

**EXTORTION ATTEMPT
QANTAS AIRWAYS**

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At 1344 hours on Friday 4 July 1997 Qantas Flight 27, en route to Hong Kong, was the subject of a bomb threat. A substantial amount of money was demanded in order to secure the safety of the passengers, crew and aircraft.

At the above stated time a male person using the pseudonym 'Mr Brown' contacted Qantas Airways. 'Mr Brown' demanded to speak to the General Manager. After a short conversation with the switchboard operator Mr Brown declared that a bomb had been placed on board QF27. 'Mr Brown' was immediately transferred to the Duty Security Controller, Security Investigation Services.

'Mr Brown' then outlined the nature of his threat against QF27, a boeing 747-400 which had already departed Sydney for Bangkok at 1203 hours that afternoon. The conversation between 'Mr Brown' and the Security Controller was recorded for further reference and evidence.

Mr. Brown stated that a time bomb located on the aircraft was set to explode below an altitude of 6,500 metres. He also indicated that the bomb contained trip wires designed to prevent any attempt at diffusing the device. Further he stated that he was able to remotely detonate the device should Qantas fail to comply with his demands.

'Mr Brown' demanded \$505 000.

He demanded the money in the form of used bank notes to be contained inside a suitcase. 'Mr Brown' indicated that a courier would collect the suitcase for transfer to an unknown destination. Upon receipt of the money 'Mr Brown' stated that the bomb would be disarmed.

If the money was not received 'Mr Brown' stated that the bomb would be immediately activated, the media and public would be informed of all actions undertaken by Qantas and another bomb would be placed on a Qantas aircraft in the immediate future.

Qantas threat assessment teams were immediately convened and the New South Wales Police Service notified. An initial assessment decision was made to allow the aircraft to continue en route. Diversion points were determined as Darwin, Brisbane, Cairns and Sydney.

At 1514 hours, following specific analysis of technical information provided by 'Mr Brown', the threat itself was deemed a hoax. This conclusion was based on the following:

- *A barometric device is only operational in a non pressurised environment. As such the need for an anti handling device is negated, ie the device is made inaccessible whilst the aircraft is en - route.

- *The possibility of deactivating the bomb via remote control was considered impossible.

- *The possibility of secreting such a device into a non pressurised part of the aircraft is considerably remote. *'Mr Brown' was technically inept and inconsistent in his instructions.

As the threat was now discredited, a decision was made to proceed with this matter on the basis of an attempted extortion. A covert Police operation was consequently instigated.

In total, 'Mr Brown' made five telephone calls to Qantas Airways. 'Mr. Brown' reiterated the bomb threat, along with outlining a number of details in regard to the collection of the said money. 'Mr Brown' advised that the deadline for the payment of money was 1745 hours that same day. After some negotiation the demanded sum of money was reduced to \$250 000.00. 'Mr Brown' stated that he would provide instructions regarding the deactivation of the bomb at 1845 hours, following receipt of the money.

Telephone call traces were activated to ascertain the location of 'Mr Brown'. In addition, arrangements were made to obtain the required sum of money through out the course of the weekend should it be determined necessary.

At approximately 1650 hours that same day a courier attended Qantas Building A, Level 3, as previously requested by 'Mr Brown', to collect a 'package'. After the identity and authenticity of the courier was established, he was handed two navigational bags secured with tape. The bags did not contain any money, but rather, were filled with telephone books in order to provide the required weight.

The carriage of these bags to the intended destination - Spanish Inn Motel, Homebush NSW - was controlled by Police. This destination corresponded to earlier telephone trace information indicating that 'Mr Brown' had been located at the Spanish Inn Motel whilst calling Qantas Airways. The courier was paid in cash for his service by the receptionist. The bags were then placed in the Motel foyer. Surveillance of the bags was established and maintained until the following day.

At 2015 hours the QF27 arrived in Hong Kong without incident. Inquiries conducted by Police that evening established that telephone calls to Qantas Airways had originated in room 291 of the Spanish Motor Inn. It was discovered that the room was registered to a male person identified as 'Peter Banks'. The name 'Banks' was later found also to be a false name.

'Mr. Banks' attended the foyer of the Hotel and following a conversation with staff paid \$92 in cash for overnight accommodation. It was established that 'Mr. Banks' instructed staff to take delivery of a courier consignment expected that evening. 'Mr. Banks' gave staff \$70 cash representing payment to be made to the courier.

At 1002 hours on Saturday 5 July 1997 'Mr. Banks' contacted staff and inquired whether an associate would be permitted to collect the courier delivered bags on his behalf. As a result of this conversation 'Mr. Banks' arranged for a taxi to attend the motel and collect the bag.

At this time staff indicated that the taxi driver needed to present an authorisation in order that the bags could be released from their possession. Consequently the taxi driver later returned with the said authorisation.

Following surveillance of the taxi 'Mr. Banks' residence was identified and upon arrival at those premises 'Mr. Banks' took possession of the two bags. Police effected the arrest of 'Mr. Banks' and consequently a search warrant was executed.

During the execution of the search warrant incriminating information and documentation was lawfully seized which linked the person Police identified as 'Mr. Banks' with the extortionist.

It has been established that the extortionist had accessed the Internet, and had gleaned information relating to terrorist activity and the construction and detonation of explosive devices. Diary notes were recovered from the extortionist which contained a contact phone number for Qantas Duty Security Controllers, drawings of an explosive device and information which related to the explosive RDX. Information was extracted from the hard drive belonging to the extortionist which consisted of a two page record of the conversation to be used in relation to the threats.

The offender was interviewed and later charged with the offences of Demand Money with Menaces and Threaten to Destroy Aircraft.

The combined expertise of the NSW Police Service and members of Qantas Security Investigation Services lead police to identify and effect and arrest within 19.5 hours of receipt of the extortion demand.