

Airport security: They make me take off my shoes but can't tell if a real terrorist has explosives sewn into his underwear?

A few years ago, when the constantly blaring announcement at DIA told me that the terror alert level was "Orange," I traveled from Denver to the Twin Cities on a one-way ticket to pick up a car that I would drive back to Cheyenne.

I paid for the ticket with a credit card and may have been traveling without luggage because I was just going to grab the car and leave immediately to return here.

When I checked in, I didn't notice anything special on my boarding pass but when I got to the security screening area, I was directed to go a different direction than most other passengers and then saw it had a red letter of some sort on it. That was before *everybody* had to take off their shoes. Everything was fine and I was shown a folding chair to sit on and remove my shoes. They disappeared for a minute and, as I recall, they "wanded" me all over and let me go on my way.

I learned later that a one-way ticket will always get you special handling. It would make sense that a terrorist wouldn't need a return ticket so that is kind of a no-brainer for TSA - check closer those traveling on a one-way ticket. Not wanting to profile anyone, they didn't care that I was an Anglo not exactly fitting the description of most terrorists. But, again, they didn't delay me for long and I always allow plenty of time at DIA so I made the plane with plenty of time to spare.

Recalling that day after the recent events on a Northwest flight from Amsterdam to Detroit, I wondered how a guy like Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab could pay nearly \$3,000 cash for a roundtrip ticket, check in on such a long flight (Nigeria to Amsterdam to Detroit) without luggage to check and arouse no suspicion.

On a different flight when I took a carry-on bag, they confiscated my Right Guard and some other things. I can't carry a container larger than 3 oz. with shampoo but a suspicious dude can have explosives sewn into his underwear and no one thought twice about running him through a little tougher security screening? Maybe a strip search or pat down?

I've seen women have to take "blankies" away from crying babies and hand them to security matrons who run them through the x-ray machine but this guy aroused no suspicion when he paid \$2,831 in cash at a KLM office in Accra, Ghana (there are two countries lying between Ghana and Nigeria) for a roundtrip ticket to Detroit, Michigan in the United States, with a plane change in Amsterdam and had but a small carry-on bag when he checked in at the Lagos, Nigeria airport? Most of us who use air travel accept the inconveniences and annoyances of what seem like silly security measures, believing they are necessary to insure breaches exactly like this one don't occur.

Hell, if they're going to allow terrorists with dynamite in their briefs to get on board, leave all of us with 6 oz. containers of shampoo in our carry-ons alone. You hear passengers joking about the security measures and they always get serious when they say they will gladly accept the shoeless walks across filthy terminal floors if it will prevent another shoe bomb being taken on board a flight.

Then this guy comes along.

All he lacked was a sandwich board hanging from his neck: "I am linked to al-Qaeda and I am going to bring down your airplane. Have a nice day."

Cash. He paid cash for his ticket. No checked luggage for a 14,000 mile round trip flight. My wife packs three bags, including a steamer trunk, for a week in Minnesota. Then, this gratefully futile bozo spent a long time in the bathroom once over U.S. soil and nearing Detroit. He also had a blanket over his lap just before landing. Yet, it took him beginning to smolder before any flight attendant or "sky marshal" suspected he might be a passenger from hell?

One thing the incident showed again is that the world is not lacking for brave people who will risk it all to try to prevent a guy like Abdulmutallab from killing hundreds of innocent and unwary passengers. "Let's roll." Another flight. Another hero. Another several heroes.

Contrast what went on inside this Northwest Airlines flight bound for Detroit with the approach taken by President John F. Kennedy when he presented the notion that the United States was behind in the "space race" and that we should dedicate ourselves to landing a man on the moon.

Imagine where we'd be if the two presidents since September 11, 2001 had shown the same commitment to ending terror in our skies. They (George W. Bush and Barack Obama) have had eight years and four+ months (since 9/11) to beef up airport security to the point that clowns with explosives in their shoes or shorts don't get anywhere near boarding a commercial airliner with Americans on board or on an airplane headed for a U.S. destination. Forget the stupid color alerts. No passenger in any airport knows the difference between an "Orange Alert" and a "Chartreuse Alert."

We have the brightest minds, the most dedicated intellects, the most patriotic citizens and the most determined scientists in the world. Bar none. Obviously, our government has not called upon them to find answers before confronted with the problems. Dogs can sniff drugs inside cars they walk around. The explosive two characters (this clown and the shoe bomber) planned to use to bring down separate airplanes must be detectable.

What an embarrassment and shame it would have been to the Homeland Security people and to TSA had the latest guy's plan worked. And, Janet Napolitano, head of Homeland Security, believes "the system worked?" How did it work? When civilians disarmed a guy bent on committing terrorism in the sky over Detroit, Michigan, leapt on him, drug him into first class, disrobed him and insured the explosives could not detonate? What has the U.S. government done to protect Americans traveling by air? Except, of course, taking your too-large shampoo bottles, bottles of water and running your shoes (even sandals) through an x-ray machine?

Eight and a third years after 9/11, nothing should get past our security or security anywhere in the civilized world - which the Netherlands surely is. Nigeria? Not so sure about that - almost all of the bizarre internet scams come out of Nigeria. That's a weird country and long has been. (*The Navy ship I served on tried to make a gift to them of various commodities [which I wouldn't have accepted either] and they wanted to know who would pay the import duty on the stuff. We did not off-load anything in Lagos.*)

On May 25, 1961, President John F. Kennedy, barely four months in office, said to Congress:

"I believe we possess all the resources and talents necessary. But the facts of the matter are that we have never made the national decisions or marshaled the national resources required for such leadership. We have never specified long-range goals on an urgent time schedule, or managed our resources and our time so as to insure their fulfillment."

And, "First, I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth."

Finally, "It is a most important decision that we must make as a nation. But all of you have lived through the last four years and have seen the significance of space and the adventures in space, and no one can predict with certainty what the ultimate meaning will be of mastery of space."

If we substituted the objective of reaching the Moon with secure air travel almost five decades later, we would end even a real *risk* of some rich guy's wayward son trying to blow up an American airplane over an American city.

Eight years and less than two months after JFK's words, Commander Neil Armstrong and fellow astronaut Edwin Aldrin successfully touched down on the lunar surface. As Armstrong became the first person to touch the Moon's surface, and then to return safely to Earth which

was part of JFK's commitment, he spoke the unforgettable and oft-quoted words: "That's one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind." Not only did Neil Armstrong and "Buzz" Aldrin land on the Moon, they explored the Moon's surface for 2 1/2 hours.

We reached the Moon in less time from a President's promise to do so than has passed since the multiple acts of terrorism perpetrated upon the United States of America on September 11, 2001.

We cannot continue to be reactionary to these threats. We must be proactive and stop them before they start.

Were there sky marshals on this flight or aren't they allowed on flights that originate outside the United States even if they end in the U.S.? If there were, how did a fellow traveler get to the extremist who tried to blow up the Northwest plane first?

What serious steps have been taken to thwart a repeat attempt such as this one? Little in the way of preventing such a person from getting on board the plane. TSA now authorizes security personnel to "go through" carry-on bags. You mean they haven't been doing that? They spotted my Right Guard and large shampoo bottle but they can't spot chemicals and explosives? Probably the most bizarre, "but, at least we're trying" change is that passengers will not be allowed to have a blanket or pillow in their lap for the last hour of the flight into the United States.

Cabins in the planes are often frigid. And the "blanket" sometimes provided is similar to a "receiving blanket." So often, with bureaucrats, the cure becomes worse than the disease. If they prohibit trips to the restroom for the final hour of a flight, they're going to have lines the length of the cabin an hour and a half before landing. Passage will be impossible. It just seems that President Kennedy and his group would have come up with a better plan and a better solution.

And, this president announced that those behind this attempted act of terrorism "would be held accountable." Once again, a group in Yemen is being accused of being behind the training and the plan. Yemen, of course, was where the USS Cole was anchored when it was attacked. As I recall, that perpetrator has already been released from prison. Yemen (Aden) has been a dangerous place for decades. Obama may draw a line in the sand, only to later move the line back, then move it back again. Unless he plans to back his threat with action, it would be better not to issue the threat. At least for show, it would be good for the POTUS to suspend, or interrupt, his Hawaiian vacation to "imply" to the bad guys that he will not be an easy mark. That his words during the campaign were merely words. That he is strong enough to defend us.