



Keeping the Skies Friendly

On December 18, 1985, airports in Rome and Vienna are bombed. Twenty people are killed; five of them American. Bombings are linked to Libya. On April 2, 1986, a bomb explodes aboard TWA flight 840 en route from Rome to Athens. Four Americans are killed; nine are injured.

On December 21, 1988, a New York-bound Pan Am Boeing 747 explodes in flight from a terrorist bomb and crashes into a Scottish village, killing all 259 people aboard plus 11 on the ground. Passengers include 35 University of Syracuse students and many U.S. military personnel. Libya formally admits responsibility 15 years later.

On September 11, 2001, hijackers crash two commercial jets into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. Shortly afterwards, two more hijacked jets are crashed: one into the west side of the Pentagon; the other into a field near the village of Shanksville in rural western Pennsylvania. Total dead and missing number 2,992: 2,749 in New York City, 184 at the Pentagon, 40 in Pennsylvania, plus 19 hijackers. The Islamic al-Qaeda terrorist group is blamed.

As these incidents so clearly and tragically illustrate, the terrorist threat to the United States is at least in part focused on the commercial airline industry. To counter this threat, the U.S. Government began a rapid expansion of the decades-old Federal Air Marshal Service shortly after the September 2001 attacks. Part of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the air marshals operate from a variety of locations around the country and are charged with securing the Nation's airline industry from threats.

According to Tony Hedges, special agent in charge at the Denver (Colorado) Federal Air Marshal Service Office, the attacks of 9/11 brought both a new focus and a new strategy to fighting the longstanding terrorist threat to commercial air travel. "September 11 definitely focused Federal law enforcement's attention on airline security," Hedges says. "The obvious signs were a dramatic increase in the number of Federal Air Marshals and the establishment of the Transportation Security Administration."

Hedges says that the new air marshals undergo intensive training to enable them to recognize and eliminate threats to the safety and security of an aircraft and its passengers. They are required to meet the most strict marksmanship standards of any branch of Federal law enforcement. This marksmanship training is supplemented with training in situational awareness, close combat tactics, hand-to-hand fighting skills, and a variety of other skills, including stopping the use of improvised explosive devices—an area of expertise for the National Institute of Justice's National Law Enforcement and

...DID YOU KNOW

- The Federal Air Marshal Service began in 1968 as the Federal Aviation Administration's Sky Marshal Program.
- In 1985, President Ronald Reagan requested the expansion of the program, and Congress enacted the International Security and Development Cooperation Act, which provided the statutes behind today's Federal Air Marshal Service.
- On September 11, 2001, the Federal Air Marshal Service consisted of 33 Federal Air Marshals. President George W. Bush quickly authorized an increase in the number of Federal Air Marshals, and almost overnight the service received more than 200,000 applications. A classified number of these applicants were screened, hired, trained, certified, and deployed on flights around the world.
- Today these individuals serve as a key component of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the largest investigative arm of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, in the war against terrorism.

Text excerpted and adapted from the website of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Federal Air Marshal Service, at www.ice.gov/graphics/fams/index.htm.

Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC)–Rocky Mountain in Denver.

In summer 2004, NLECTC–Rocky Mountain began a series of classes, based on its existing Explosives Remediation Program, that gives air marshals hands-on opportunities to learn about types of improvised explosive devices terrorist organizations might try to use onboard commercial aircraft. The classes also include other information and tactics to help marshals mitigate threats to commercial aviation.

“Being able to see real explosives and what items can be used to make a bomb shows the air marshals exactly what they’re looking for,” Hedges says. “Showing how explosives can be concealed in everyday items demonstrates the threat, and seeing the power of the explosives drives home the threat.”

The classes include demonstrations of numerous improvised devices constructed using a variety of explosives (both military and commercial in origin). Because the threats the marshals face are constantly evolving, the marshals are exposed to situations that skew toward the unorthodox. The classes also feature explosives concealed in items that travelers regularly bring onboard aircraft and unusual items used in the construction of improvised explosive devices.

“The opportunity to see actual explosives and watch what they can do reinforces the seriousness of the threat,” Hedges says. “The ability to show how explosive devices can be constructed teaches the marshals to think outside the box when it comes to thinking about what can be used to build a bomb.”

Hedges adds that the specialized training offered by NLECTC–Rocky Mountain effectively complements the training that all Federal Air Marshals received on entering the service. “The air marshals receive training on explosives and how to handle a situation involving them,” he says. “The training they received through NLECTC–Rocky Mountain goes much further into detail, however, and the actual demonstration of explosives cements the threat in their minds.”

“The men and women of the Federal Air Marshal Service face unique pressures, problems, and challenges,” says Paul Reining, Explosives Remediation Program project manager at NLECTC–Rocky Mountain. “They must make lightning-quick decisions in a cramped, pressure-packed environment, and they must do so with the knowledge that hundreds, if not thousands, of lives may hang in the balance. They must be familiar with all manner of threats, tactics, and weapons that may be encountered in any given situation.”

Reining adds that the objective of the Rocky Mountain explosives training for Federal Air Marshals is to serve both as an eye-opener and as a means to mitigate one

of terrorism’s most prominent advantages—surprise. “Through demonstrations of explosive devices concealed in innovative ways or made out of materials that make them difficult to detect via traditional means, participants learn to shift both their tactical and strategic approaches,” he says. “Rocky Mountain’s training offers them a number of new tools in their fight against terrorism.”

Hedges says that the hands-on, practical nature of the training helps the information “stick.” He says, “We received nothing but positive responses from the marshals. They really enjoy the demonstrations. I think they gain a new respect for the explosives threat and will use this information on every mission. If you have never seen explosives detonate, you can’t fully appreciate the power and destructive capability.”

The training offered by NLECTC–Rocky Mountain to the Federal Air Marshal Service consists of series of instructional sessions featuring live explosives demonstrations, lectures, and hands-on exercises. It is a variation on the Center’s ongoing explosives training classes offered to the general law enforcement and public safety community at various times throughout the year at the University of Denver’s test range facility in Watkins, Colorado. For more information about the Explosives Remediation Program and related training initiatives at NLECTC–Rocky Mountain, contact Paul Reining, 800–416–8086 or preining@du.edu.



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