

**The original documents are located in Box 14, folder “La Guardia Airport Bombing” of the Ron Nessen Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

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I am deeply grieved by the loss of life and injuries which occurred tonight at La Guardia Airport, in New York. It appears this ~~was~~ senseless act <sup>involved</sup> ~~involving~~ the use of a bomb.

I have instructed Secretary of Transportation William Coleman and the F.A.A. to investigate immediately and to give me a complete report on the tragedy as soon as possible. The Justice Department and the FBI have been directed to provide whatever assistance they can to the FAA and local law enforcement agencies.



~~FLASH~~  
PRECEDENCE

LINCLAS  
CLASSIFICATION

FOR COMM CENTER USE ONLY

FROM: MIKE DUVAL  
TO: DICK CHENEY (VAIL)

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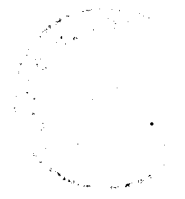
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SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

(DELIVER IMMEDIATELY)



FLASH

December 29, 1975

TO: DICK CHENEY

FROM: MIKE DUVAL

The following is an update of the explosion at La Guardia airport:

(1) Reports of fatalities range from 9 (FBI) to 17 (Coleman/ Red Cross). There are reports of 34 seriously injured and possibly as many as 75. *total injuries.*

(2) There is confirmation from FAA that the explosion was caused by a bomb in the baggage area used by Delta and TWA.

(3) A second bomb has been reported found at La Guardia and is being dismantled.

(4) A bomb has been reported at the Delta terminal in Detroit, aboard a TWA airplane which departed JFK airport (it has landed and is being searched) and National Airport has been evacuated due to a threat.

(5) The FBI is "informally" on the case assisting local authorities.

I talked to Harold Tyler, Deputy Attorney General (Ed Levi is out of town) and he concurs in a recommendation of Phil Buchen and myself that the President not involve the Justice Department in any directive at this time.

I recommend that the following statement be issued tonight. Although I am continuing to confirm facts concerning this incident, I believe it is important that the President act immediately.



The following is the recommended text for a Presidential statement:

"I am deeply grieved by the loss of life and injuries which occurred tonight at La Guardia Airport, in New York. It appears this was a senseless act involving the use of a bomb.

"I have instructed Secretary of Transportation William Coleman and the Federal Aviation Administration to investigate immediately and report to me on the facts of this tragedy and have a report ready for me ~~when I return to the White House~~ when I return to the White House."

Dave Gergen has reviewed the first paragraph of the suggested statement.



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 23, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR:

THE PRESIDENT

FROM:

JIM CANNON

SUBJECT:

Secretary Coleman's Report  
on LaGuardia Bombing

Attached for your review is a memorandum from Secretary Coleman summarizing the report of the Department of Transportation's task force study on the recent LaGuardia bombing (attachment A).

Also attached is a copy of the task force report and a cover memorandum from John McLucas, Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration (attachment C).

The report contains a number of short term steps that the Secretary plans to implement immediately. It also contains recommendations for an analysis and evaluation of longer term steps to meet transportation security problems. In this process, the Secretary has assured us that maximum use will be made of experience gained by other agencies concerned with security problems.

Jack Marsh, Phil Buchen, Domestic Council and OMB have reviewed this report. In addition, a meeting was held with Secretary Coleman and Judge Tyler, Deputy Attorney General, to review the report and staff recommendations. It was agreed that after you have reviewed and approved this proposal the memoranda of Secretary Coleman and Administrator McLucas should be released, but that the detailed report should be held as confidential because of the sensitivity of the analyses and findings.

RECOMMENDATION

I recommend that we respond to Secretary Coleman, thanking him and urging him to continue his efforts to seek permanent solutions to transportation security problems. Attached for your signature is a letter from you to Secretary Coleman (attachment B). The text of the letter has been approved by Paul Theis.

\_\_\_\_\_ Approve

\_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove



THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590

January 12, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

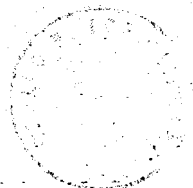
I am enclosing herewith as Attachment B the initial report of the Task Force on Airport Security formed as a consequence of the bombing at LaGuardia Airport in New York City.

This Task Force, under the chairmanship of the Federal Aviation Administrator, Dr. John L. McLucas, responded quickly. I believe the enclosed report is an excellent example of what government and industry cooperation can do when faced with a serious problem of national consequence.

As a result of their efforts, the FAA is able to take positive actions which are outlined in their letter of transmittal (Attachment A). I have studied this report and agree with its recommendations. Dr. McLucas will make these actions public later this week.

In summary the immediate action which will be taken includes:

- (1) Immediate on-site surveys of the nation's air carrier airports under the leadership of FAA Explosives Security Specialists to identify measures that airport operators can introduce quickly to prevent or deter the introduction of explosives or to reduce the effects of explosions, and to develop longer range airport counter-measures.
- (2) Continue the repositioning of airport public lockers in secure areas or to take other steps to control access, increase effective surveillance or reduce the effect of explosions.
- (3) Develop with the air carriers an effective and efficient system to reduce the possibility of explosives being placed aboard planes in checked baggage.
- (4) Develop procedures which will permit a better detection of explosives in bags.

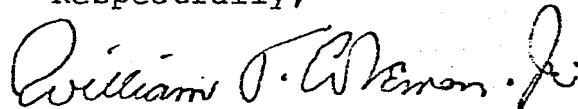


In addition to the actions to be taken immediately, I am considering certain legislative initiatives which would improve the security situation at our nation's airports. I will submit them to you as they are developed.

I am also concerned that this problem of airport security extends to the other transportation modes. To answer this concern, I have directed action within my own office to make recommendations to increase security at all transportation terminals.

I very much appreciate your active concern and leadership in this process. I assure you that this Department will pursue a vigorous program of close cooperation with other concerned Federal and local agencies to insure the maximum practicable protection of passengers of this nation's transportation system. I will continue to advise you of further developments.

Respectfully,



William T. Coleman, Jr.

Attachments





THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Dear Mr. Secretary:

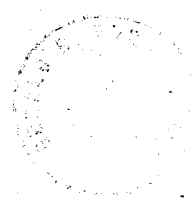
You and your staff, as well as others from within the Government and from the airline industry, are to be commended for your diligent work in responding to the recent LaGuardia Airport tragedy.

Your assessment of the issues we face in seeking permanent solutions to the problems of air transportation security correctly identifies the need to evaluate specific actions in terms of their legal, economic and operational impact. To this end, I am pleased to learn of your plans to continue the close cooperation with responsible local officials, other Federal agencies and industry representatives. A particular effort should be made to coordinate your future activities with other agencies concerned with the broader question of security against these types of incidents.

Safe and timely air transportation is an essential element of our Nation's economic vitality, national security and general well-being. We must, therefore, protect airline passengers and our airline system from such acts of violence and destruction. The achievement of this goal will require the cooperation of officials at all levels of Government, of the transportation industry and of the general public. I urge all parties involved to cooperate in this effort and request your continued efforts to develop and implement comprehensive improvements in air transportation security.

Sincerely,

The Honorable William T. Coleman  
Secretary of Transportation  
400 7th Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20590



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20590



OFFICE OF  
THE ADMINISTRATOR

January 9, 1976

Honorable William T. Coleman, Jr.  
Secretary of Transportation  
Washington, D. C. 20590

Dear Mr. Secretary:

In accordance with your instructions, I brought together experts from government and industry to review aviation security in light of the tragic explosion at LaGuardia Airport on December 29, 1975.

We do not now know whether the LaGuardia explosion was targeted against aviation or merely happened to occur in one of the lockers which are common to transportation terminals and other facilities serving the public. Whatever the connection, any strengthened security alternatives must be considered within the context of the U.S. air transportation system. There are 32 scheduled airlines operating a jet fleet of some 2,500 aircraft enplaning 500,000 passengers and more than 1,000,000 pieces of baggage on some 15,000 flights each day. The airlines serve almost 500 United States airports each of which is different in many respects. Accordingly, security alternatives must weigh carefully the impact on efficient movement of passengers, baggage and cargo, especially whether passengers can or should be expected to arrive at airports hours in advance of flight departures, and whether U.S. airports can or should be converted into fortress-like transportation facilities.

Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, the comprehensive working papers and studies should be carefully controlled. In the interests of aviation safety, I have accordingly determined that the detailed documentation not be circulated outside of authorized channels.

Based on the enclosed report, I am moving ahead on the following major initiatives:

Lockers: The LaGuardia explosion focused immediate attention on the security of public lockers. However, there are only 14,000 public-use lockers at airports and only 140 of the 500 air carrier airports in the country have any at all. And, the majority of these lockers are located at the 20 major airport terminals. So, securing

lockers is not the only answer. However, we are recommending that, where feasible, lockers be located within secure areas. Where this is not feasible, other means should be taken to control access, increase effective surveillance or reduce the effects of explosions.

FAA is conducting an immediate on-the-spot survey of the nation's airports to identify measures that can be introduced quickly and gather data to help develop long-range countermeasures.

Increased attention will be directed toward the redesign of lockers, locker areas and terminals. New designs might include modifications, for example, that would permit visual detection of stored baggage or restructuring the locker to direct the explosion blast away from persons nearby. Tests of current and modified lockers will provide guidelines on the best courses to pursue.

Checked Baggage and Cargo: Although the LaGuardia explosion occurred in a locker, it drew attention to other aspects of airport security, including current security requirements for checked baggage. Strengthened measures range from examining each piece of baggage to the development of less time-consuming but effective methods to determine quickly baggage and cargo that require special security attention. We also reviewed stricter application of or modifications to the procedures for handling baggage by authorized airline personnel, and more stringent measures for safeguarding luggage once it has been accepted. Some of these procedures will go into effect immediately; others are being refined and will be selected for implementation within 30 days.

Explosives Detection Techniques: FAA will immediately begin modifying existing x-ray absorption systems for operation at selected airports to detect explosives. The FAA also will step up efforts already underway to determine the feasibility of:

1. Using the x-ray fluorescence concept as an explosive detection technique.
2. Using nuclear magnetic resonance to detect different types of explosives.
3. Applying explosive vapor detection techniques to the inspection of hold baggage, cargo and the aircraft itself. Technology has not yet been able to come up with a mechanical "sniffer" that can compete with the nose of a trained dog, and therefore, we intend to increase the use of explosive detection dogs.
4. Adapting a thermal neutron detection concept to examine checked baggage and cargo.

There are several criteria that must be used in the development of new equipment and procedures. They must be quick and effective. They must be reliable, easily maintained and operable by relatively unskilled personnel. They must not present any hazards to persons or the environment nor damage luggage or its contents. And airports, airlines and passengers must be able to afford them.


Based upon our final assessments, we may be asking for your assistance in obtaining additional funds required to carry out the expanded activities I have outlined if further funding appears necessary. We will, of course, explore the activities of other Federal agencies as they may relate to these initiatives to assure full utilization of appropriate Federal capabilities and to avoid any duplication of effort.

Ultimately, better methods and machines are not the entire answer, particularly if they induce a sense of complacency or relaxation of vigilance. When the FAA released its latest report on the number of hijackings and other criminal acts against aviation, some felt that the strict procedures introduced a few years back were no longer needed. But, the fact is that the threat is with us and our major concern is that people will not recognize this because of the program's success. So, too, with bombings. We must develop the best equipment and measures. But we all must realize that continued vigilance is equally vital.

After the LaGuardia bombing, I visited the LaGuardia, Dulles and National Airports to check their security devices and procedures, and I spoke to many airport and airline personnel. There is obviously a heightened level of awareness to the threat which is perhaps our most important immediate defense. All these people, from the sky-cap or the ticket agent who may first greet the travelers to the captain who flies them to their destination are the human factors on whom safety depends. Any technological help we give them to do their job is a plus, not the solution itself.

I am confident, in summary, that just as the anti-hijacking program has been extremely effective, we can be equally effective in preventing and deterring other criminal acts against aviation.

Sincerely,

  
John L. McLucas  
Administrator

Enclosure

