

rorists (some 60,000 before 9/11) until he heard it mentioned during the Commission's January 26, 2004, public hearing. The FAA had access to some TIPOFF data, but apparently found it too difficult to use.⁵⁴

The second part of prescreening called on the air carriers to implement an FAA-approved computerized algorithm (known as CAPPS, for Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System) designed to identify passengers whose profile suggested they might pose more than a minimal risk to aircraft. Although the algorithm included hijacker profile data, at that time only passengers checking bags were eligible to be selected by CAPPS for additional scrutiny. Selection entailed only having one's checked baggage screened for explosives or held off the airplane until one had boarded. Primarily because of concern regarding potential discrimination and the impact on passenger throughput, "selectees" were no longer required to undergo extraordinary screening of their carry-on baggage as had been the case before the system was computerized in 1997.⁵⁵ This policy change also reflected the perception that non-suicide sabotage was the primary threat to civil aviation.

Checkpoint screening was considered the most important and obvious layer of security. Walk-through metal detectors and X-ray machines operated by trained screeners were employed to stop prohibited items. Numerous government reports indicated that checkpoints performed poorly, often failing to detect even obvious FAA test items. Many deadly and dangerous items did not set off metal detectors, or were hard to distinguish in an X-ray machine from innocent everyday items.⁵⁶

While FAA rules did not expressly prohibit knives with blades under 4 inches long, the airlines' checkpoint operations guide (which was developed in cooperation with the FAA), explicitly permitted them. The FAA's basis for this policy was (1) the agency did not consider such items to be menacing, (2) most local laws did not prohibit individuals from carrying such knives, and (3) such knives would have been difficult to detect unless the sensitivity of metal detectors had been greatly increased. A proposal to ban knives altogether in 1993 had been rejected because small cutting implements were difficult to detect and the number of innocent "alarms" would have increased significantly, exacerbating congestion problems at checkpoints.⁵⁷

Several years prior to 9/11, an FAA requirement for screeners to conduct "continuous" and "random" hand searches of carry-on luggage at checkpoints had been replaced by explosive trace detection or had simply become ignored by the air carriers. Therefore, secondary screening of individuals and their carry-on bags to identify weapons (other than bombs) was nonexistent, except for passengers who triggered the metal detectors. Even when small knives were detected by secondary screening, they were usually returned to the traveler. Reportedly, the 9/11 hijackers were instructed to use items that would be undetectable by airport checkpoints.⁵⁸

In the pre-9/11 security system, the air carriers played a major role. As the