



# Airport 2002



# September 11th 2001

## Aviation changed, the world changed

**Philip Baum, Editor of Aviation Security International and Managing Director of Green Light Limited.**

*It was an event that altered the history of the world. An event, so shocking and lacking in reason, that relatively few of the billions of people inhabiting planet Earth have failed to witness the constantly replayed television images. An event that demonstrated the depths to which members of the human race can sink. An event that will, no doubt, change the way in which we view the world and function within it. The security implications for the aviation industry must now be considered.*

It has long been argued that aviation security is far more than the protection of the lives of the passengers and crew onboard a single aircraft. It is a necessary inconvenience that we all have to endure, as the checks made can be the difference between war and peace. This is not a new viewpoint in the aftermath of the September 11th hijackings, but it maybe a view that is taken more seriously henceforth.

Shocking though it may seem, security experts have considered the possibility of a suicidal pilot taking down an airliner, but few will have speculated that any group could carry out such an act of genocide. The plan was, quite

**Start looking at people while using our brains, rather than looking at screens and listening for buzzers**

simply, dazzlingly brilliant and operationally almost completely successful. The perpetrators only disappointment will be that despite their actions, there will not be 72 virgins awaiting them in paradise. We wait to see the price their backers will pay.

As the politicians grapple with the issue of military retaliation, the aviation industry, already in the doldrums, needs to affect an immediate response to prevent such tragedies occurring again.

There has been much criticism of security at airports in the United States, especially vis-à-vis domestic operations. Most of the criticisms are well justified with basic security principles being brushed aside due to economic considerations. The absence of positive passenger bag match, the allowance of kerbside check-in, the lack of checked baggage screening, and the unnecessary access to sterile areas afforded those meeting or seeing off passengers will all be issues addressed. Yet for all the condemnation, the security practitioner does need to ask whether such measures might have averted the disaster. The answer, if one is honest, is probably not. The reality is that such passengers might well have got on to such aircraft at almost any airport in the world.

So, if that is the case, where do we go from here? Are we not arguing that no matter what the controls are, hijackings will still occur and that all we can do is try to minimise the risk as much as possible? Hardly a view that motivates security screeners or encourages the already nervy general public back into the skies.

Perhaps, on the other hand, we can actually start to view aviation security procedures as a total web that safeguards the industry, starting with the intelligence fraternity and ending with the in-flight safeguards. It does not begin and end with the security screener, nor even with the airport security programme.

Intelligence is the first line of defence. The infiltration of terrorist cells and the resulting inside information is, of course, fundamental to any area of national security. Relaying the acquired knowledge to those that need to know, without creating too many scares in the process, is the second stage. It would now seem that the greatest failure in the tragedy of September 11th lay at these primary levels. Many of the hijackers were seemingly known and yet, despite a computerised passenger profiling system being utilised, 19 hijackers successfully seized four commercial jets on a single day.

**The greatest failure in the tragedy of September 11th lay at these primary levels**

The next line of defence lies at the airport – at the check-in counters and at passenger and baggage screening checkpoints. There has been a tremendous drive to find technology-based solutions to counter all security threats. X-ray machines were introduced into the airport arena in the early 1970's. They were used for the examination of cabin baggage to identify



guns and grenades. Archway metal detectors and hand held magnetometers were also deployed for similar reasons. By the 1990's, in the post-Lockerbie era, most X-ray machines were operating using colours in an attempt to identify explosives. Indeed, since Lockerbie the industry has become so focused on the identification of a bomb that little progress has been made in the identification of potential hijack-

### **The effectiveness of sky marshals has been proven on many occasions**

ers. Profiling systems, originally inherited from the Israelis, were watered down and, eventually computerised. After all, the argument went; far more people will die as a result of an act of sabotage than by hijacking. It's an argument buried in the rubble of the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

I do not wish to denigrate the tremendous technological developments achieved in explosive trace detection, passenger scanning, biometric identification, CT examination, X-ray and metal detection. They all play their role and will contribute to an effective security programme. But, as even the manufacturers of such technologies would point out, security relies on human factors too. Given that one can hijack an aircraft with ones bare hands and that one cannot expect every little blade to be identified using existing technologies (unless we want the system to grind to a halt), we need to look at who is boarding our aircraft. This relies on security screeners who can utilise behavioural analysis skills. I am not advocating full-scale (Israeli-style) passenger profiling, as that is also impractical given the size of the global aviation industry. I am,

however, saying that we can take elements of it and start looking at people while using our brains, rather than looking at screens and listening for buzzers or alarms that only tell half the story.

This approach requires a professional security force. For too long we have accepted that our checkpoints can be manned (especially in the US) by minimum wage employees who yearn for almost any other job. If government can take responsibility for immigration and customs controls then it should also see that a competent, motivated, educated team of security professionals protects our lives.

The truth is that even given effective intelligence, sophisticated technologies and screeners capable of profiling, the hijack threat remains. It is therefore imperative that there be some inflight security – a last line of defence if you will.

The US carriers have long operated with a closed cockpit door policy, whilst others have been reluctant to follow suit. Aside from the hijacks of September 11th it would seem that, given the rising tide of air rage incidents and the sporadic hijacks of a more traditional nature, aircraft manufacturers will be taking steps to provide a more secure cockpit. That will take time and given that for the foreseeable future the flight deck crew will have an abundance of genuine reasons, of both a natural and a safety nature, to need access to the cabin, maybe we should consider alternative options.

There has been a reluctance to deploy sky marshals. It is a costly exercise. Then again, the reason we have flight attendants is for safety reasons rather than customer service. The effectiveness of sky marshals has been proven on many occasions. Of the four hijacks that were attempted on 6th September 1970, the only one that failed was on the El Al flight carrying sky marshals – one hijacker, Patrick Arguello was

killed, the other, Leila Khaled, was overpowered. Yet even more recently sky marshals have been in action. Last year they were used successfully during a Xinhua Airlines hijack in China and on a Royal Jordanian flight as well.

If there is anything good that can come out of the outrage that killed so many innocent people, destroyed the lives of so many survivors, left an indelible mark on the tens of thousands of people that knew the victims, and that transfixed the rest of the world to its television screens, then maybe we can learn the lesson that security has to be proactive. We cannot wait for tragedies to occur and then find ways to respond. If we know of weaknesses, they must be fixed. Whilst we look now to the response required to handle suicidal terrorists who train to become pilots for one flight only, we need also to evaluate the programmes we have in place to counter the threats of the future.

### **Aircraft manufacturers will be taking steps to provide a more secure cockpit**

On September 11th there were many heroes. Some lost their lives. It would appear that in the ensuing conflict there will be many more heroes...and many more fatalities. It must never be forgotten that however much one might perceive security to be a drain on finances and however distant the threat might seem, aviation security is a key element of a nation's defence. It's time it was treated with the respect it deserves. ■

**Philip Baum is Editor of Aviation Security International and Managing Director of Green Light Limited, specialists in hijack management training for aircrew.**