SKIES UNDER SIEGE

TERROR HITS HOME

# Hijackers defeated flawed airport security

*Former inspector says lots got through*

By Andrew Mollison and Julia Malone
Cox News Service

WASHINGTON — One American who wasn't shocked by the almost simultaneous hijacking and subsequent destruction of four airliners from three airports was A. Mary Schiavo, the former inspector general for the U.S. Transportation Department.

"For at least 10 years the United States government has known that domestic aviation security is extremely, extremely lax," she said Tuesday. "This is an outrage and this is an outrage that was not unforeseen."

As inspector general, Schiavo tested security at major airports in 1993 and again in 1996.

"We were able to access any airport in the United States that we tried, at will," she recalled.

"We got on any airplane that we wanted. We got through security 73 percent of the time. We got guns, bombs, knives, hand grenades through. And we drove onto airport property almost at will."

Whether airport security is lax or not, terrorism experts say it clearly is not the equal of a determined hijacker.

Bruce Hoffman, a terrorism expert at the RAND Institute, a California-based think tank, said Tuesday's terrorists benefited from the "unquestioned dedication" needed to overcome the will to survive, and also exhibited a highly effective combination of the patience to conduct preliminary surveillance, the acquisition of piloting skills sufficient to guide an airliner into a large building, and "enough professional tradecraft to bluff their way through the security that exists at airports."

Hoffman also speculated that defeating airport security cost the hijackers more in time than money.

"These terrorists learned from past mistakes by other terrorists, and security against such people will always require keeping one step ahead," Hoffman said. "The main expenditure would have been time, the time needed for the intense reconnaissance and preparation needed to choose the airports where it would be easiest to overcome or spoil the security system."

Schiavo estimates that the United States would need to spend at least $10 billion to make the country's airports more secure.

In 1996 Congress did authorize a security upgrade inspired by Schiavo's investigations as well as recommendations from an aviation security commission headed by then-Vice President Al Gore.

The innovations included architectural changes to eliminate access to obscure passageways, new bomb-detection scanners to inspect both carry-on and checked baggage at major airports, and a new rule requiring criminal background checks for the employees of the firms hired by the airlines to operate screening machines.

Some older procedures, such as the assignment of armed air marshals from the Federal Aviation Administration to selected flights, were retained.

Schiavo, who quit as inspector general after blowing the whistle on security problems, has continued to raise the issue.

In 1999 she wound up as the target of an FBI investigation after she was caught collaborating with a Columbus, Ohio, TV station to try to get dummy weapons through airport detection systems. No charges were filed, but the FAA responded by banning such news media investigations.

# Planes grounded across the nation, but travel expected to resume today

*Tougher security measures likely to be installed*

By James F. Peltz and Jeff Leeds
Los Angeles Times

U.S. air travel stopped Tuesday, emptying the skies above the nation and closing all airports for the first time, after the unprecedented terrorist attacks on New York and Washington that involved four hijacked commercial jetliners.

The airline industry tentatively planned to resume operations today at 11 a.m. CDT. But the FAA is expected to require tougher security measures for boarding passengers, measures that could severely hobble the system's efficiency over the next few days, analysts said.

On Tuesday, an air travel system that normally moves 1.5 million people on more than 40,000 commercial and chartered U.S. flights was brought to a standstill, as the more than 5,000 jets that crisscross the country were grounded by the Federal Aviation Administration as a precaution in case of other attacks.

Federal authorities also quickly diverted hundreds of international flights bound for the United States to airports elsewhere, mainly in Canada. Airlines in Asia, Europe and other continents suspended service to the United States.

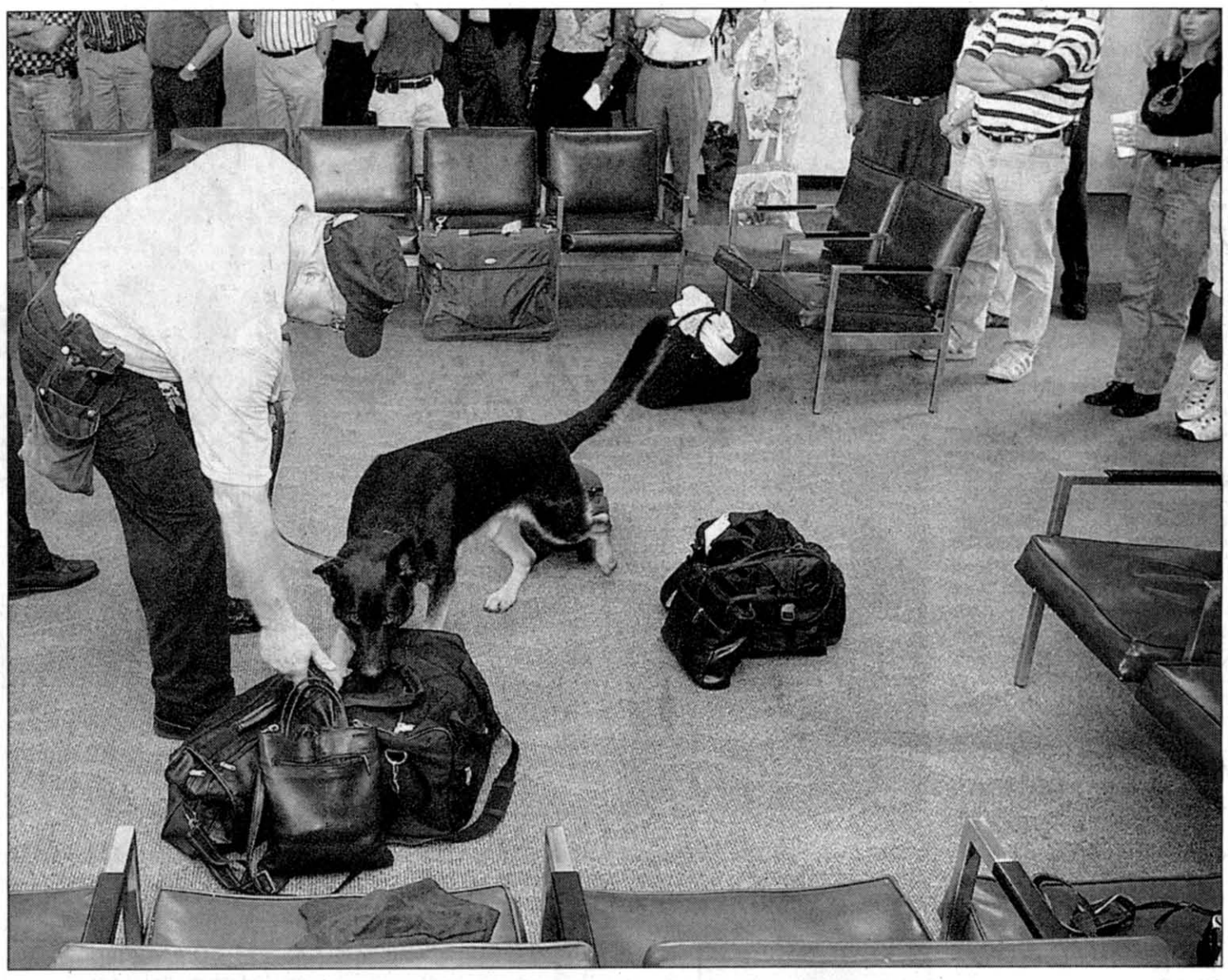
Some Amtrak rail service and Greyhound bus operations also were halted, mainly in the Northeast.

"The airline transportation system as we knew it died as of 9 a.m., New York time" when the second hijacked jetliner plowed into the World Trade Center, said Michael Boyd, president of the aviation consulting firm Boyd Group in Evergreen, Colo.

Air travelers' "ability to walk through a simple security system, run by people who don't know security, is gone," he said.

The astonishing shutdown of air travel provided one of the most tangible ways that Americans across the country felt a direct ripple effect of the attacks on the East Coast.

Not only could countless numbers of travelers not fly, but thousands of others found themselves landing in cities other than their destinations, as the FAA ordered en route jets to land at the nearest airport.



AP PHOTO

A bomb-sniffing dog and its handler walk through an almost-deserted Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport after all flights were canceled in response to the hijacking attacks on New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington.

Any prolonged shutdown of the air travel system and the resultant disruption of business and leisure travel and cargo flights could cause serious harm to the U.S. economy.

On Tuesday, aircraft flown by the U.S. Postal Service and cargo carriers such as United Parcel Service and FedEx also were grounded by the FAA.

The airline industry and the airports, notably LAX in Los Angeles, quickly became a focal point of the nightmarish tragedy, owing to the terrorists' use of four commercial jetliners to carry out the suicide missions. All four were flying to California, and together they carried more than 260 people.

American Airlines, the nation's largest airline, confirmed that two of its flights were seized and used in the attacks. Flight 11, a Boeing 767 flying from Boston to Los Angeles, was one of the jetliners that hit the World Trade Center towers in New York. The other American Airlines plane that was hijacked was Flight 77, a Boeing 757 flying from Washington's Dulles Airport to Los Angeles. That aircraft was the one that crashed into the Pentagon.

United Airlines also lost two jetliners. Flight 175 from Boston's Logan Airport to Los Angeles, a 767, was the other jetliner that slammed into the World Trade Center. United Flight 93, a 757 en route to San Francisco from Newark, N.J., crashed 80 miles southeast of Pittsburgh.

"We are horrified by these tragic events," said Donald Carty, chairman of American Airlines.

Mary Jersin, a spokeswoman for Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific Airways, said the carrier had eight U.S.-bound flights either diverted to Vancouver, Canada, or canceled and that it called off four more that were scheduled to leave Hong Kong after midnight early today.

Lee Manchen of Detroit, a passenger heading home on a Northwest Airlines flight from Tokyo, said the pilot announced that mechanical problems had forced him to divert the plane to Vancouver. The pilot later apologized, Manchen said, for not telling the truth, saying "it was the worst day of our lives and he would remember it forever."

Boyd, the independent airline analyst, blamed the extent of the damage squarely on the FAA, charging that the agency has allowed security to be lax at passenger check-in points around major airports.

"The airport perimeters at many airports have been sieves, and the FAA has done nothing about it," he said. FAA officials could not be reached to respond.

Travel and airline experts said the tragic events could result in devastating short-term losses for the major U.S. carriers and may lead to higher ticket prices as the companies pass on the costs of tightened security measures.

The new security clearances that passengers will face are expected "to be quite Draconian," said Steve Alterman, president of the Cargo Air Line Association, an industry trade group in Washington.

Aaron Gellman, a professor at the Transportation Center at Northwestern University, said the overall effect on the economy could be devastating.

"The airlines are the most vulnerable and would be most affected by this," Gellman said. "It's impossible to predict with any precision what's going to happen. This is a very important, watershed event."

Parsons said the attacks could lead to a wholesale review of security measures, particularly those applied to domestic travelers.

"I think in America, we've never had the true fear of travel, like you do in Tel Aviv. Look at El Al," Parsons said, referring to the Israeli airline. "They may inspect your bag three times before it gets on the plane. You go to Europe, you see the dogs and the guns in the airports. I think high security we've talked about, we've had opportunities to bring in good equipment, but we've never spent the money on it, not on the domestic side."

# Warnings issued to travelers Friday

*State Dept. urged vigilance abroad*

By Karen DeYoung
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — As recently as Friday, the State Department issued a dire public warning of increased terrorist threats against U.S. citizens abroad, urging all Americans to "maintain a high level of vigilance" while traveling overseas. It was the broadest of at least 44 separate warnings made this year.

But there were no advisories about vigilance at home and no specific indications of heightened domestic threats. A number of knowledgeable terrorism experts said Tuesday they were unaware of any reports that terrorists were planning — or were capable of carrying out — anything resembling the sophisticated, simultaneous strikes that occurred in New York and Washington.

Now, as the government undertakes massive efforts to discover who perpetrated Tuesday's attacks and how they were accomplished, investigations also will examine whether they should, or could, have been anticipated.

What happened Tuesday was not even near the top of the government's list of terrorist threats. In a lengthy assessment presented to the Senate in May, then-FBI Director Louis Freeh cited cyber-terrorism and the use of chemical, biological or radiological weapons as the greatest emerging terrorist threats to the United States. In a speech last month in Albuquerque, N.M., President Bush said the "true threats" facing the United States came from weapons of mass destruction launched by rogue nations.

Security has been stepped up in recent months at the nation's military bases, and the Federal Aviation Authority has revised and broadened its airline and airport security regulations. New legislation has been proposed to tighten security at the nation's seaports. But these actions have come in response to general feelings that complacency could lead to vulnerability, rather than to any specific threat.

Yet many specialists and government officials believed that somewhere, sometime soon, another attack along the lines of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Africa or last year's attack on the USS Cole in Yemen would be launched against a U.S. target.

Their concerns have been heightened to some extent by the success of law enforcement and intelligence agencies in thwarting major terrorism plots. Dozens of North Africans have been arrested across Europe in recent months, all believed connected to the so-called Millennium bomb plot to hit numerous targets in the United States. The plot was uncovered when an Algerian, Ahmed Ressam, was stopped with explosives in his car when he tried to cross the Canadian border into the United States in late December 1999.

Ressam, who was convicted in April of nine terrorism charges related to plans to bomb Los Angeles International Airport, has provided what U.S. authorities charge is a direct link to Osama bin Laden, the Afghanistan-based Saudi expatriate who the United States has charged leads a loose international organization of anti-U.S. terrorist cells and ordered the 1998 embassy bombings.

Ressam testified in July against another one of the plotters, Mokhtar Haouri, in a bid for leniency in an upcoming sentencing. Ressam also led international authorities to Haydar Abu Doha, an alleged bin Laden lieutenant currently under arrest in Britain, whose extradition was requested last week by the United States.

The assumed or proven mastermind of most major terrorist threats against the United States, Bin Laden has also been the subject of early speculation about Tuesday's attacks. "It's hard not to draw that connection" with bin Laden based on the Rassam case, the embassy bombings and other credible reports," said Bruce Hoffman, a terrorism expert and head of the RAND office in Washington.

But bin Laden is far from the only suspect. "The trouble is that in the firmament of the Middle East, it's very hard to say with any sort of certainty," he said.

In response to what the United States believes has been credible information about possible terrorist attacks, U.S. embassies around the world have been closed at least temporarily on 68 occasions since 1968, including two weeks ago in Romania and Bulgaria. Travel warnings for U.S. citizens, either to avoid specific threats against Americans or general unrest, are currently in effect for countries as far afield as Jamaica, Bangladesh, Mali, Israel, Papua New Guinea, Kirgizistan, the Philippines and Belgium.

Last spring, FBI officials investigating the Cole bombing were evacuated from Aden, Yemen, after information was intercepted that they were about to be attacked. In July, the United States canceled joint military exercises in Jordan and put the Bahrain-based Fifth Fleet out to sea following threat reports. In early August, Indonesian intelligence officials publicly warned of possible attacks against U.S. installations by separatist extremists.

Friday's "Worldwide Caution" alert from the State Department noted that "increased risk" of terrorism from groups tied to bin Laden began with reports first received last May.