

Passenger Testimony re El Paso Airport January 16 2006.txt

Subject: Passenger Testimony re: El Paso Airport, January 16, 2006

Mr. Gamble:

Per our conversation this morning, I have drafted an electronic message reporting the events that I witnessed yesterday at the El Paso airport. I am copying this e-mail to Carson Seeligson in the Continental legal department, having been referred to Ms. Seeligson by Ms. Nealan Kerwin of Continental. Please do not hesitate to call or e-mail me to discuss these matters further. As a concerned citizen and passenger, I consider it my duty to shed any light that I can on this unfortunate event.

Sam Rascoff

Statement of Samuel J. Rascoff  
January 17, 2006

I am a 33-year-old attorney who resides in New York, NY. Currently, I practice law at a major firm. From 2003-2004 I served as a law clerk to Associate Justice David H. Souter of the Supreme Court of the United States. I hold undergraduate degrees from Harvard and Oxford and a law degree from Yale.

Following is a description of the series of events that I witnessed yesterday, January 16, 2006, aboard Continental flight 1515, intended to fly from El Paso to Houston.

There was nothing out of the ordinary about the check-in or boarding processes. My wife, Lauren, and I walked onto the plane (up stairs from the tarmac), stowed our carry-on luggage in the overhead compartment (we checked no luggage) and found our seats: 6E and 6F. I took the window seat.

Very soon after getting seated, I noticed something unusual going on immediately outside my window. The flaps of the jet engine were open, and at least two men could be seen working on or near the engine. One man (bearded, forty-ish, brown-blond hair, blue uniform with orange earplugs) stood a couple of paces to the front and right of the engine with what appeared to be a gauge in his hand. He appeared to be testing air flow in the engine. Another man must have been standing or lying against the inside of the interior flap - from my window I could only see his booted feet planted against the outer surface of the engine.

As I watched the proceedings outside, the cockpit crew was clearly "gunning" the engine. The sound coming out of the engine was as loud as anything I have ever heard from a plane sitting still at the gate. Taken together, the extremely loud noise, the open flaps on the engine and the presence of crew working on the engine were sufficiently unusual that I commented to my wife that something seemed amiss. She agreed. The unusualness of the scene caused me to focus intently on what was happening outside my window.

At least five minutes (and probably more) went by with the engine being gunned and with work being done on the engine. The vast majority of passengers were in their seats. I could see only one man still standing in the aisle, waiting, so it seemed, to change his seat. I remained focused on what was going on outside.

A man rather suddenly appeared coming from behind the engine and advancing to its front on the outside right side. I could not say for certain what he looked like,

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although I am fairly confident he was wearing a similar uniform to the one worn by the bearded man. He may well have been older in appearance. He came around the engine from the outside right, may have stood there for a split second, then took a step to the left (in front of the engine) and was immediately and violently lifted off his feet and sucked into the engine head first and face up (as I recall it). Events happened far too rapidly for me to see the look on his face, but based solely on his movements, it appeared that he expected the engine to be off at the time. It did not appear that he accidentally slipped or fell into harms way. I am not sure whether the deceased was the same man whose feet I originally saw planted on the engine or whether he was a third man who I did not initially see.

As soon as the man was sucked into the engine, it made a number of loud grinding sounds and the airplane shook. I saw a small black object (a shoe, perhaps, or a piece of the engine itself) fly out of the engine toward the front. The bearded man on the ground did not appear to react to what had happened for at least a second or two. Upon recognizing what had happened, he motioned to the cockpit to shut down the engine. From that point on, I did not look outside my window.

I immediately explained to my wife (as well as to a woman sitting in 5E) what had happened and instructed her not look outside. She must have caught a passing glimpse while I was talking to her, for she later reported seeing the bearded man on the ground with his head between his legs.

About 20 seconds after the incident, a female flight attendant came from the front of the aircraft and asked for someone to call 911. A female passenger sitting near us did. I closed the window shade as I explained to the man in 6D what had happened. Very shortly thereafter, a male flight attendant asked everyone on the right side of the aircraft to close his or her window shade (he had to repeat the instruction to at least one passenger). He informed us that we would be deplaning immediately, and that we were to look straight ahead when we did. My wife and I complied with his instruction.

Thereafter, we were directed to the Continental ticket counter in the front of the airport. My wife and I waited on line for approximately 90 minutes, talking to two friends who had been on the flight as well and to some family members who had been in El Paso with us and who were at the airport to catch flights on other airlines. Sensing that the line we were waiting on was advancing only very slowly, I called a travel agent on my cell phone and made reservations for the four of us to fly back to New York via Atlanta on Delta. We proceeded to the Delta counter, where a representative graciously provided us with boarding passes as well as a full refund for the tickets that I had purchased shortly before by phone. We arrived at Newark Monday night around 8PM. Upon arriving at our Manhattan apartment, I contacted Continental, the FAA and the NTSB, making myself available to each organization to discuss the details of what I witnessed.

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