

Air Line Pilot talked in December 2005 to Tom Quinn, director of the Federal Air Marshal Service, about issues of interest to ALPA members—especially FFDOs, now included under the FAMS umbrella. In January, Quinn announced he would retire, effective February 3; his successor had not been named at press time.

Air Line Pilot: The Federal Air Marshal Service (FAMS) has expanded dramatically since Sept. 11, 2001. How has this increased presence benefited aviation security?

Quinn: Since 9/11, the FAMS has rapidly evolved from a small cadre of Civil Aviation Security Specialists to a large, fully functioning federal law enforcement organization, now wholly integrated into the federal, state, and local law enforcement community.

The FAMS mission goes far beyond the scope and capabilities of the initial start-up force and now provides a robust law enforcement presence to achieve a comprehensive risk-based approach to aviation security. The FAMS operates under a sophisticated risk management/mitigation strategy to maximize the deployment of FAMS based on risk assessment.

Our success is not measured by the number of arrests made, cases closed, or incidents resolved, but by the absence of hijackings and criminal terrorist violence and mayhem in airports, airspace, and aircraft.

We have worked jointly with our strategic partners as part of a layered system of security to restore the confidence of the traveling public in the U.S. airline industry, as evidenced by the tremendous increase in passenger volume since 9/11.

The deterrent component of our mission reassures the traveling public that well-trained FAMS may be aboard their aircraft to protect them.

The FAMS mission goes far beyond responding to a direct, inflight attack—our first job is to keep the terrorist threat off the airplane.

Recent international terrorist attacks have reaffirmed that the war against today's criminal terrorist organizations requires vigilant law enforcement to improve our methods of detecting and deterring those who would commit acts of violence against aviation.

Since the start-up, the FAMS has significantly advanced aviation security and law enforcement in the areas of surveillance detection (counter-surveillance), intelligence, and information sharing.

The FAMS Surveillance Detection Reporting and Tactical Information Sharing Systems have become the operational cornerstone of aviation security awareness at airports, complementing Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff's philosophy that "our strength lies in what we can see and what we can access."

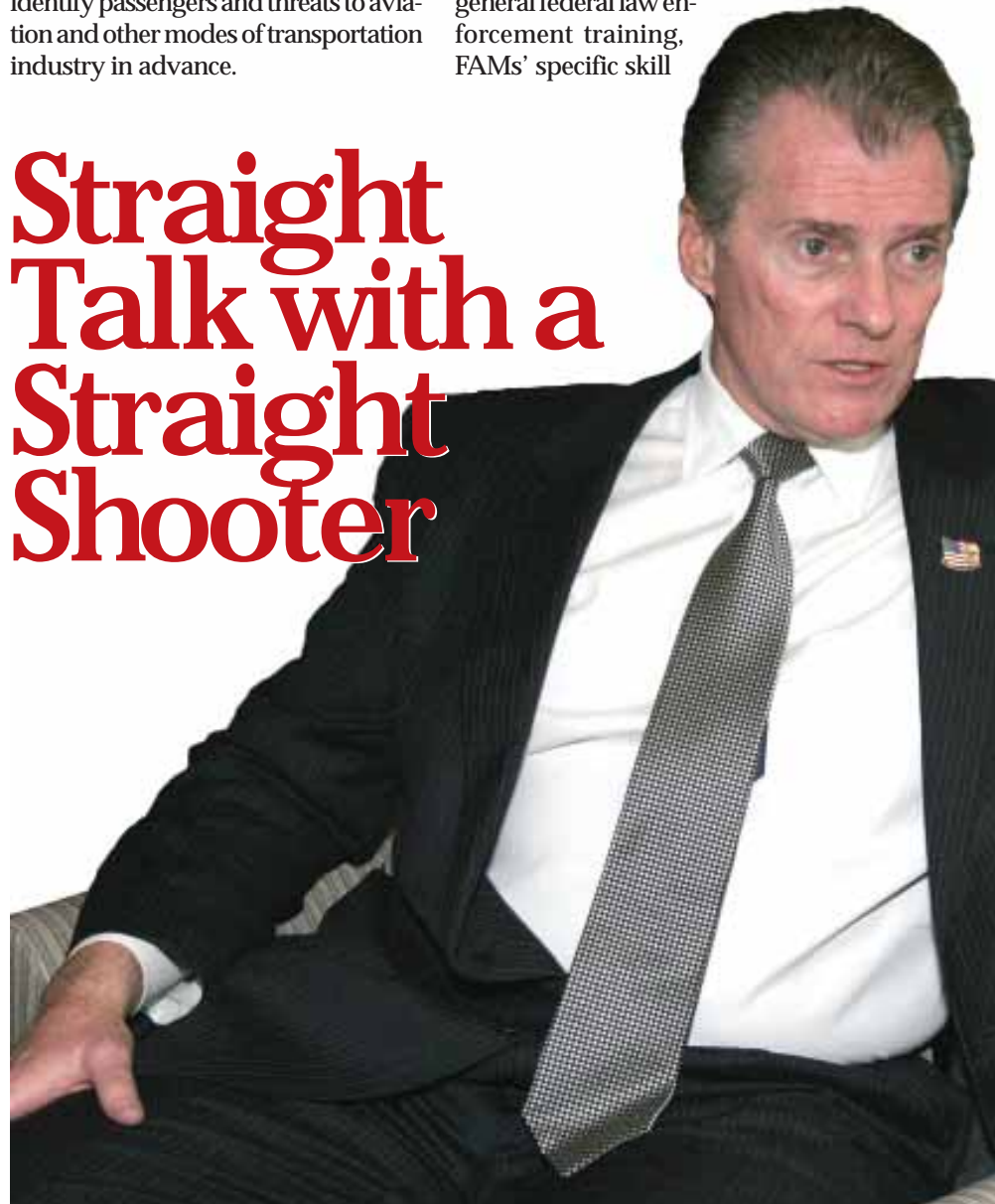
The FAMS has also placed FAMS and supervisors throughout the intelligence and law enforcement communities. The FAMS' participation ensures timely response to specific threats and the ability to implement enhanced security and law enforcement measures. Their participation also enhances the FAMS' ability to identify passengers and threats to aviation and other modes of transportation industry in advance.

ALP: What is the process for selecting and training FAMS?

Quinn: After 9/11, the U.S. Congress mandated immediate expansion of the FAMS from the 33 active FAMS on duty to the several thousand on duty today. This rapid expansion relied on the experience of applicants with prior law enforcement or military backgrounds. Candidates are vetted through extensive interviews, psychological testing, medical screening, and background investigations to determine the likelihood of their successfully completing extensive training to become a FAM. Every FAM candidate must also undergo an investigation for a Top Secret security clearance.

Building upon the past experience of these professionals, we provide federal law enforcement training and rigorous firearms and tactical training in countering hostile acts aboard an aircraft and operating effectively in the aviation environment. In addition to general federal law enforcement training, FAMS' specific skill

Straight Talk with a Straight Shooter



training includes armed and hand-to-hand anti-hijacking tactics, aircraft familiarization, how to detect improvised explosive devices, situational awareness, surveillance detection techniques, and many other skills.

The FAMS has a robust, recurrent training program at the local field office level. Each of the 21 field offices has a training staff, physical training facilities, firing range access, and aircraft tactical simulators to support FAMS training requirements.

FAMS undergo quarterly training in their field offices with an emphasis on legal, medical, tactical, firearms, defensive control techniques, surveillance detection techniques, and investigations.

Incidentally, the FAMS has the highest firearms qualifications standards among federal law enforcement agencies. FAMS training predominantly underscores federal law enforcement core principles, along with specific tactics and techniques.

ALP: Do FAMS have responsibilities beyond protecting passengers and crews during flight?

Quinn: Absolutely. Our mission is to promote confidence in our nation's civil aviation system through the effective deployment of FAMS to detect, deter, and defeat hostile acts targeting U.S. airlines, airports, passengers, and crews.

FAMS are trained and skilled to detect, deter, and defeat criminal terrorist activities within the aviation en-

How to Report Suspicious Activity

ALP: When crewmembers see suspicious activities in airport areas or on the aircraft, how can they notify FAMS of their concerns?


Quinn: The FAMS recognizes that airline employees are in a unique position to notice suspicious activity that others might miss. To capture these observations, we established an e-mail address for reporting suspicious activity and security concerns.

Submissions to Famsreport@dhs.gov are routed directly to our Investigative, Tactical Information, and Intelligence Branches.

Our Tactical Information Branch

collects and analyzes information gathered by our FAMS in the field and compares this with information collected from other government agencies and other sources. These FAMS, along with our intelligence analysts, are in the unique position of viewing all of the data in one place and noting patterns and trends.

I encourage all airline employees to report any suspicious activity they may observe to this e-mail address.

Additionally, if a FAM team is aboard your flight, please notify them discreetly. 

vironment *before* they occur. Moreover, because criminal and terrorist attacks nearly always involve some level of preoperational planning, FAM surveillance detection in the aviation environment promotes early detection and identification of suspicious activity, when criminal terrorists are most vulnerable and subject to discovery.

From the time a FAM team leaves their office on a mission—anywhere in the world—to the time they complete the mission and leave the airport, they are alert to suspicious activity and behavior. They are able to report this activity to the FAMS Tactical Information Sharing System, “real time,” for analysis and sharing with other FAMS and other law enforcement and intelligence organizations. This is an example of the law enforcement and intelligence communities “connecting the dots” on a daily basis.

The FAMS’ Tactical Information Sharing System, developed by the FAMS, uses advanced technology, an interactive analyst network with our partners, and trained FAMS to analyze and track information on potential threats. This information is disseminated to our investigative and intelligence branches for further analysis and investigation with our partners in the law enforcement and intelligence communities.

The FAMS has also established tactical information-sharing system ca-

pabilities with the aviation industry. Flight crews, for example, submit reports of suspicious activity that are analyzed for name comparison, patterns, and trends.

ALP: FAMS are required to be vigilant for extended periods during long flights. How do they stay alert during uneventful cruise?

Quinn: This is similar to situations in which other law enforcement officers find themselves. The FAMS are “quiet professionals” and are aware that the very core of their duties is to be vigilant. FAMS function as teams and are well-trained and disciplined, which enhances their ability to stay vigilant for extended periods.

ALP: Because of tight scheduling, flight crews often have little opportunity to discuss security issues with FAMS operating on their flights. Are additional resources available for line pilots to learn more about the FAMS?

Quinn: Yes. We just completed an informational video for airline employees to promote better understanding of our organization. The video is being distributed to airline corporate security departments and should be widely available now.

Furthermore, with the Federal Flight Deck Officer (FFDO) program transferring to the Transportation Security Administration’s FAMS, we have an opportunity to capture synergies be-



PHOTOS: GARY DINIUNO

tween the FFDOs and the FAMS through focus groups, open communication, and integrated training.

ALP: The TSA recently announced that armed pilots serving as FFDOs will now operate under your leadership. What changes do you envision for FFDO initial, recurrent, and requalification training?

Quinn: We will be proactive in all phases of the FFDO program, from operations to training to sharing intelligence. I believe our highly qualified firearms instructors will enhance FFDO proficiency in weapons handling and qualification. Additionally, training together will solidify the FFDO-FAM relationship, which will enhance our overall joint operational effectiveness.

ALP: Volunteer pilots serving as FFDOs have often felt disconnected from traditional law enforcement because of the dispersed nature of their operation and limited contact with TSA supervision. What can be done to improve communications and interaction with FFDOs in the field?

Quinn: We have started an FFDO focus group to encourage discussion of current and emerging program issues. The first focus group meeting was scheduled for Dec. 7, 2005, with participation from FFDOs and FAMS leaders [see "Committee Corner," page 22, for a report on this meeting]. We plan to conduct periodic focus group meetings throughout the year to provide greater opportunities for training and operational partnership. We will also provide a method to share intelligence information with the FFDOs through their established system of communication.

Our vision is that the partnership between the FFDOs and the FAMS will be enhanced through focus groups, open communication, and integrated training.

ALP: How would you describe the working relationship between FAMS and airline pilots? Between the FAMS and ALPA?

Quinn: I believe our working relationship is excellent. We have worked to establish a partnership with the airlines, pilots, and flight attendants—a

partnership that is central to accomplishing our mission.

The vast majority of our missions are conducted in a professional manner, while maintaining good relationships with the entire flight and cabin crew. We believe this rapport will be further enhanced now that we are managing the FFDO program.

Our relationship with ALPA is strong. The FAMS leadership has been engaged with ALPA since the initial expansion of the FAMS in early 2002. Senior FAMS managers have attended numerous meetings with ALPA's National Security Committee.

With the lines of communication open, and common goals and understanding paramount, we will continue to further build upon this solid base.

ALP: What is your personal vision of the FAMS, its challenges, and its future in aviation security?

Quinn: The FAMS will continue to play a significant role in working in partnership with the law enforcement and intelligence communities to combat criminal and terrorist activity.

To this end, I envision a robust FAMS that is joined with the other layers of aviation security and law enforcement.

The FAMS' Oct. 16, 2005, transition to the TSA was an important step in achieving this goal of improving the coordination and efficiency of aviation security operations and law enforcement. This transfer is part of a broader TSA reorganization to align functions with DHS "Second Stage Review" findings for strengthening and consolidating all aviation law enforcement and security functions at the federal level, and for creating a common approach to stakeholder outreach.

Our most important asset, and the best weapon the FAMS has to offer, is our people. Our workforce is made up of well-prepared, well-trained, well-equipped, and fiercely dedicated professional law enforcement officers. However, we must enhance career opportunities within the FAMS and the transportation law enforcement domain to allow a well-rounded federal law enforcement officer to prosper within our organization.

I salute the men and women of the FAMS flying the skies every day who provide a federal law enforcement capability in airports and airplanes. Their efforts, hard work, dedication, long hours, and sacrifice truly help keep this great nation safe. 🌐

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