utilising computer programmes (CBT) such as Safe Passage, Frontline and Trainsoft's In-sight, have facilitated the viewing of a wide range of different genuine X-ray signatures of an ever-growing image library of weapons, explosives and other IED components in the safety of an airport classroom. As a result, the X-ray/CT Scan operator of the late 1990's is now far better equipped and more likely to detect the threat item.

Yet the suppliers of all such technologies will readily acknowledge that their products are not stand-alone solutions to the terrorist threat. Lockerbie taught us the potential result of a bomb in checked baggage exploding at 33,000 ft and much of our efforts have gone into preventing such an atrocity occurring again. The developing technologies have therefore concentrated on the examination of checked baggage. Funding, in the United States, was even made available after TWA 800 exploded shortly after take off from New York in August 1996, although the subsequent investigation that ruled out terrorism has put the reins on such expenditure. Have we progressed, though, in other areas? What about passenger screening, staff selection, baggage reconciliation, to name but a few of the other aspects of the system that still need to be plugged?

Would the bomb that was placed on board the Philippine Airlines aircraft in 1994 have been discovered by the latest technologies? Probably not. Most passen-

gers still pass through metal archway detectors designed to detect weapons rather than explosives. Some products, such as Ranger's Intelliscan, do, as a result of their zoning technology, enable the user to screen passengers utilising a greater degree of sensitivity without increasing false alarm rates, but the solution to the plastic explosive bomb has yet to be implemented into the world's airports. A Dutch company, M.M.C., has developed a system, the Compass X 1280, of subjecting passengers to X-ray introscopy, but general usage within transportation systems is still some way off. And the techniques of magnetic resonance imaging, being developed by firms such as Quantum Magnetics, have yet to be fully commercialised.

Baggage reconciliation systems are available and being marketed world-wide, such as Frankfurt's FRA-BRS. Some airlines



**passengers pass through metal archway detectors designed to detect weapons rather than explosives**



have developed their own products, KLM's IBRIS for example, which are now also commercially available. Yet, despite this, some countries, including the United States, have yet to demand positive passenger/baggage match on all flights, let alone 100% baggage screening.

And then there's staff selection. Can we really say that we are comfortable with the ability, motivation and reliability of those on whom we place the onerous task

to unmask the terrorist? Some states, and even some airports, have managed to ensure that those who enter the profession (a word we, sadly, rarely use) are of sufficient calibre to perform their duties at an acceptable and consistent standard. There are, however, still many places, even in the developed world where we expect minimum wage, poorly educated, unmotivated personnel to save our lives. And for that, there's no excuse.

Lockerbie was a tragedy, but it is not alone. The memories of those who died such horrific deaths are with us still, calling upon those in the industry to look at all modes of attack, everywhere on this globe. Lockerbie is a symbol of the depths to which some people will sink to achieve their political goals, but it is not a blueprint for all terrorist attacks. Sure, we have progressed, but look where the fancy technologies are utilised. What about the developing world? Sure we have responded to the threat of the suitcase bomb, but we are overlooking the hijacker or the suicidal terrorist. How would our advances have saved the passengers on Air France (Algiers) in 1994 or on Alas Chiricanas (Panama) in 1994 or on Ethiopian Airlines (Comoros) in 1996? We still respond to the act rather than to the threat, and by then it's too late.

In this issue of ASI we commemorate the lives of those which were lost that wintery December evening ten years ago. And who better to do that than the father of one of the victims, Dr. Jim Swire? His personal reflection on the Lockerbie tragedy should give us all food for serious thought. And with that as a background, we look at other ways in which security can be enhanced: addressing the issue of the future threat of chemical and biological attacks; providing our crews with the requisite knowledge to enable them to best handle a hijacking, which is still the number one act of unlawful interference against aircraft; developing international training programmes and, as in Belgium, endeavouring to ensure that security guards are up to the task. By limiting the amount of carry-on baggage, we can speed up security checks, concentrate our efforts on the bags that matter, and potentially reduce the number of incidents of unruly passengers on board aircraft. We can learn from the past, but we had far better go back to the future •

## Recognising the Screener

by **Homer Boynton**

In reviewing some FAA press releases recently, I came upon one that provided some interesting information regarding a security screener that was to be honoured by the FAA for "Guarding Public Safety." The award was sponsored by not only the FAA, but also by the Air Transport Association, Regional Airline Association, National Air Carrier Association and the Air Line Pilots Association. A formidable group in the US Aviation Industry. This annual award, called "National Screener Of The Year Award", was presented to Roseline Phillip, a checkpoint security supervisor at San Francisco International Airport, by FAA Administrator Jane Garvey at a special ceremony on September 3, 1998 at FAA Headquarters in Washington, DC.

According to the FAA Press Release, the purpose of the award is to "honour the best among those who work hard every day to keep potentially dangerous items and individuals off the nation's passenger planes." At the ceremony Administrator Garvey said "We honour Roseline Phillip for her dedication and for serving as an exceptional role model in protecting the flying public."

In reading the FAA Press Release and the comments of Administrator Garvey I was struck by the observation that we seldom honour, reward or recognise the outstanding work done by Checkpoint Screeners. All over the world they execute a task that is not only difficult but at the same time one of the most important elements in the World-Wide Security System. When one considers that it is estimated that the average checkpoint screener may have to screen up to 300,000 bags and 150,000 passengers per annum that is a very awesome and, at times, uncompromising task.

This award, while impressive and important, does not meet the full time requirements of the importance of the Human Factor in Aviation Security. In reviewing back issues of Aviation Security International I noted almost no articles in the past four years on checkpoint screeners. No articles about the Human Factor aspects of: Training, Supervision, Rewards, Wages or Ergonomics etc. I know that if

articles on these matters had been forwarded to Aviation Security International they would have been published. Perhaps there is more interest in published articles such as Securing the Cargo Hold, Counterfeit Tickets, Baggage Reconciliation, EDS, Canines etc., however, I submit that articles on Human Factors are of more importance.

Having been a part of aviation security for more years that I care to admit, I am not surprised at the lack of focus on Human Factors. I have, however, always been perplexed at the low priority this important component of the aviation security system seems to manifest. We continue to fixate on sophisticated EDS systems that we believe will be the ultimate answer to our problem of aircraft sabotage. We provide enormous amounts of funding for research and development of these products, as well as expending huge sums to purchase large numbers of this type of equipment for airports around the world. The amount spent on research for Human Factors is almost insignificant compared to the amounts dedicated to EDS and similar equipment. Is it not time that we place the human element of aviation security on an equal priority with equipment? It is too important to relegate to the "back-water" of our industry.

At the presentation ceremony honouring Roseline Phillip, Admiral Cathal "Irish" Flynn, FAA Associate Administrator of Civil Aviation Security, said the following about the responsibility we entrust to checkpoint screeners, "It's a demanding job requiring constant vigilance and an unwavering sense of duty, and we owe Roseline Phillip and her colleagues a debt of gratitude for serving as our first line of defence at the nation's airports."

Should we all not recognise the job that Roseline Phillip and thousands of other checkpoint screeners throughout the world perform on our behalf every day, every hour, every minute to assure the safety and security of our industry? And in recognition of their achievements should we not devote more of our efforts and resources to improving their work environment, training, selection, pay and supervision? My answer to both questions is "Yes"! •