

TV: A Bomb Backfires

In Aftermath of 'Doomsday Flight,' F.A.A. Reports a Rise in Airline Scares

TELEVISION's exploitation of bomb scares on passenger airplanes had its repercussions yesterday.

The Federal Aviation Agency in Washington reported that the number of bomb threats after Tuesday night's presentation of "The Doomsday Flight" now stood at five. In addition to the previously reported threatening phone calls to American Airlines, Trans World Airlines and Eastern Airlines, Pan-American World Airways and Northwest Airlines also suffered bomb scares within a day after the program's showing.

The first threat was received at 10:45 P. M. Tuesday, 15 minutes before the film showing ended on the National Broadcasting Company network. The F. A. A. noted that for all of November, there had been eight bomb scares on the country's airlines.

After Wednesday's disclosure that the Air Line Pilots Association had protested in advance the showing of the Rod Serling film and that the Air Transport Association of America, representing the scheduled airlines, was concerned over the program's possible consequences, the role of the Federal Bureau of Investigation took on added interest.

In aviation circles, it was insisted that in May, 1963, the F. B. I. had informally joined in the recommendations of an industry and government committee to ask the news media not play up bomb hoaxes and scares. A confidential report on the problem, including the reputed F. B. I. position, was said to be in the files of the airlines.

A spokesman for the F. B. I. said yesterday, however, that he was not aware of any such suggestion and asserted that the agency had always shied away from trying to influence news reports.

On Monday night's Johnny Carson program on N. B. C., Jack Lord, who played the role of the chief F. B. I. investigator in "The Doomsday Flight," said he had been cleared for the part by the F. B. I. itself.

Frank Price, producer of the film, said yesterday in Hollywood that he had received guidance from the F.B.I.

on technical details, but that this did not suggest agency approval. He added that the F.B.I. knew what in the script related to itself.

On Sunday night over the American Broadcasting Company network, "The F.B.I.," a show that bears the agency's official seal and has been expressly approved by J. Edgar Hoover, director of the F.B.I., presented a drama called "The Camel's Nose."

The visual highlight of the hour was the destruction of a plane owned by a corporation. A partner who had been selling defective war goods to the armed forces in Vietnam had put a bomb on the craft to kill associates who might expose him. On "The F.B.I.," the madman succeeded; on "The Doomsday Flight," the passengers were saved.

Under special legislation passed by Congress, the F.B.I. has specific authority to review commercial shows purporting to show its agents at work. It has also confirmed the clearing of actors accepting such roles.

The F.B.I. spokesman declined to discuss yesterday whether dramas about bombs in airplanes helped curb hoaxes or, as the pilots association suggests, they invite imitation by mentally unstable persons.

N.B.C. said that "The Doomsday Flight" had been cleared by its offices of practices and standards and said that there had been a question whether a drama dealing with a current problem should be censored.

On Mr. Carson's Monday night program, Woody Allen, the humorist, said that he had discovered a way never to miss an airplane even if he were late. One could call the airline and say there was a bomb aboard a flight, he observed, and by the time the craft was completely searched the tardy passenger would have ample opportunity to get to the airport.

Apparently this is a week for sick television values on many fronts.

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