

There In the Beginning

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After submitting a resume, two telephone interviews and ordering the requisite slacks for the position, I awaited travel instructions. The call came, but it was to say they had decided not to hire from this location. I asked what I was to do with those required slacks that I couldn't afford to purchase nor would need. A day later I was called back and told to pack for a trip to DC.

Following background clearance, two weeks of training on the brand new luggage screening machines that would be used in the "back rooms" of airports and several written exams, I was a certified trainer for incoming TSA Agents. We were all told to pack a "GO" bag because we would get as few as 24-hours' notice of our training destination.

The first deployment was to Reagan International (DCA) in DC during the holiday rush. The second day, United's computers all went off-line. That necessitated all travelers come through our hand-check security lines. Travelers were permitted to watch the luggage search and us to hear their outrage when Christmas gifts were unwrapped, which airlines warn not to wrap

December found us in *Minneapolis*-St Paul (MSP). Entire families had traveled from Mexico to Mall of America to Christmas shop. They spent several hours packing four-foot high duffle bags with gifts. Unfortunately, during the x-ray, my team found a suspicious item right in the middle of the duffle. That meant unpacking to verify contents and then repacking what had taken hours to pack back into the duffle in a matter of minutes to prevent missed flights. Some of us were less than happy after listening to several small yelling children run up and down the halls after we had gone to bed early the night before because we had to be on the airport shuttle at 4:00 AM!

With a much needed Venti Mocha Extra Hot in hand, I arrived back at the screening room to find everyone in the lobby. Local police and DEA with drug sniffing dogs were coming through the door. When I asked what had happened, I was told "YOUR team found a substance and we had to clear the room!" It turned out a male passenger had not adequately cleaned tools in his duffle after working with fertilizer on a farm.

The final week of December meant Mobile Airport (MOB), where these multi-million dollar machines were installed outside under a roof, but just off the dusty route of the tugs that shuttle luggage to planes. That night we received notification that we needed to be home before December 31 because the company's contract had not been renewed. A few short weeks later TSA went LIVE in airports nationwide.

Thanksgiving 2019 I flew into Rawlins, Wyoming (RWL). The clerk brought my checked bag back to the lobby for a manual search because the airport did not have any screening device for checked bags. I literally watched them hand-search my bag. I then placed my carry-on through the screener as I went to board.

Sometimes things really don't change all that much!