

AVIATION SECURITY INTERNATIONAL

www.asi-mag.com



SPONSORED BY:

ARINC

THE GLOBAL JOURNAL OF AIRPORT & AIRLINE SECURITY



Qualifying Equipment: on location at the TSL & TSIF

ALSO:
FALSE ALARMS
DRONES
UK PASSENGER EXPERIENCE
THE PARABLE OF THE STARFISH

MEDIA SPONSORS TO:



DEATH IN EAST SHEEN
SEE PAGE 1



IN THE LAND OF THE QYLATRON
SEE PAGE 25



A DEATH IN EAST SHEEN:

time to focus on airport perimeter security

by Philip Baum

As I drove away from my home early on the morning of Sunday 9th September, one of my daughters, seated in the back and already ensconced in the world of Facebook and Twitter, suddenly exclaimed, "Dad. One of my friends has just told me that there's a dead body outside their house. They think it is a stowaway who has fallen out of an aeroplane". I am used to receiving calls about aviation security-related breaches, yet they normally emanate from the media or industry sources, rather than from my own family!

Surprisingly, it took quite some time for the media to pick up on the story. We live a few miles from Heathrow and can often see landing gears of aircraft being lowered as they pass overhead, so there was every reason to believe the conclusion of the unofficial report. Dead bodies are not a common sighting in the streets East Sheen! Indeed, it would not have been the first time that a body had landed in the area. In 2001, the body of 21-year-old Mohammed Ayaz landed in the car park of a local shop. The street in which the latest poor soul landed was Portman Avenue, a residential road half a mile from our home and a few hundred metres from my office. Albeit that East Sheen is a suburb of London, it has a village-like nature to it and people know each other. My office landlord lives in the road, as do a number of my children's classmates. The community was understandably shocked by the incident.

In all likelihood the victim died of hypothermia within a short time of his departure from, as we later found out, Luanda, if he had not already been crushed to death by the retracting landing gear when the British Airways jet took off. However, for the locals, it was as if the death had occurred within East Sheen. Body parts were found over a wide area and blood had splattered parked cars. Nobody saw the body fall and, fortunately, it had not landed on the roof of a house or, worse still, anybody walking in the street.

What concerned me most however was the lack of recognition that this death was not only symbolic of a human tragedy – whatever brought the boy to be so desperate as to chance his luck by clambering into the wheel well of an aircraft – but also of a fundamental failure of aviation security.

We spend vast sums of money on developing technologies to counter the threat of weapons and explosives being infiltrated through airport checkpoints and onto passenger aircraft. Yet both the media and the industry place disproportionate attention on the screening process, ignoring or downplaying the failures of airport perimeter security. What use the screening if the airport perimeter remains porous? On this occasion, it was 'only' a stowaway that illustrated the problem. If an individual has time to climb on board undetected, so too does a person with ill-intent have the opportunity to secrete explosives inside a wheel well.

"...there's a dead body outside their house. They think it is a stowaway who has fallen out of an aeroplane..."

Many dismiss the problem as being an 'African issue' or one facing the developing world. After all, only 16 days before the Angolan stowaway landed in East Sheen, the body of another dead stowaway was found in the wheel well of another British Airways aircraft after it had landed at Heathrow from Cape Town. Yet over the last few months we have witnessed numerous examples of individuals managing to board flights undetected, or penetrating supposedly sophisticated perimeter intrusion detection systems in Europe and America.

In July, two asylum seekers managed to board an Icelandair aircraft set to depart for Denmark at Keflavik International Airport and, in August, Daniel Casillo managed to swim ashore airside at New York's JFK International Airport after his jet ski had broken down in Jamaica Bay. Also in August, a 10-year-old boy managed to board a Gulf Air flight in Cairo, having by-passed security, and in September, in the Philippines, a 16-year old boy scaled the perimeter fence at Iloilo Airport and boarded a Zest Air flight. Thanks to alert airline employees at Icelandair, Gulf Air, Zest Air and, in the case of the jet skier in New York, Delta Airlines, all the intruders were intercepted. So, adopting the onion model of security – the layered approach – we could simply pat ourselves on the back and we should certainly praise those who did take appropriate action. But, in all these examples, there were people to identify...and human beings are bulky and stick out on board aircraft. Would they have noticed small packages, potentially containing explosives, had similarly successful intruders secreted them in the multitude of crevices afforded us by the modern jet aircraft?

Some can argue against taking proactive action against the threat of cyber terrorism and chemical or biological weapons attacks, because they are not regular occurrences, but we can no longer dismiss failures in perimeter security as being irritating non-events. The work being done on checkpoints is laudable, but it's not the be all and end all. Let's get back to basics. ■

