

## A Stick in Time

Andrew Eglinton is a serving officer in the Australian SAS in Karajan Province in Afghanistan. He gets damaged a bit when his scout car gets blown up by the ubiquitous I.E.D's so common in this war. He cops a deal of shrapnel in his knee and thigh area and finishes up being tended by the German Army Medical Service in Frankfurt. He gets out of this quite light and is soon mobile again, albeit relying on a stick. He goes over to England on sick leave with a check-in pass to British Military hospitals and doctors if needed.

He's got an architecture degree from Sydney University and is quite interested in the architecture embodied in the English Cathedrals. Lincoln in particular interests him and he catches a train up there for a look around. His walking is improving and on a whim, he stops at an antique shop on the steep cobbled uphill slope to the Cathedral. Just through the old city wall, he spots a well-used shooting stick with fold out flaps to sit on. It's all metal with the shaft painted dark green. He buys it for £16; cheap enough and as its well-used looking, that suits him quite well. He doesn't want to look too neue. The seller finds him a rubber ferrule to slip over the sharp pointy end and he gets rid of his walking stick into the same bin he found the shooting stick in.

Andrew doesn't know it, but this purchase saves his life and that of 64 airline passengers near Washington two weeks later when he is over in America to have a look at Thomas Jefferson's famous house, 'Monticello'.]

Being SAS, Andrew is trained in counter terrorist action and being again no slouch, he carries in his baggy English sports coat, a tiny all plastic flare pistol. It's a British invention and the El Al plane guards generally have one of these among their walking around arsenal.



Andrew has the window seat when the terrorists quickly take over the plane and bash in the pilot's cabin door. He's quick to get a word in to his next seat passenger, a good-looking late 20's girl and the oldish man in the aisle seat. To the girl he says, "Do you want to live?"

"Bloody hell," the girl replies, "surely that's a rhetorical question?"

"Psst," he goes to the aisle dweller, "sit pat, leave your seat belt on and whatever you do, don't try to get up."

The terrorists are getting settled in; he has to move quickly; the plane is lurching as the Al Qaeda replacement pilot takes over the controls. Two of the sky-jackers are busy now dragging the pilot's body out of the cabin into the aisle way. Andrew pulls out the flare gun, puts in in the girl's hand and says,

"Aim for the middle of the chest, pick the easiest target."

He pulls the rubber cover off his shooting stick's pointy end and in one fluid movement, spears the hijacker standing in the empty seats in front of him. It's a terrible assault. He hauls the stick back, reverses it and smashes the man's hand with the heavy seat end. The girl shoots the first sky-jacker running up to them in the torso. As he falls, Andrew, covered in blood and very formidable, grabs the man's box cutter and is on the next man like a tiger. He slashes away madly; there is no

time to select a soft spot. The girl grabs his shooting stick and plunges it into the eye of the next other terrorist to arrive on the scene. None of them have guns, only box cutters.

The cabin now looks like a scene from Dante's Inferno; red and yellow flare smoke fog envelops the whole plane interior. Andrew reloads the flare pistol and says to the girl and another big man, who he hands the box cutter to,

"Go for their eyes."

The cockpit occupants try to shut the in-between door, but are thwarted by the legs of the dead pilot.

"Keep up the pace," Andrew says.

The big man slashes the arm of the chap trying to shut the door and the girl, once in the door, drives the sharp end of the shooting stick dead centre into the pilot's neck. Andrew borrows the stick to dispatch the other terrorist; smashes his skull. It's a terrible scene and the plane's nose drops sharply. Andrew hauls back on the control stick; he gets it up and level within minutes, but they have to get it down.

"Is there a pilot on board?" Andrew yells into the loudspeaker. Seconds later, a lanky young fellow materialises out of the flare smoke.

"I'm a crop duster," he says, "The principles are the same. Let's see if we can raise someone on the radio."

The terrorists have torn the radio connection out, but the plane is full of people with mobiles and within minutes, they have got onto the Washington tower.

"Get the hell out of our air space," they are told. "We'll get Baltimore to talk you down. It's rush hour here. You're courting disaster."

The crop duster puts the commercial jet down with a feather-like touch at Friendship and with the motors screaming in reverse thrust, they pull up short of the main terminal. The plane and environs are immediately swamped by tactical and rescue forces.

The girl, spattered in blood, gives Andrew a huge hug. "Our hero," she says. The crop duster turns to shake his hand. Andrew grins. "If ever you wanted to be an air hostess....." and looking the crop duster in the eye, "If ever you wanted to get into an airline pilot training scheme, here and now is your golden and only opportunity," he says.

He manages to slip his lead; it's only a domestic air terminal they are in, but a big one of course, and gets out to the Taxi area. A crisp \$100 note gets him along to a recycling shop and he re-dresses himself and gets rid of his damaged clothes and the blood particles in the shop rest room.

As he later writes this verbatim account of an historical moment in the USA airline history, he glances at his shooting stick standing in the door jamb corner of his study. *'My very best investment ever,' he thinks.* In retrospect he is surprised they let him on board with it.