



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

By Jamie Buckingham

It was obvious the moment our National Airlines flight from New York to Savannah touched down at Washington, D.C., that something was wrong. Instead of taxiing toward the terminal, the yellow and white 727 headed rapidly to the far end of the runway. Outside my window I could see an escort of speeding police cars and fire trucks, red lights blinking. This was no normal stop-over.

The rear stairs were lowered and the captain's crisp voice came through the speaker, "will everybody please leave the aircraft."

Puzzled and a little tense, everyone grabbed their overcoats and bags and started out. The captain's voice came again, "Ladies and gentlemen, please expedite your exit."

A naval officer with a chest full of ribbons clarified things. In a loud, firm voice he said, "That means hurry, folks!"

Seconds later we were standing in the freezing, whipping wind on the brown grass alongside the runway. Far away we could see the terminal. Behind it, silhouetted against the gray afternoon sky, were the familiar outlines of the Washington Monument and the capitol dome.

A fleet of taxis, headed by a police car, arrived. We climbed in and our convoy was whisked to a special room in the terminal. "What's the problem?" I asked an officer.

He shrugged, "Who knows."

The passenger behind me laughed, "Well, at least we know we're in Washington. That's a typical political answer."

2

We were quizzed by a polite team of men who introduced themselves as FBI agents. They confirmed a bomb had been found aboard and they were looking for the culprit.

I guess all of us have enough guilt about past sins that it's difficult not to look and sound suspicious when under such investigation. Even the nice young man's question, "What's your name, sir?" caused my mouth to go dry and my palms to sweat. I had the feeling a lie detector test would immediately show I was the mad bomber, even though I've never seen the legendary clock, wires and dynamite sticks.

Two hours later we were allowed to reboard our plane. Shortly we were in the air heading south. The man across the aisle was angry, complaining loudly to the stewardess about the delay. I, too, was miffed. Glancing at my watch, I saw I was going to miss my appointment.

I turned to my seatmate, an old man with wrinkled face and threadbare coat. "I hope you're not going to miss an appointment also," I said.

"It makes no difference," he answered with a thick accent. "I made my appointment when I finally got to America this year to live. Last year, in Russia, something like this happened and everyone aboard the plane was arrested for two days of questioning. It's wonderful to be in a nation where we are all innocent until proved guilty."

I glanced across the aisle at the loud complainer. The old man had just jolted me back into proper perspective. Instead of griping I bowed my head and breathed a silent prayer of thanksgiving - for the brave police and firemen, the airline crew, the FBI and for a country that is still the land of the free and the home of the brave.