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## Pilots-in-Command: but what if they're not?

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# PILOTS, FLIGHT ATTENDANTS ...AND WELSH RUGBY STARS: when those we 'trust' are out of control

by Philip Baum

**M**uch has been written about the need to differentiate between those passengers we 'know' and those people we have little, or zero, information about. The ultimate goal for many is to fast-track those people deemed to be 'trusted' through security checkpoints. Who makes it onto the trusted shortlist is a question for debate; suffice to say that the more information we have, the greater the chances are for an individual being granted membership of that special club.

Aircrew have long claimed that they should be exempt from routine screening. After all, they argue, what's the point given that they have ultimate control over the aircraft? Furthermore, one would like to think that the privilege of being so-trusted is not only an indication that they have completed the necessary training, but also as a result of having been subjected to intense scrutiny and undergone the type of background checks that would, were they simply a member of the general public, guarantee that they would make it to the 'trusted' list.

And, it's not only aircrew, it's those who work at airports who will have had to demonstrate their integrity before being issued with ID that would enable them to access sterile zones at airports or, potentially, even onto the flight deck of aircraft.

Beyond that rather limited list of individuals who we can justifiably trust, there are those people we all know because they are household names and whose every action and indiscretion is the subject of media attention. After all, can you imagine Pierce Brosnan or Demi Moore hijacking a flight? And, if Tobey Maguire were on board, he'd more likely don his Spiderman costume in order to repel an attacker than be the cause of an international terrorist act himself!

Or so it would seem...

True, Maria Sharapova is not likely to be the next al-Qaeda activist and Didier Drogba is not going to hold people hostage just because Ivory Coast lost to Zambia in the final of the Africa Cup of Nations, but celebrities, as we have seen on countless occasions, have often been the cause of in-flight disturbances, some of which have been quite serious. On 31st March 2012, Gavin Henson (apologies to those of you in America who are not familiar with the name; he is a Welsh rugby - real man's oval ball game - star and media celebrity) was so intoxicated on a flight from Glasgow to Cardiff that he ended up being sacked by his club, the Cardiff Blues, and banned from flying on Flybe for six months. So, we may be able to trust that the Hensons of this world are not members of terrorist organisations, but we cannot say that they will not be a threat to the flight.

Likewise with aircrew. On 11th February 2012 TAM flight 8047 had just departed Montevideo, Uruguay, for Sao Paulo when the flight deck crew were attacked by an airline employee, resulting in the temporary loss of control of the aircraft. The pilot called for assistance as the aircraft went into a dive. The result could have been tragic were it not for the heroic efforts of the pilots and flight attendants who managed to regain control of the aircraft and effectively restrain the assailant. The aircraft landed safely in Porto Alegre.

**"...Maria Sharapova is not likely to be the next al-Qaeda activist and Didier Drogba is not going to hold people hostage just because Ivory Coast lost to Zambia ..."**

A few weeks later, on 9th March 2012, it was the turn of a reportedly bipolar American Airlines flight attendant to lose control on board a flight preparing to depart Dallas for Chicago. Using the airline's public address system, she made announcements referring to the 11th September attacks and issued a disclaimer as to her responsibility should the flight crash. She was eventually restrained by fellow crewmembers and all on board breathed a sigh of relief that the incident had taken place on the ground, whilst the media speculated just why a bipolar person was employed as a flight attendant in the first place.

As if two incidents within a number of weeks being caused by airline personnel were not bad enough for the industry, worse still was to follow. On 27th March 2012, it was one of the pilots of JetBlue flight 191, operating from New York to Las Vegas, who seemingly 'lost it'. His fellow pilot initially encouraged Clayton Frederick Osbon off the flight deck, having been concerned about his behaviour; Osbon used the toilets, but when he emerged, he started pacing the aisle and made bizarre comments to passengers to say their prayers. His attempts to regain access to the cockpit were frustrated by the enhanced flight deck door. The pilot-in-command, assisted by an off duty pilot on board, diverted to Amarillo where Osbon was arrested.

Many were quick to use the JetBlue case as an example of the benefits to flight safety of the enhanced cockpit door.

In this case, it did work. However, if one looks at the TAM incident, imagine what might have been the result had the two flight attendants not made it onto the flight deck in time to wrestle the assailant off the controls? And, even citing the JetBlue example, what would have happened had Osbon not agreed to leave the cockpit in the first place?

What all these cases demonstrate is that there is no person who can be simply classified as 'trusted' when it comes to air travel. We may be able to say that they are not terrorists, but we cannot guarantee that they will not be a threat to a flight....and that's what aviation security is all about. ■

