

www.asisindonesia.or.id
chapter266@asisindonesia.or.id; chapter266@yahoo.com;

'Barefoot Bandit' Case Hints at Gap in National Security

(July 14) -- Authorities say Colton Harris-Moore -- the so-called "[Barefoot Bandit](#)" -- is responsible not only for hundreds of burglaries, but also the theft of at least five airplanes. How the 19-year-old allegedly pulled off so many crimes in two years is a subject of debate, but one expert sees an even bigger issue -- the ease of stealing planes even after 9/11.

"The fact that [authorities say] he was able to get the airplanes and get them out of the [airports] successfully without anybody challenging him is scary," Los Angeles attorney [John A. Greaves](#) said in an interview with AOL News. "That means, basically, anybody that wants to steal a plane can."

Greaves, a seasoned airline accident lawyer and former commercial airline pilot, says there is an immediate need for federal officials to re-evaluate airport security.

"It has been nine years since [9/11](#), and complacency has set in," Greaves said. "All the extra security measures and watchfulness has faded, and that is what has happened here -- otherwise, this guy wouldn't have [allegedly] been able to do these things."

Harris-Moore -- who was [arrested](#) Sunday -- is suspected in the theft of at least five airplanes from around the country:

- [November 2008](#): A plane belonging to a Seattle radio DJ is stolen from the Orcas Island Airport in San Juan County, Wash., and crash-landed on the Yakama Indian Reservation in southern Washington.
- [Sept. 11, 2009](#): An experimental aircraft is stolen from San Juan Island in northwestern Washington and crash-landed at the nearby Orcas Island Airport.
- [Sept. 28, 2009](#): A plane is stolen from the Boundary County Airport in northern Idaho and crash-landed near Granite Falls, Wash.
- [Feb. 10, 2010](#): A plane is stolen from an airport in Skagit County, Wash., flown around the restricted airspace set up for the Vancouver Olympics and landed at the Orcas Island Airport.
- [July 3, 2010](#): A plane is stolen from the Monroe County Airport in Bloomington, Ind., and crash-landed in the Bahamas. Thirteen days later, Harris-Moore is taken into custody by Bahamian police following a high-speed boat chase.

According to a 2009 [Congressional Research Service report](#), there were 429 reported airplane thefts in the U.S. between 1990 and 2006. After hitting a peak of 56 in 1991, the annual number of thefts has declined in recent years, but the average since 2004 remains nearly a dozen each year, the report says.

In recent years, billions of dollars has been invested in airport security, but much of that

money has been directed at [security inside the airports](#). According to Greaves, security surrounding planes themselves continues to be an issue.

"Santa Monica Airport is about a half mile away [from me], and I could probably go down there and steal a plane right now," Greaves said. "It is real easy to get out onto the ramp. Nobody asks any questions. If you're taxiing an airplane, they just assume that it's your plane.

"Even if it is controlled airport," he added, "it's just a simple matter of calling into the tower, calling in an aircraft number and telling them you want to taxi for takeoff."

Which raises the question: If Harris-Moore did, in fact, successfully steal five airplanes, couldn't a terrorist do the same?

Cause for Concern

According to the Congressional Research Service report, some intelligence suggests that there is a "continued terrorist interest in using general-aviation aircraft to carry out attacks both domestically and overseas."

The report cites an incident involving [Zacarias Moussaoui](#), who was convicted of conspiracy in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Prior to his arrest, authorities said, Moussaoui had been interested in crop-dusting planes and was found to be in possession of a computer disk containing information on the aerial application of pesticides -- leading the CIA to [speculate](#) that al-Qaida had "considered using aircraft to disseminate [biological warfare] agents."

The CIA also indicated that one of Osama bin Laden's associates had [proposed a plan](#) to attack the World Trade Center using small aircraft packed with explosives.

"This suggests that terrorists engaged in some deliberative process of weighing the pros and cons of using small general aviation aircraft ... in planning the 9/11 attacks," the CRS report states. "While the terrorists favored commercial aircraft ... heightened security measures at commercial airports could make [general-aviation] assets considerably more attractive to terrorists."

So what are the odds a terrorist could actually steal a plane from a community airport? To find out, AOL News contacted the Federal Aviation Administration, the National Transportation Safety Board and the Department of Homeland Security.

The FAA has yet to respond to a request for an interview. The NTSB and DHS directed questions to the Transportation Security Administration.

A spokesperson for TSA declined to comment on the record and instead pointed to an online guide titled "[Security Guidelines for General Aviation Airports](#)." The guide, published in 2004, is intended to provide general-aviation airport owners, operators and

users with guidelines and recommendations for aviation security. However, it does not "contain regulatory language, nor is it intended to suggest that any recommendations or guidelines should be considered a mandatory requirement."

The general-aviation industry's working group includes 10 participating organizations. Only two, including the [Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association](#) (AOPA), responded to a request for an interview with AOL News.

According to AOPA, America has approximately 5,200 public-use airports, of which about 4,700 are general aviation only and 500 have airline service. Describing them as ranging from small rural airfields to major metropolitan airports, AOPA media relations director Chris Dancy said their security needs are as varied as the airports themselves.

"Obviously, a 2,000-foot grass strip in the middle of Iowa has far different security needs than Teterboro [near New York City] or Van Nuys [in Los Angeles]," he said.

As for whether Americans should be concerned that a terrorist could steal a general-aviation plane and use it in an attack, Dancy said small aircraft do not make "good terrorist weapons."

"Even the case earlier this year in Austin, where you had a [suicidal pilot trying to attack the IRS](#) ... [planes] do not make the kind of statement terrorists usually are looking to make. It's far easier to get a car or truck and load it. You can get much closer to the building than you can with an airplane."

In regard to community airports, Dancy said the AOPA believes the level of security is appropriate. "Whether or not it needs to be reviewed is a question for TSA or Homeland Security," he said.

Weighing Security Measures

Dancy said it is worth noting that the last plane Harris-Moore is alleged to have stolen was from a fenced-in airport with closed-circuit cameras in place. The plane had also been locked and was sitting in a locked hangar.

"There's not much more [they] could have done to secure that plane, yet it was stolen anyway," Dancy said.

But Greaves sees that as an exception to the rule. At many airports, he said, there's still a long way to go in tightening security.

"They could fence in the ones that are open and put sensing devices on them. When someone attempts to climb it, you would know," he said. "You could also secure the planes with [anti-theft] devices. Sure, these things cost money, but something needs to be done."

The Congressional Research Service report makes similar suggestions regarding motion sensors, as well as keypad locks. And the [National Association of State Aviation Officials](#) (NASAO) is an advocate of locking all hangars and aircraft.

"We recommend multiple locks," NASAO president and CEO Henry M. Ogradzinski said in an e-mail to AOL News. "In addition to the ignition key, most modern aircraft also require a door key. There are also inexpensive but effective propeller locks, wheel locks, throttle locks, tie-down locks and gust locks," which lock such things as the plane's rudder and ailerons.

None of these security measures, however, has been made mandatory by the federal government. Additionally, the CRS report notes that some of them could be "costly and challenging" to implement.

So while terrorists have yet to utilize small aircraft in large-scale attacks, the threat remains. And until such an attack happens, Greaves said, the possibility will probably not be taken seriously.

"Most of the people that steal airplanes are drug runners, so it's not raising a lot of red flags," Greaves said. "But it only takes one determined individual to change that, and it's absolutely something to worry about."

