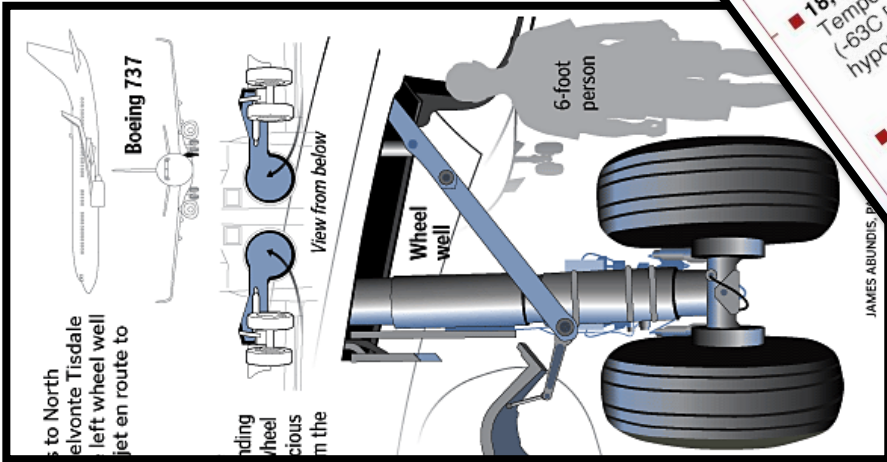


How to Stow Away on an Airplane (or die trying)

9 October 2019



The risks for stowaways

Stowaways hide in compartment holding landing gear. Wheels retract into compartment as plane climbs.

- 33,000ft (10,100m)**
 Lungs can't function normally, blood oxygen drops
- 22,000ft (6,700m)**
 Stowaway struggles to remain conscious
- 18,000ft (5,500m)**
 Temperature drops (-63C [-81F]), hypothermia sets in.
- Oxygen thins and hypoxia sets in. Stowaway experiences weakness, tremors, light-headedness and eyesight problems

Reported cases in the last 20 years

- Deaths 6
- Survivors 1

Image credit: Getty/Boeing

HOW THE STOWAWAY MADE IT TO HAWAII

- 1** Stowaway scales perimeter fence at Mineta San Jose Airport and climbs into the wheel compartment of a Boeing 767 standing on the tarmac
- 2** After take-off he positions himself to avoid being crushed as the wheels fold into the compartment. At 38,000 feet, the temperature drops as low as -62C. The stowaway loses consciousness
- 3** As the wheels extend for landing, the stowaway remains unconscious. He wakes up one hour later, jumps down and wanders around until discovered by airport staff

KAUAI OAHU Kahului Airport MAUI HAWAII

100miles

The plane flew from San Jose in California to Maui in Hawaii, taking 5 1/2 hours.

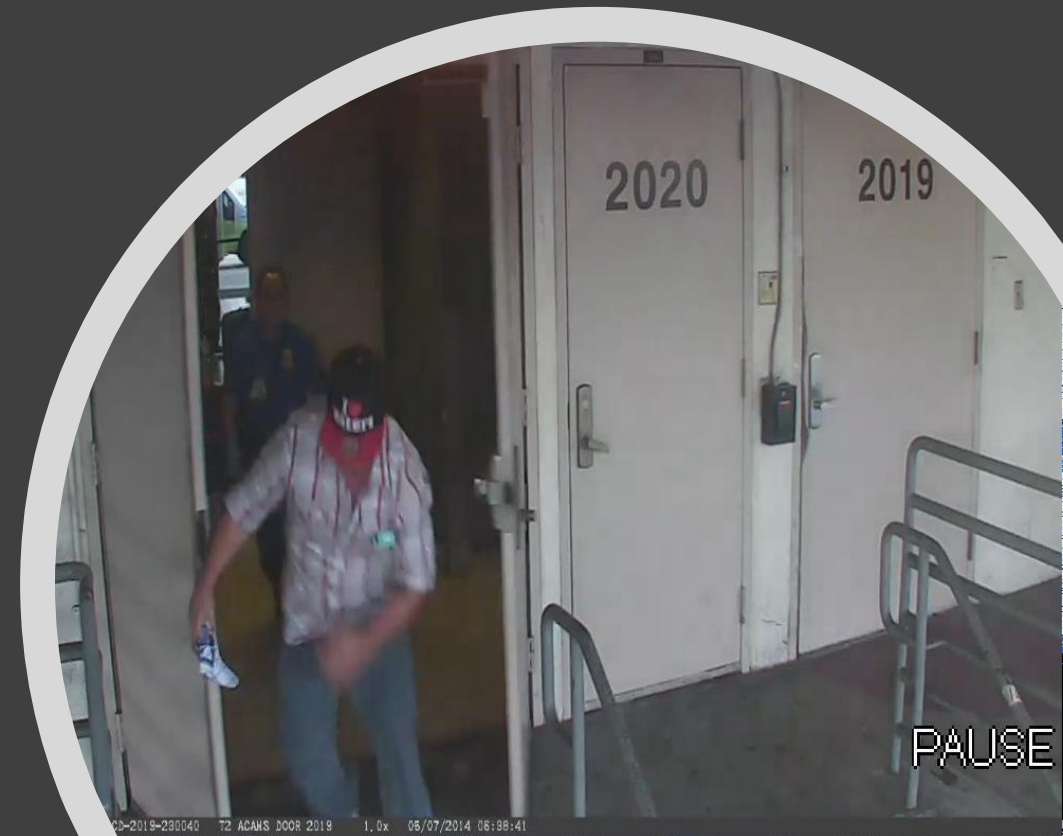
DISTANCE: 2,356 MILES

SAN JOSE

Stow away in a seat or in the cargo hold?



- **PRO:** Jumping the fence or running through a door is pretty easy and there are less people who can stop you.
- **PRO:** There's usually room in the wheel well for you to fit without getting crushed by the landing gear (usually).
- **CON:** Wheel wells are cold and there's not much oxygen so most people who do this die.
- **CON:** If you survive, you'll still be a total mess and probably need to be hospitalized.



PAUSE



This is what happens when you stow away in a wheel well

- That's the wheel well of a Boeing 747. The body was jammed between support beams and was on the aircraft (frozen) for five days before being found at LAX by the pilot during a pre-check flight. He was probably dead within a few minutes—no oxygen and super cold. Over the 5 days the plane went from Cape Town to London, London to Hong Kong (HK), HK to London, London to Singapore, Singapore to London, then London to Los Angeles International (LAX).

From Wikipedia:

- Between 1947 and June 2015, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) recorded 113 wheel well (landing gear compartments, aka wheel bay) stowaway attempts on 101 flights either departing from or landing in the United States. Of these 113 people, 86 died (76%) . As per the FAA, it is likely that the number of stowaways is higher than records show due to bodies having fallen into the ocean.

Okay, so we agree that we should focus on traveling in a seat...in a pressurized and climate-controlled environment...

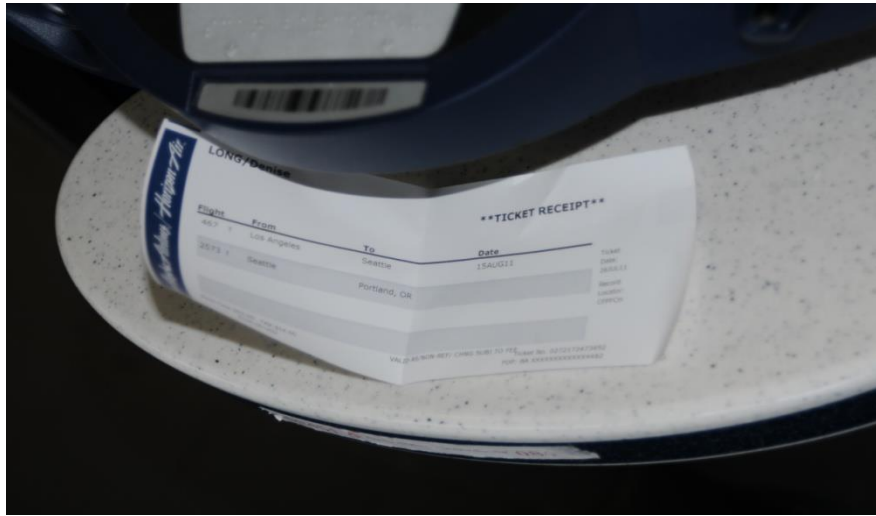
3 points of failure

- Initial check
- TDC
- Boarding the plane

All 3 require documents to get through

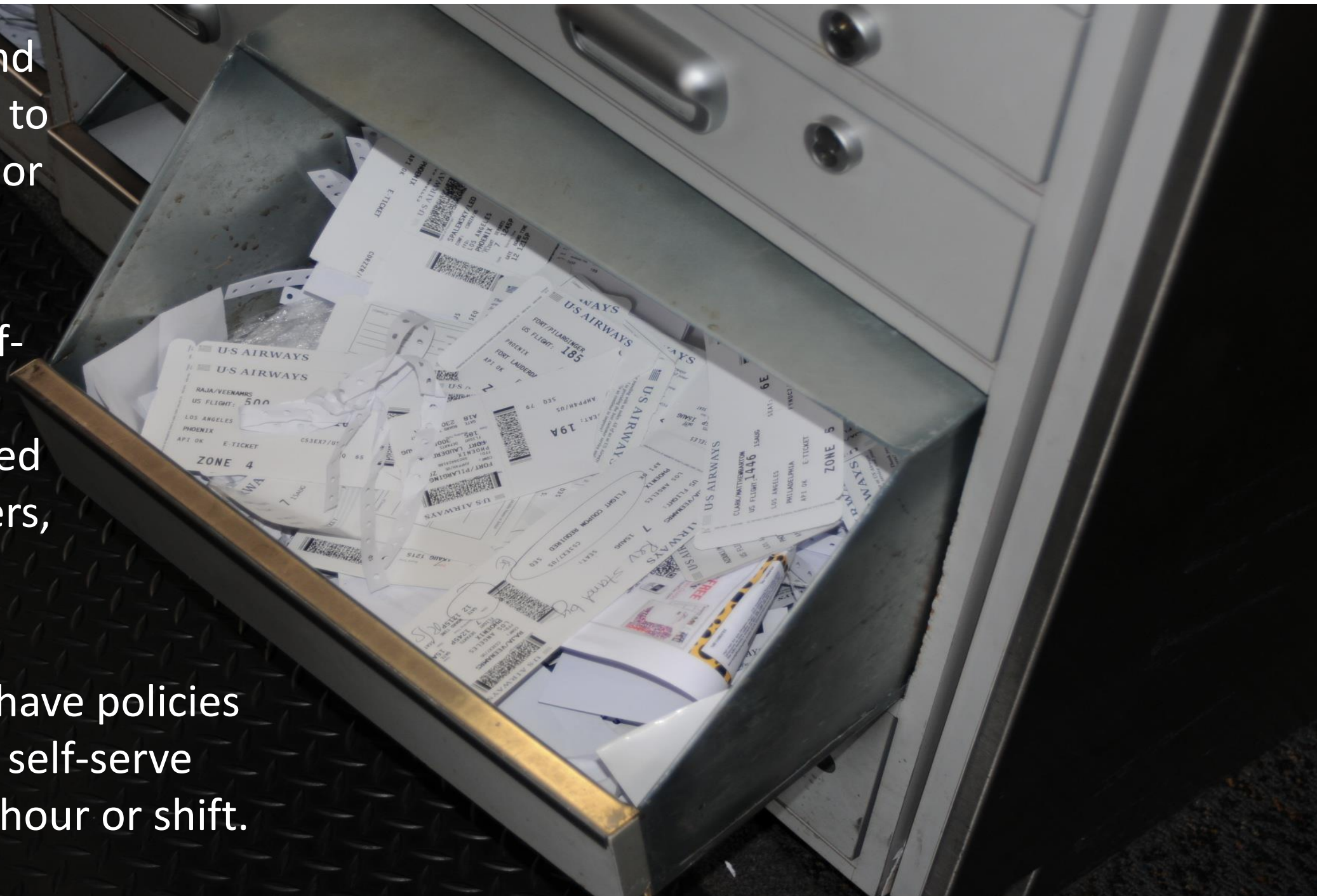
- Where can we get boarding passes?

Hooray for Self-Service Kiosks!



In this day and age, it's easy to find leftover or abandoned boarding passes at self-serve kiosks, behind unused ticket counters, and in trash cans.

Few airlines have policies to police the self-serve kiosks every hour or shift.



Airports are known for high security and people who work there have NO sense of humor. How to get through...

- **Conduct surveillance.**
- **How do passengers move through the airport?**
- **Where are points of failure at each terminal?**
- **Who is paying attention?**



Test the system



In our example, our stowaway subject is going to “go with the flow” and see if he can just get through. Are workers paying attention or are they bored and/or overworked? At the end of the video clip, an employee is seen stopping the subject. Great news that the security officer is paying attention.

Our stowaway acts surprised and confused—this is also normal and does not raise suspicion. And most of our confused travelers are actually confused so he doesn’t stand out. But while he is not identified as a problem, he also isn’t allowed to simply go through. He learns about the system and uses what he learned in his next attempt.

Try a couple days later at a different terminal

Get through the initial check by showing a boarding pass.

Go to TDC with a boarding pass and an ID.

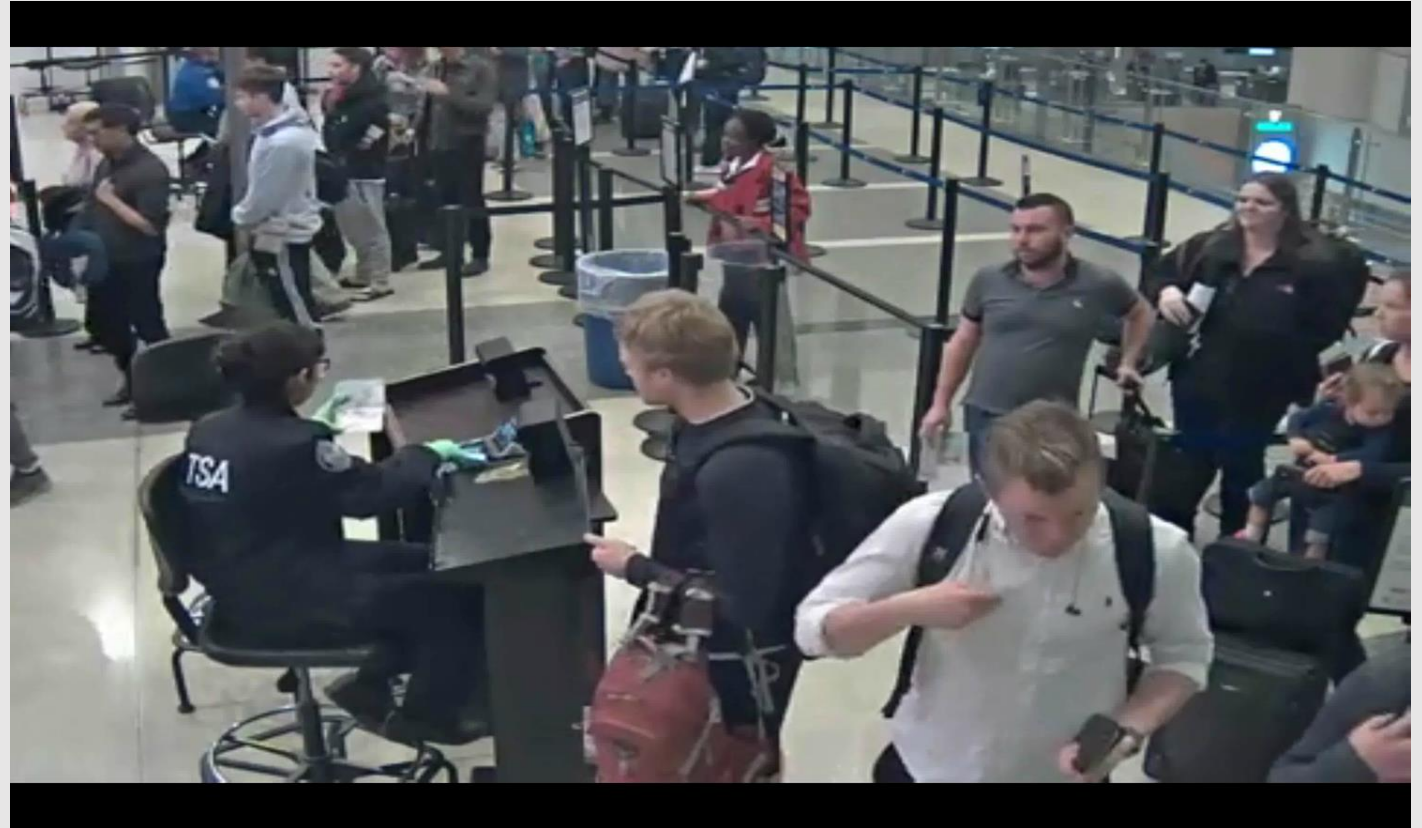
Sneak through... dang, she's paying attention...

Next attempt is at a different terminal.

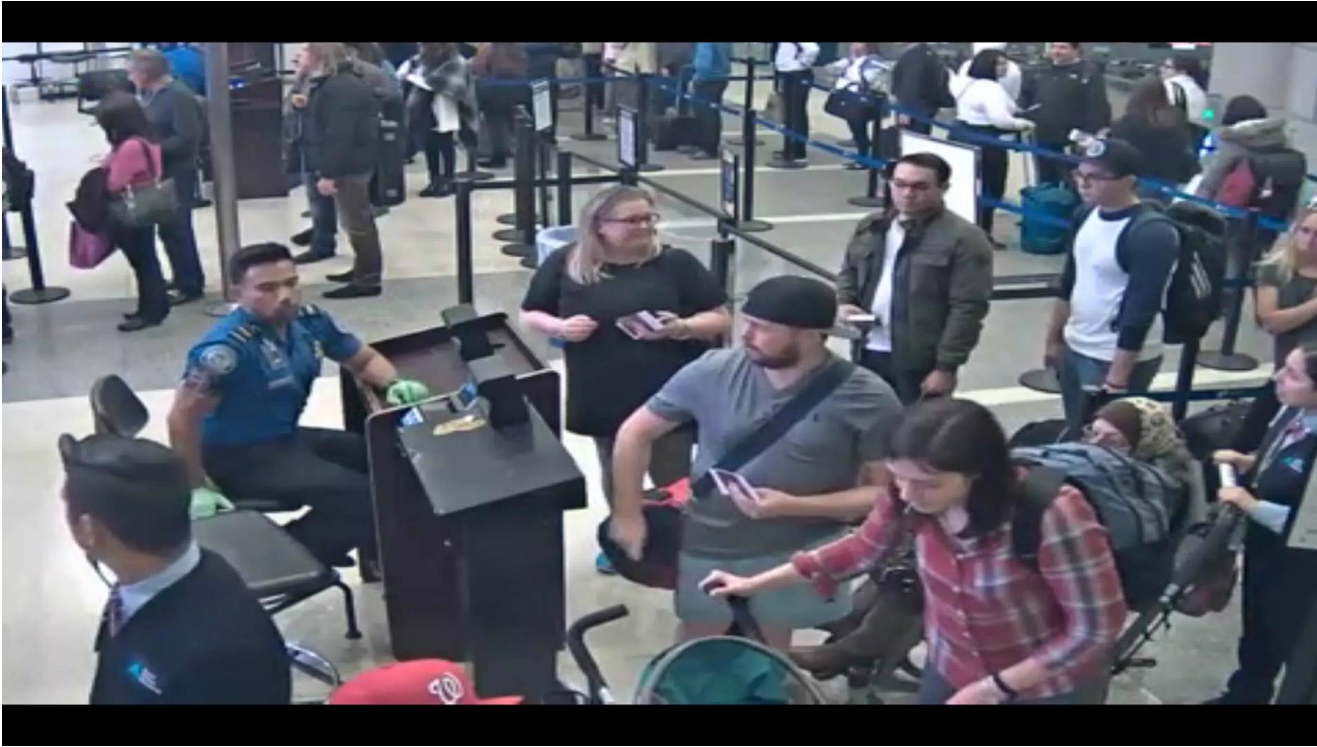
Our stowaway learned that the best approach is to have no contact with the screener at the document check station. He tries to sneak by.

Note that there's no space between passengers

so it's easy to have your view blocked. If we made it like a pharmacy counter, where there's a sign warning people to stay back to give others privacy, it would be harder to sneak by in this method. Also note that for all the "if you see something, say something" advertising we've done, nobody in line said anything. But he fails, so go to plan 2—lie and bluster. Show a boarding pass that doesn't work (the machine on the desk turns red—indicating it was bad). And then we see him look around for a boarding pass on his phone...he doesn't have a boarding pass on his phone that will work, but he's hoping she will give up and just let him through. She doesn't. Good for her.



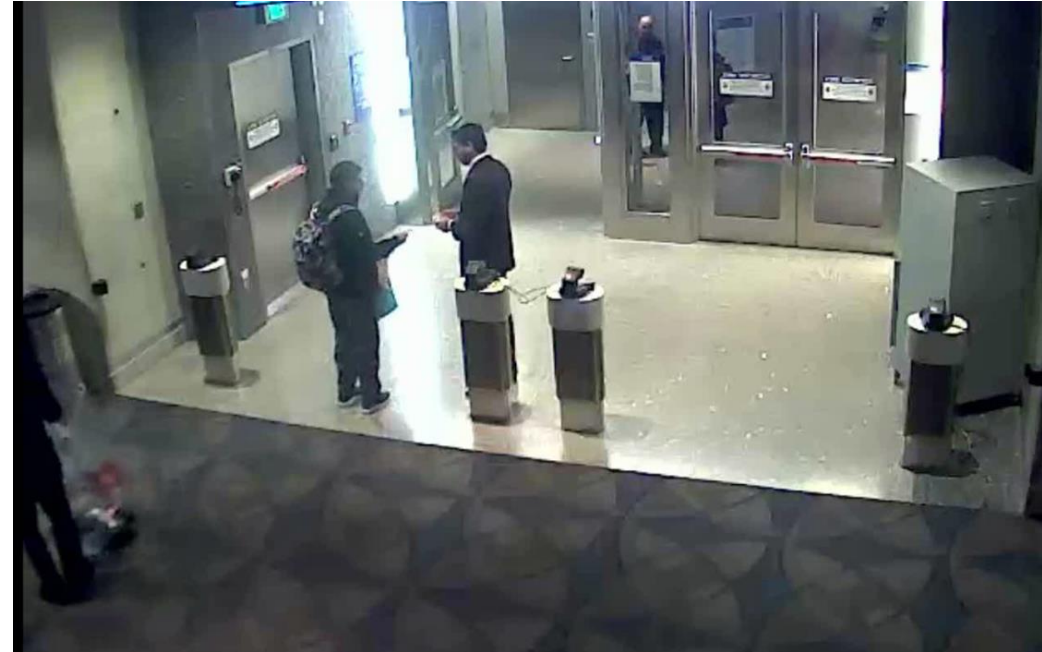
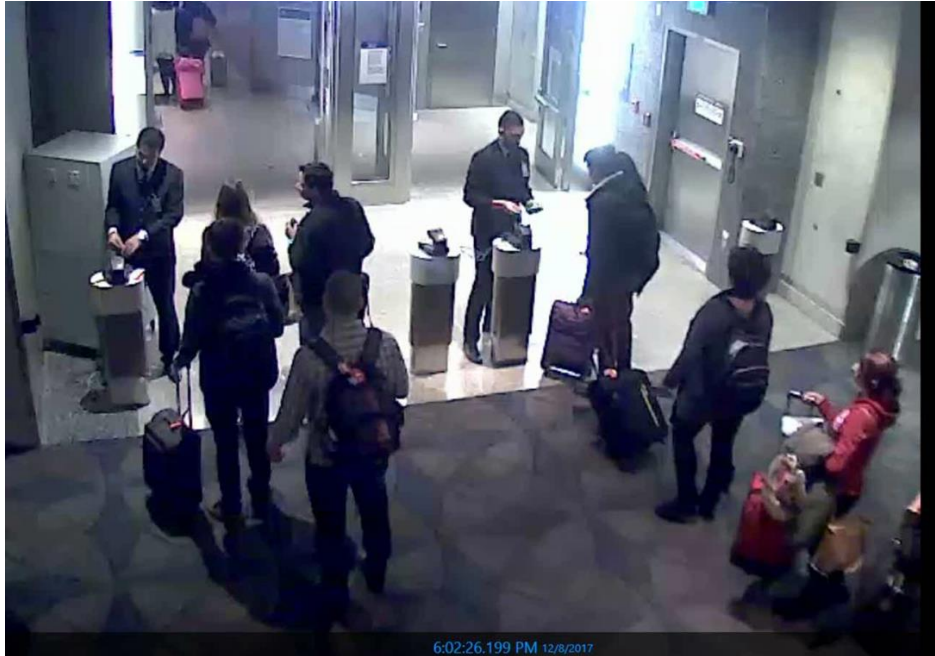
That was close. Try again.



If at first you don't succeed...try, try again.

Also, not the TSA officer's fault—he is doing his job. Our stowaway is seen on the video pretending to tie his shoe as he sneaks by. It works! Again, nobody in line says a thing.

Same thing at the gate: Do some surveillance to see what you're up against....



He's on the phone (at least he has a phone to his ear) as he again does surveillance. With 2 gate agents...this one is harder to sneak through...or is it...?

It looks easier now, so he'll do the same thing...he plays the "distracted traveler" to walk on through. He gets on the plane, but ultimately doesn't want to go to the overseas destination and tells the flight attendant. They check his seat assignment against the manifest and realize it was supposed to be empty. The plane taxis back and our stowaway is arrested.

Thoughts

- Focus on your job
- Don't get distracted
- Don't doubt yourself
 - You know policies and procedures. Follow them.
 - Don't be fooled by social engineers/fraudsters. "They told me to go here"
- Speed matters, but not as much as safety.
- Situational Awareness
 - Rip up loose boarding passes
 - Question people going through trash cans or taking passes
- Corporate Policy for policing self-serve kiosk area is nonexistent for most airlines.

Neighborhood Watch concept: Look out for your neighbors. Look out for your airport. Engage people in a polite and friendly way. Call the police when needed.

Questions?