



Written by [Becky Akers](#) on April 16, 2010

Where Have All the Men Gone?

It used to be that a man would sooner die than run. Courage, physical and moral, was the sine qua non of American masculinity. Whether it was a 22-year-old George Washington boasting of his first battle, "I have heard the bullets whistle; and believe me, there is something charming in the sound," Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie at the Alamo, or Charles Goodyear's persevering for years, through financial failure and formula after formula, to produce vulcanized rubber, courage was as much a part of the American identity as pluck and practicality, independence and pride.

So the sight of grown adults trembling at tobacco smoke, insubstantial and harmless [even if it did issue from a Qatari diplomat](#), was as tragic and surreal as it was hilarious. No whistling bullets here, just smoke and a joke when 27-year-old Mohammed al Modadi savored his [pipe](#) in the lavatory of United Airlines Flight 663 last week, then quipped about igniting his shoes. That prompted our fearless leaders to summon *fighter jets*. Yes! Admittedly, Mohammed's attempted witticism wasn't, but *come on*: the *Air Force*? Nor had these cowards finished proving themselves fools to the world. They also ["alert\[ed\]" all aircraft aloft](#) at the time lest a whiff and words imperil them, too.

Among the casualties of the War on Terror lies not only liberty but the American character. A people who sailed the fearsome Atlantic to tame a wilderness, who defied the most powerful army on earth at Lexington and Concord, who left all comfort and civilization behind to push westward with only the canvas of a Conestoga wagon between them and the elements, now quiver like rabbits when a guy sneaks a puff.

And their rulers valiantly fight phantoms. "[Law enforcement authorities](#) initially notified key lawmakers" about the distinctive aroma of burning tobacco and a diplomat-who-fancies-himself-a-comic-but-had-better-keep-his-day-job aboard the flight, "a congressional aide told [Agence France-Presse]... 'Air marshals jumped in, and the cockpit wasn't breached,' the official said." Thank God.

Some accounts allege that the air marshal didn't just "jump in," he "wrestled [Mohammed] to the ground after he made the statement about lighting his shoes, NBC said." Talk about your nerves and





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muscles of steel: our nicotine fiend looks as if he weighs about 120 pounds fully dressed.

For further security, "[the Transportation Security Administration](#) (TSA) said the passenger was placed in custody" and that "it was 'monitoring' the incident." Imagine the doom for all aboard had menacing Mohammed grabbed another drag.

While the air marshal was whaling on Mohammed, "[The pilot declared an emergency](#)," though I daresay not on his passenger's behalf, "and two F-16 fighter jets raced to intercept the aircraft around 6:45 pm (0045 GMT Thursday) under the authority of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD)." [Formed in 1958 to foil the commies](#) with their nukes and long-range bombers, but hey, happy to combat smoke, too. And so NORAD, without betraying an ounce of fury or shame at contributing to this farce, "escorted the aircraft until it landed safely without incident..."

We long for a hero anywhere along this absurd chain to shout, "It's *smoke*, you nutjobs! Gimme a break!" But no. The nutjobs vie with one another to quaver and quake, to cry loudest for Mommy, to demonstrate beyond all refutation that their lily-liver is whitest. It's unlikely Crockett and Bowie ever knew caitiffs this nauseating; if they did, for sure they'd prescribe a horse-whipping rather than a berth at the public trough.

Bizarro World continued the next day, though with a higher level of rodent. "[I commend the Federal Air Marshals](#) on board United Airlines flight 663 last night," squeaked Janet Napolitano, the contemptible Secretary of the even more contemptible Department of Homeland Security, "who swiftly responded to a potential threat to passenger safety while the plane was in flight." Pssst, Janet: *smoke*. "These highly trained individuals took appropriate and immediate action to secure the aircraft" — from *smoke*, you moron, *smoke* — "and communicate the potential threat" — go ahead, dear reader, retch; I did, too — "to authorities on the ground—ensuring that the flight was met by TSA and law enforcement officials when it landed safely in Denver." As if there were ever a doubt! "I spoke to the Air Marshals this morning, and I expressed my appreciation for their vital service keeping passengers around the world safe" — unbelievable, isn't it? — "from potential threats of terrorism [*sic* for 'joke']..."

The Warriors on Terror have taught us to expect such craven lunacy. Indeed, it's required for their employment. A paycheck is far more important to these invertebrates than self-respect, so they pretend that guys living in caves half a world away, who are so hard up for weapons they had to use our planes against us and whose usual run of recruit can't figure out how to detonate his underwear, endanger us. In fact, they not only endanger us, they comprise the worst menace humanity knows. Smallpox, volcanoes, the black plague, hurricanes, the State with its taxation and wars — all are mere trifles compared to terrorists.

Naturally, the corporate media cowers with this same pusillanimity. It became government's fourth branch long ago, dispensing propaganda that many Americans still mistake for news. TV and radio networks as well as newspapers are often part of conglomerates that include [military manufacturers, a la GE's ownership of NBC](#). The War on Terror boosts profits and ratings, so journalists duly report with straight faces when pipe-smoke nearly vanquishes the Homeland.

We turn for some sanity to a taxpayer and passenger, bless her heart. "[Erin Montroy](#), who was passing through [Denver's] airport on her way from Kansas City to Las Vegas, said she hadn't heard anything about the incident and wasn't alarmed. 'I don't really ever feel as threatened as they think we should,' she said."

Somewhere, our forefathers are laughing so hard they're crying.



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