



As an Israeli sky marshal, Mordechai Rachamim stood trial in Switzerland after a shoot-out at Zurich's airport, where he took on terrorists with a 22 Beretta pistol. He was released after the hearing and eventually opened his own security service.

Israel is a small country and secret units like Mossad and Shin Beth prefer to recruit likely subjects rather than review unsolicited applications. Every male and most females are drafted into the military at 18. Those who do well, especially in the nation's special forces, have already been tested, some in combat. These individuals are considered natural candidates for secret projects.

Morechai Rachamim had done his three-year conscript service in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) as a parachutist and operator with one of the country's special units. He was only 22 and studying English at Tel Aviv University, when Shin Beth asked if he would do six months as a sky marshal, with an option to extend for a full year. This showed perspicacity on SB's part, since young hard-chargers do not look forward to 20 years of riding in one airplane seat after another. However, foreign travel was rare in those days for most Israelis, so the short assignment would allow Rachamim to see some of the world while saving money to continue college.

"The new sky marshal had only three weeks of training with chief instructor Dave Beckerman, who had served with American intelligence during World War II," David Steele reports. "He was a superb pistol shot and taught the recruits single-handed shooting and other techniques rarely seen today. Other instructors taught the recruits advanced hand-to-hand combat."

This may sound familiar to FAA sky marshals after 9/11, but the airlines didn't want anyone aboard carrying guns. For the first few months, sky marshals were allowed to carry only an irritant spray. They considered this outrageous and degrading, so they collectively flew back to Tel Aviv and staged a strike. After considerable negotiation, it was agreed to issue the marshals each a 22 rimfire Beretta, namely the Model 70S Jaguar.

"These were single-action guns carried chamber-empty," according to David Steele. "The idea for using

a 22 rimfire was to minimize damage to the aircraft. However, James Bond movies aside, catastrophic decompression or damage to controls was – and is – statistically impossible from a handgun bullet, even from the 357 SIG cartridge now used by U.S. sky marshals.

"The modern passenger aircraft is a marvel of redundant safety systems. A greater danger would be hitting the wrong person, but at least, a 22-caliber makes over-penetration unlikely. Although there probably is an ideal sky marshal pistol somewhere, a 22 is not a bad choice. It is accurate, easy to learn to master, has fast recovery time, low report, lightweight magazines and spare ammo. Although it has low single-round stopping power, the 22 has serious close-range wounding power. The Ronald Reagan and Robert Kennedy shooting incidents have illustrated just how effective a 22 can be."

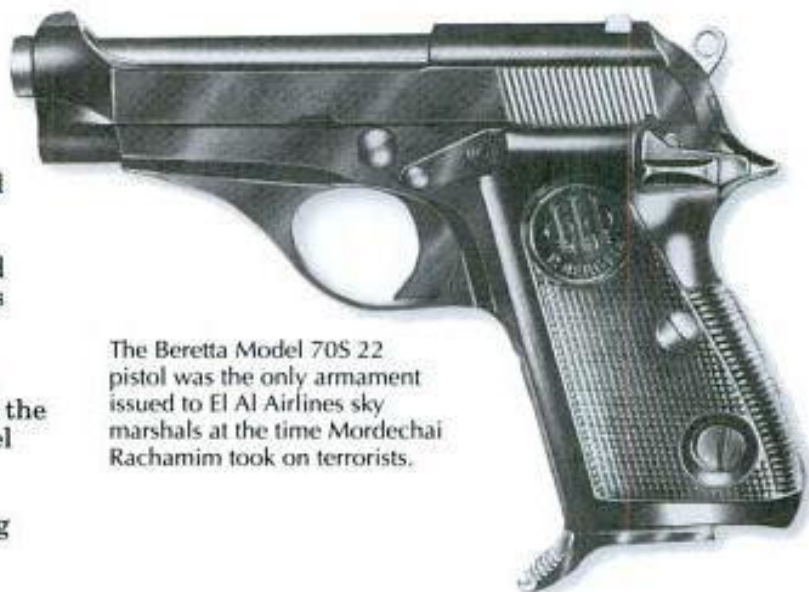
Back in 1969, the guards flying El Al were not allowed to take their pistols with them when they reached a foreign airport. Instead, they picked them up from the cockpit when boarding and left them aboard the plane upon landing and debarking.

On February 18, 1969, Mordechai Rachamim rendezvoused with his assigned flight in Zurich, Switzerland, where snow was heavy on the ground. He took the passenger bus to the plane, for only the crew knew who he was. He was working alone, since there were not enough trained sky marshals at that time for them to work in pairs.

He had not yet picked up his pistol, when the plane reached the taxiway for takeoff. He heard several banging sounds and thought they came from the engine. Then the captain came on the intercom, shouting, "They're shooting at us. Everyone get down!"

Looking out the window, Rachamim saw several men and one woman positioned behind a fence in an observation area that was being utilized as a sniper nest. The marshal immediately rushed to the cockpit, where he found the pilot, his intestines falling out, dying in agony. The marshal grabbed up his assigned pistol and leaned through a hole that had been smashed through the cockpit window. He spotted two men an estimated 50 meters away, both firing AK-47s. A third man threw hand grenades. The explosions of the grenades were visible on the tarmac.

Rachamim opened fire on the snipers, but could see no effect from his bullets. Only later did he learn that his counterattack had served to disrupt the plans of the



The Beretta Model 70S 22 pistol was the only armament issued to El Al Airlines sky marshals at the time Mordechai Rachamim took on terrorists.





The familiar AK-47 was used by Palestinian terrorists in their effort to destroy an El Al aircraft on the runway at Zurich, Switzerland, in 1969.

terrorists, since they had expected no resistance.

He was concerned that the attack would set fire to the aircraft's wing tanks. He decided to distract the terrorist's fire to himself, but realized that if he jumped down from the cockpit, the plane still would be in danger. The gas tanks would be behind him.

He ran to the rear, passing dazed, uncertain passengers and ordered the steward, "Open the emergency slide for me!" Seconds later, he slid down the escape chute on the far side of the plane. Out of sight of the terrorists, he ran around the tail of the aircraft in a wide arc.

As a parachutist in the Israeli army, Rachamim had been taught to run, while shooting at the enemy. This keeps their heads down and hopefully demoralizes them until they can be finished hand-to-hand. The tactic grew out of an upper echelon strategy that Israel did not have the territory or the manpower to get involved in a slow-moving war of attrition.

With this sort of training as his guide, Rachamim charged from one pile of plowed snow to another, using them for cover as he fired, at the same time, yelling in English, "Throw down your weapons!"

Coming to a bank of snow piled to the level of the top of the security fence, he climbed up and over, landing only eight meters from what he now could see were three men and a woman. Two men were firing Kalashnikovs, another was tossing grenades and the woman was launching PLO propaganda pamphlets on the wind.

Staying out of their sight, the marshal reloaded his second magazine and fired on the run as he advanced. When he was roughly six meters from the foursome, one man threw down his rifle, but the other stopped shooting at the aircraft and swung to point his assault rifle at the Israeli.

Racamim emptied his Beretta, killing the second terrorist, then tossed away his empty pistol and leaped onto the grenade thrower, choking him while screaming, "You bastard, attacking civilians." In that moment, he felt a pistol muzzle pressed against his back and heard a Swiss police officer saying, "Let go of him or I'll shoot." He was arrested along with the two Palestinians.

The Swiss policeman took his gun and he was put in the same cell with the two Palestinians, with the jailer declaring, "You're equal. We don't care about your struggle. No one shoots on Swiss soil."

Initially Mordechai Racamim would not talk to the Swiss prosecutor. The Israeli sky marshal program was still secret and he would not talk until cleared by the Israeli consul. Once authorized, he talked and the story broke in the news that Israel now was using armed guards on its planes.

The marshal was in prison for a month, but at least it was a clean Swiss lockup he later told reporters. Eventually, he was released on his word as an Israeli soldier to return for trial. Back in Israel, though, he was greeted as a national hero and, still on the Shin Beth payroll, they put him in charge of the bodyguard detail for then-Prime Minister Golda Meir. Two months later, though, the German press reported the assignment and he was taken off the detail.

Soon after, Racamim returned to Zurich for trial and was acquitted. Out of a job, he returned to the university in Tel Aviv to resume his studies. But all was not ended. On May 9, 1972, he was called out of class to participate in the retaking of a Sabena 707 that had been commandeered at Lod airport by Black September terrorists. Today, he resides in Tel Avid and runs Hawkeye, his own private investigative and security consulting service.

On a more current note, one of the most unlikely handgun combat devices ever to come down the pike is of Israeli origination. It is called the CornerShot and is described as a "high-tech weapon support system designed to enable military, law enforcement and security operations to effectively observe and engage targets from around the corner or from behind cover without exposing any part of the operator's body."

According to Amos Golan, inventor of the system and co-founder of CornerShot Holdings, LLC, the latest version of the device is listed as the APR – Assault Pistol Rifle – and is an update of the original handgun version, firing the 5.56mm NATO round.

Golan retired from the Israeli Defense Forces in 1995 with the rank of lieutenant colonel. He served as a troop commander in various elite and counter-terror units. Asaf Nadel, described as a major developer of the CornerShot system, is co-founder of the company. He served as a major in the Israeli Defense Forces' armored corps and subsequently in various security positions around the world, first with the ministry of foreign affairs, then El-Al, the Israeli Airline. The pair – and their company – now headquarter in Miami, Florida.

Both the rifle version and the handgun version of the CornerShot offer the ability, it is claimed, to "observe, acquire and engage targets from around the corner." In short, it is meant to allow security forces to remain outside the line of fire while engaging targets. The APR version of the CornerShot combines the design principles, features and capabilities of the earlier introduced handgun version.