

## CLOSING THE COCKPIT LOOPHOLE

Could four handguns have saved thousands of lives?

The short answer is yes. Airplanes are controlled by pilots. Without pilots, airplanes are 150 ton 500mph guided petroleum missiles. We have just seen the potential of aircraft used as assault weapons.

Let me introduce myself. I am an airline Captain for the worlds second largest airline. I have been flying airplanes professionally for twenty one years. I have dealt with engine failures, aircraft system failures, aircraft navigation equipment failures, Air Traffic Control failures and airline management failures. Through it all, nothing has scared me more in aviation than the people I carry in the back of the plane. Why? Because I have had to deal with drug crazed and drunk passengers, air ragers, and people who are just scared. I have learned that all these people are unpredictable and dangerous. And now we have a new type of passenger. A diabolical warrior filled with more hate than ten Tim McVeighs.

What about Air Marshals? Not the best idea. An Air Marshal in the back of the aircraft can be identified, distracted and overwhelmed, even if armed. The pilots however have a cockpit door to get through. And a kevlar cockpit door would be a formidable obstacle for anyone to breach. Also, there are over thirty thousand flight segments per day in the U.S. The cost of putting an Air Marshall on each flight would be prohibitive. Especially when you have two highly qualified professionals in the nerve center (cockpit) of the airplane who can do the job.

Is it dangerous for pilots to carry guns? No. Pilots are some of the most mentally, physically and psychologically tested people on earth. Additionally we are drug and alcohol tested all the time. We are highly educated, have a unique understanding of how mechanical things work, and have eye/hand coordination second to none. We are also required to undergo rigorous recurrent training and checkrides every nine months. (A great place for firearms requal.) There is no safer group of individuals to issue defensive firearms to.

What about Stun Guns and other non-lethal defense methods? No good. A stun gun is a one shot, one target weapon. When you have multiple suicidal individuals charging the cockpit, stun guns, pepper spray and harsh language will not stop them.

Should every pilot be forced to carry a firearm? No. Certainly there will be pilots who for various reasons will not want to be armed. Those pilots would be excused from the program. Hijackers however would have no idea which pilots were armed and which were not. Knowing that at least some flight crews were armed would be enough of a deterrent to prevent what happened on 9/11 from happening again.

What about shooting in a pressurized cabin? Will the airplane blow up? No. Do not be fooled by movies showing an explosive decompression in the cabin after a gun is fired. The pressurized fuselage of an aircraft already has many holes in it for regulating pressurization and air flow. The aluminum alloy skin of the aircraft is a quarter inch thick and capable of taking direct hits from most handguns without fracture. Even the cabin windows are incredibly thick and strong and capable of taking hits without failure, especially if using a frangible bullet. Even if they did penetrate the fuselage, several additional small holes would not make any difference in the ability to maintain pressure. But lets not loose the forest for the trees here. Just remember the scenario that would require gunfire in an aircraft. It would be the last line of defense before turning the aircraft over to a terrorist for him to complete his mission - to kill hundreds or thousands of you.

Fights between pilots in the cockpit? Does not happen. In twenty one years of professional flying with five different airlines, I have never been involved in an altercation with another pilot. I have never even heard of this happening. How many police get into arguments, draw their weapons and kill each other while on duty?

Still do not want guns on airplanes eh? In any given week of flying I will carry

one to five armed individuals on my aircraft. They are IRS agents, Postal Inspectors, DEA agents, FBI agents, Secret Service agents, state and local law enforcement, and virtually anyone else authorized by the government to carry a weapon. There is no restriction on the size or type of gun they carry.

All I am asking is to not be defenseless. Give me a fighting chance to save my passengers, crew, aircraft and people on the ground from a psycho or terrorist. Lets close this cockpit loophole.

Captain Duane Shaw