

## Aviation Security



A United States airliner was subjected for the first time to terrorist attack in November 1955 when a bomb exploded in luggage on a DC-3 that had just left Stapleton Airport in Denver. A man hoping to collect on a life insurance policy had placed a bomb in his mother's luggage. The plane crashed, killing all aboard.

Civil aviation security exists to prevent criminal activity on aircraft and in [airports](#). Criminal activity includes acts such as hijacking (air piracy), damaging or destroying aircraft and nearby areas with bombs, and assaulting passengers and aviation employees. Today, aviation security is high on the list of priorities of air travelers, the Federal Government, and the international air community. In the earliest days of aviation, however, aviation security was only a minor concern.

The first recorded hijacking occurred in May 1930, when Peruvian revolutionaries seized a Pan American mail plane with the aim of dropping propaganda leaflets over Lima. No hijackings were then recorded until 1947. Between that year and 1958, 23 hijackings were reported, mostly committed by eastern Europeans seeking political asylum. The world's first fatal hijacking took place in July 1947 when three Romanians killed an aircrew member.

The first major act of criminal violence against a U.S. airliner occurred on November 1, 1955, when Jack Graham placed a bomb in luggage belonging to his mother and killed all 44 people on board a Denver-bound plane. Graham had hoped to cash in his mother's life insurance policy; instead, he was sentenced to death. In January 1960, a heavily insured suicide bomber killed all aboard a National Airlines plane, sparking demands for the use of baggage-inspection devices.



Passengers have to pass through a security area where they pass through a scanning device and their carry-on baggage is scanned.

Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba in 1959, and soon after, the number of hijackings began to grow. At first, flights were hijacked by those wishing to escape from Cuba. The pattern changed in May 1961, with the first American airliner diverted to Cuba. Other such incidents took place that summer, and the government began using armed guards on commercial planes when requested by the airlines or the FBI. In September, President John F. Kennedy signed legislation that prescribed the death penalty or at least 20 years' imprisonment for air piracy.

The skies remained relatively quiet until February 21, 1968, when a fugitive forced a DC-8 plane to fly to Cuba. This started a rash of hijackings in the United States that would last through 1972. Worldwide, the U.S. Department of

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Transportation placed the total number of hijackings from 1968 through 1972 at 364.



A section of the Pentagon was destroyed when the building was struck by a hijacked commercial airliner on Sept. 11, 2001. Injured workers were treated or taken to area hospitals, while firefighters tried to extinguish flames.

The international aviation community had earlier recognized the seriousness of air piracy. In 1963, the Convention on Offenses and Certain Other Acts Committed on Board Aircraft (known as the Tokyo Convention) had been drafted, requiring the prompt return of hijacked aircraft and passengers. In December 1970, the United States and 49 other nations signed the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft (Hague Convention). Ratified by the U. S. Senate in September 1971, it categorized hijacking as a criminal rather than as a political act. The 1971 Montreal Convention, which went into force in 1973, strengthened the earlier agreements.

Although most hijackings in the 1960s were to Cuba, in August 1969, Arab terrorists carried out the first hijacking of a U.S. aircraft flying outside the Western Hemisphere when they diverted an Israel-bound TWA aircraft to Syria. Another incident that October involved a U.S. Marine who sent a TWA plane on a 17-hour circuitous journey to Rome. This was the first time that FBI agents attempted to thwart a hijacking in progress and that shots were fired by the hijacker of a U.S. plane. Other violent incidents followed. In March 1970, a copilot was killed and the pilot and hijacker seriously hurt during a hijacking. The first passenger death in a U.S. hijacking occurred in June 1971.

Following the hijacking of eight airliners to Cuba in January 1969, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) created the Task Force on the Deterrence of Air Piracy. The Task Force developed a hijacker "profile" that could be used along with metal detectors (magnetometers) in screening passengers. In October, Eastern Air Lines began using the system, and four more airlines followed in 1970. Although the system seemed effective, a hijacking by Arab terrorists in September 1970, during which four airliners were blown up, convinced the White House that stronger steps were needed. On September 11, 1970, President Richard Nixon announced a comprehensive anti-hijacking program that included a Federal marshal program.

In early March 1972, the discovery of bombs on three airliners led President Nixon to speed certain FAA rulemaking actions to tighten airline security. In October, however, four hijackers bound for Cuba killed a ticket agent. The next month, three criminals seriously wounded the copilot of a Southern Airways flight and forced the plane to takeoff even after an FBI agent shot out its tires. These violent hijackings triggered a landmark change in aviation security. In December, the FAA issued an emergency rule making inspection of carry-on baggage and scanning of all passengers by airlines mandatory at the start of 1973. An anti-

hijacking bill signed in August 1974, sanctioned the universal screening.

These stringent measures paid off, and the number of U.S. hijackings never returned to the worst levels before 1973. No scheduled airliners were hijacked in the United States until September 1976, when Croatian nationalists commandeered a jetliner. Two fatal bombings did occur, though: a bomb exploded in September 1974, on a U.S. plane bound from Tel Aviv to New York, killing all 88 persons aboard, and a bomb exploded in a locker at New York's LaGuardia Airport in December 1975, killing 11. That bombing caused airports to locate lockers where they could be monitored.

In June 1985, Lebanese terrorists diverted a TWA plane leaving Athens for Beirut. One passenger was murdered during the two-week ordeal; the remaining 155 were released. This hijacking, as well as an upsurge in Middle East terrorism, resulted in several U.S. actions, among them the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1985 that made Federal air marshals a permanent part of the FAA workforce.

On December 21, 1988, a bomb destroyed Pan American Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. All 259 people aboard the London-to-New York flight, as well as 11 on the ground were killed. Investigators found that a bomb concealed in a radio-cassette player had been loaded on the plane in Frankfurt, Germany. This tragedy followed an FAA bulletin issued in mid-November that warned of such a device and one on December 7 of a possible bomb to be placed on a Pan Am plane in Frankfurt. Early in 2001, a panel of Scottish judges convicted a Libyan intelligence officer for his role in the crime.

Security measures that went into effect for U.S. carriers at European and Middle East airports after the Lockerbie bombing included requirements to x-ray or search all checked baggage and to match passengers and their baggage.

During and after the 1990s, the FAA sponsored research on new equipment to detect bombs and weapons and made incremental improvements to aviation security that included efforts to upgrade the effectiveness of screening personnel at airports. In 1996, two accidental airline crashes focused attention on the danger of explosions aboard aircraft, including those caused by hazardous cargo. The FAA's response included banning certain hazardous materials from passenger airplanes. The 1997 Federal appropriation to the FAA provided funds for more airport security personnel and for new security equipment.

In the last few years, airport security procedures were sometimes faulted by the media and by the Department of Transportation's Office of the Inspector General (OIG), an independent government office that assesses Federal programs and operations and makes recommendations. In 1999, for example, a [report issued by the OIG](#) criticized the FAA for being slow to limit unauthorized access to secure areas in airports, stating that its investigators were able to penetrate these areas repeatedly. In 2000, it also faulted the agency for issuing [airport identification](#) used to access secure airport areas without sufficient checks. But for the ten years following February 1991, there were no airline hijackings in the United States.

This lull was shattered on September 11, 2001, when terrorists hijacked four U.S. airliners and crashed three of them into buildings and one into the ground, causing the death of thousands. This unprecedented attack resulted in an immediate and drastic heightening of air transportation security. In November, the Aviation and Transportation Security Act gave the Federal Government direct responsibility for airport screening, which had previously been performed by the airlines and their contractors. Other provisions of the Act included the creation of a new Department of Transportation organization, the Transportation Security Agency, to oversee security in all modes of travel.

--Judy Rumerman

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Remarks by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell With Lockerbie Family Members, February 8, 2001 Washington, D.C. [http://www.thelockerbietrial.com/Colin\\_Powell.htm](http://www.thelockerbietrial.com/Colin_Powell.htm)

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