

Committee Corner

News from ALPA's Committees

ALPA Makes Recommendations for Improving the FFDO Program

Adapted from the first in a series of "white papers" on airline security issued by ALPA's National Security Committee.

ALPA is strongly convinced that the Federal Flight Deck Officer (FFDO) program provides significant deterrence against future hijacking attempts. The Association will strongly oppose any effort to undo the success of this program.

ALPA was the first organization to call for creation of the FFDO program, which occurred when the Arming Pilots Against Terrorism Act was enacted as part of the Homeland Security Act of 2002. The Association is grateful for the opportunity to have worked hand-in-hand with congressional leaders on this most important initiative and is prepared to do so again to help develop legislative improvements to the program.

ALPA also appreciates the Transportation Security Administration's significant efforts to develop and deploy the FFDO program. The Association is committed to continuing to provide expertise to the TSA to ensure the safest, most prudent, and most efficient implementation of the FFDO program. To strengthen the growing FFDO program, however, the TSA must examine and make improvements regarding several issues.

Training

The TSA has developed and implemented an extremely effective FFDO training curriculum. Pilots graduating from the current FFDO basic training course consistently attest to this fact.

To be successful, FFDO training must meet certain goals.

First, it must be standardized and consistent and provide FFDOs with the best tools, knowledge, and skills needed to accomplish their mission. The quality and uniformity of FFDO training are crucially important. The FFDO training curriculum must also be readily adaptable to meet changing needs and conditions. Training updates must be easy to deploy and provided consistently.

Second, but no less significant, FFDO training must provide the FFDO with a sense of institutional pride and belonging. FFDOs must understand that they are *deputized federal law enforcement officers*, trained and supported by the federal government. The real and perceived value of this key element of FFDO training, both

initial and recurrent, should not be underestimated.

ALPA thus supports the concept that FFDO training be offered throughout the United States. This can be accomplished by strategic positioning or increasing the number of available training sites. Wherever administered, training must promote consistency and esprit de corps.

FFDO training provided at nonfederal training facilities should include on-site federal representation during all training exercises to oversee administration and ensure quality and consistency with federal standards. All nonfederal trainers should be federally certified as proficient to provide FFDO recurrent training. The training



should reinforce the FFDOs' understanding that it is being provided under the auspices of the parent federal agency.

ALPA has long supported the Federal Air Marshal Service (FAMS) and views the FFDO program as complementary to it. Because of the commonality of certain specific mission responsibilities of FAMs and FFDOs, ALPA recommends that the TSA develop and implement joint training exercises involving both of these groups of federal law enforcement officers.

ALPA believes that, in consideration of FFDOs' personal sacrifices, the TSA should reimburse FFDOs for all costs associated with participating in this program, such as travel, food, and lodging expenses. ALPA also believes that, similar to the requirement placed upon employers of military reservists and national guardsmen to grant them leave to defend the nation, airlines should be required to grant pilots leave to attend FFDO training.

Psychological evaluations

Not everyone is suited for the law enforcement profession, which sometimes requires officers to make split-second decisions about using deadly force. Psychological screening is very useful in determining whether a candidate possesses the personality traits required to handle the demands of a law enforcement position. Only a small percentage of FFDO applicants fail the psychological test,

and an even smaller percentage of trainees fail to successfully complete FFDO training.

These evaluation processes, however, should be no more stringent than those used by other federal law enforcement agencies. Psychological screening should not be used as an artificial obstacle to entry into the FFDO program.

Powers, privileges, and captain's authority
FFDOs do not require, nor do they receive, the same amount of training as FAMS and other federal law enforcement agents who have arrest authority. Therefore, ALPA recommends that existing law enforcement response protocols be followed aboard airliners, with FAMS maintaining primary jurisdiction over incidents requiring law enforcement intervention.

FFDOs should hold a defined place in the law enforcement response continuum on an airliner, following the lead of any other duly authorized federal law enforcement agent. However, FFDOs' authority should supersede that of any state or local law enforcement officer traveling as a passenger on that airplane.

No laws or FFDO standard operating procedures (SOPs) should be interpreted to prohibit an FFDO from acting reasonably to prevent an act of terrorism, or otherwise to protect life, in defense of the cockpit.

The presence of any law enforcement officer (including an FFDO) on an airliner in no way supersedes the clearly established pilot-in-command authority of the captain. However, captain's authority does not extend to preventing a federal law enforcement officer, such as a FAM

or an FFDO, from fulfilling his or her federally mandated duties. No legislative amendments to the FFDO program should interfere with or alter captain's authority established in law.

Managing field-deployed FFDOs

After graduating from FFDO training, an FFDO is now deployed in the field on mission status without a field training officer or frontline supervisor to help the transi-

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tion into the realities of the assignment and to provide ongoing support. The FFDO is merely given a TSA telephone number to call if issues arise. ALPA has urged the TSA to establish a more extensive management and reporting structure.

The TSA has not fully succeeded in establishing an automated communications mechanism for the FFDO community. The TSA often transmits information to FFDOs by e-mail, which in many instances has been less than effective. For example, the TSA has been unable to keep all FFDOs advised of changes to their SOPs in a timely fashion.

FFDOs also should be able to communicate with one another through authorized, appropriate, and secure means. They should be able to provide peer support through a professional mechanism created in partnership with the TSA. These developments will create and sustain a healthy and viable organization.

FFDOs are uncertain what their status will be if they become the subject of an internal TSA investigation. The TSA has not informed them of their duties, rights, and exposure to liability if they find themselves in such circumstances. The TSA should rectify this deficiency.

The FAMS, recently given responsibility for oversight of the FFDO program, has indicated its intent to more effectively support and better manage FFDOs. ALPA looks forward to the fulfillment of this commitment.



FFDOs train on the pistol range.

GARY DINIUNGO

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Transporting and carrying weapons

Current FFDO SOPs relating to carrying and transporting assigned weapons create significant safety and security risks, as shown by TSA statistics regarding events involving mishandled and misplaced weapons.

Federal law enforcement experts have recommended that FFDOs be authorized to carry their assigned weapons on their person. They have further recommended that FFDOs not be required to transport their assigned weapon in a lockbox because, in most cases in which a weapon was lost, mishandled, or stolen, it had been stored in a container and was not carried on the person.

ALPA concurs with law enforcement and aviation security experts that FFDOs should not be separated from their weapons while in transit. Further, FFDOs should never be required to remove their weapon from their person while performing their duties as an operating flightcrew member.

ALPA agrees that no FFDO traveling in the cockpit of a passenger airliner should leave its confines to respond to a disturbance in the cabin. However, ALPA does not support the practice of prohibiting FFDOs who are deadheading, commuting, or on official travel for FFDO training from carrying their assigned weapon on their person in an airliner cabin. Moreover, the TSA has not given FFDOs a way to easily retrieve their weapon in an emergency.

International deployment of FFDOs

Under current procedures, FFDOs are authorized to fly in mission status only on domestic routes. This policy not only makes inefficient use of a valuable counterterrorism asset, it can also cause significant hardship for FFDOs and airlines. If on-call FFDOs at their domiciles are assigned international segments, they must find a way to secure their weapons, or refuse the trip. The TSA has advised FFDOs that airport Federal Security Directors (FSDs) would be available to help them in such times of need, but such help is sporadic and frequently unreliable.

ALPA believes that the TSA should do everything in its power to obtain agreements with foreign governments that will permit international deployment of FFDOs.

All-cargo operations

Flightcrew members operating all-cargo airliners face challenges that differ significantly from those that their counterparts flying passenger airliners experience. The cockpit of a passenger airliner is clearly defined and is protected by a reinforced door. If the cockpit door is inoperable, the airplane is removed from revenue operations until it is repaired. This is not necessarily the case with all-cargo airliners.

Many cargo airplanes are not equipped with reinforced cockpit doors, and some models operate without any form of barrier between the cargo area and the flight deck. If a reinforced door has been installed but is inoperable, that fact will not ground the flight.

Cargo airliners often operate in remote areas of airports that are not afforded the same security enhancements that are found on the passenger side of the air operations area. In most cases, they are not located within the Secure Identification Display Area. This potentially exposes all-cargo flightcrew members and airplanes to greater risk.

In addition, cargo flightcrew members are not afforded the extra layer of security provided by the presence of flight attendants, able-bodied passengers, FAMs, or traveling law enforcement officers. Often, cargo flights carry passengers, or "supernumeraries," who sit behind the exposed backs of the flight crew. These passengers might be company employees or nonemployees escorting live-stock or precious cargo. Supernumeraries are generally not screened by the traditional methods applied to persons traveling on passenger airliners, nor are they sub-

jected to the same background investigation processes applied to persons employed by passenger airlines.

U.S. government intelligence reports indicate that terrorists continue to express interest in using all-cargo airliners as weap-

ons of mass destruction. The potential destructive payload available to would-be hijackers warrants the added security provided by pilots who are also FFDOs.

To read the unabridged "white paper," visit ALPA's website, www.alpa.org.

Law Enforcement Officer Verification Card System

ALPA was involved in the FAA's developing the Law Enforcement Officer Verification Card System (LEOVCS), designed to positively verify the identity and employment status of all armed persons transiting airport security checkpoints. The TSA has opted against installing that system. ALPA believes that the TSA should implement LEOVCS, or another system providing the same function, as soon as practical, and that FFDOs should be screened at checkpoints in the same fashion as other law enforcement officers.

Badges

A law enforcement badge is a readily recognizable symbol of authority. A badge can help in quickly identifying an officer in an emergency, particularly when law enforcement officers from different agencies unexpectedly come together in handling an incident.

A badge also helps to instill in the law enforcement officer a sense of pride, mission, and institutional belonging to the agency he or she represents. FFDOs, however, are the only federal law enforcement officers not issued badges. This fact contributes to FFDOs' sense of detachment from their parent federal agency, and their perception that their agency lacks respect for, and confidence in, FFDOs and their mission.

ALPA recommends that, for the overall success of the FFDO program, the TSA issue metallic badges to FFDOs.

ALPA Issues Alert Bulletin on Alaskan Volcano

On January 23, the Association issued ALPA Safety Alert 2006-1 to warn pilots about an active volcano in the Aleutian Islands.

The ALPA safety alert advises pilots, "Avoid volcanic ash! Turbojet engines encountering volcanic ash are extremely susceptible to multiple malfunctions such as compressor stalls, rising EGT, torching from the tailpipe, and flameouts." In addition, smoke or dust may appear in the cockpit, an acrid odor similar to that of electrical smoke may be present, and at night St. Elmo's fire or other static discharges may be accompanied by a bright orange glow in the engine inlets.

Mount Augustine, located at N59.22.1 W153.25.1 and 63 DME on the 228-degree radial of the Homer (HOM) VORTAC, is in an increased state of seismic activity. The volcano erupted on January 11, 14, and 17, and the U.S. Geological Survey has assigned a "level of concern" color code of orange regarding Mount Augustine since then.

During the eruptions in January, a warning cylinder 5 nm in diameter to FL500 was established. Another erup-

tion could occur with little or no warning, and flight crews flying North Pacific routes should exercise caution and avail themselves of frequent updates on the status of Mount Augustine. A 1986 eruption of this volcano dropped ash on Anchorage, and PANC closed.

ALPA cautioned, "Pilots inadvertently encountering an ash cloud should immediately reduce thrust to idle (altitude permitting) and reverse course to escape from the cloud. Do not try to fly through or climb out of the cloud.

ALPA Engineering And Air Safety


Review aircraft manual procedures for inadvertent entry into volcanic ash."

If the ACM does not include such procedures, ALPA recommends that pilots

- disengage the autothrottle if it is engaged,
- turn on continuous ignition, and
- turn on all accessory bleed air to reduce engine pressure and provide additional engine stall margin.

Volcanic ash clouds do not appear on cockpit weather radar or ATC radar, and they are extremely difficult to detect and identify at night. Pilots must rely on reports from air traffic controllers and other pilots to determine

the location of an ash cloud. Remain well clear of reported areas of volcanic ash when they are reported. If you are the first to discover an ash cloud, immediately notify ATC and obtain a clearance to reverse course and/or escape, then follow the recommendations provided above.

Pilots who have questions or comments about this or any other aviation safety concern should contact the ALPA Engineering and Air Safety Department via the Association's toll-free aviation safety reporting line, 1-800-424-2470, or via e-mail at EAS@alpa.org. 

Steam rises from the Mount Augustine volcano 75 miles southwest of Homer, Alaska, on January 12. The volcano erupted early on January 11, sending an ash plume 28,000 feet into the Alaska sky.

