**True Airport EUF**

by Hooked6

I witnessed this first-hand this past weekend as I was leaving England to return to America.

I’m not sure how familiar you are with airport security features in the US but I can tell you that things are done very differently in the U.K. at least for International passengers anyway.

When I checked in at the airline desk in England to return to the U.S., they validated my passport information and ran the data through their immigration system. I then checked my baggage and headed towards the ubiquitous security metal detectors like they have in the U.S. They X-rayed my carry-on luggage and I had to remove my shoes and any metal objects from my person and then walk through the detector. So far it was much like the way things are done in the U.S.

I was then instructed to arrive at my gate at Gatwick International Airport approximately 1 hour and thirty minutes before my flight left. They stressed that punctuality was important. I had no idea why such a long lead time was required as all the important things like checking in, getting my boarding pass, passport validation, and security screening had already been done and all that was left was to board the plane, but I was soon to find out.

Unlike American airports, in the U.K. each International airline gate is a secure area. Once you get approval to enter your gate you can’t leave – period. You’re stuck sitting in the gate’s waiting area twiddling your thumbs until the plane starts to board.

When the gate actually opens 1 hour and thirty minutes before boarding, they check each passenger in again, recheck your passport yet another time and then one by one they allow you to enter the gate area.

Once inside I noticed two tables set up across from each other along the walls – one manned by a male security agent and the other by a female agent.

At random, or what seemed like every third or fourth passenger, the gate airport security officers selected people to be screened yet again – male officers for male travelers and a female officer for female travelers. I was one of those selected. I was called over to the table and asked to place my carry-on luggage on the table as the officer asked a laundry list of questions like did anyone ask me to carry anything on the plane, or at any time was this bag out of my possession or left unattended – all reasonable questions in the post 911 era I suppose. I was then asked to empty my pockets and extend my arms out like a “T” as the officer patted me down. The whole process was conducted in plain sight and within a few feet of other waiting passengers in the gate’s seating area.

I then took a seat near the front of the seating area and began my long wait to board the plane. I tried reading a bit but the distraction of people being searched only a few feet away from me interfered with that process.

About 40 minutes later I saw a blonde, twenty-something young woman enter the gate area. Now if I hadn’t seen this with my own eye’s I don’t think I would have believed what I am about to tell you, but I promise you that this is absolutely a correct account of what transpired with no embellishment at all.
The young woman was selected and called over to the screening table and asked to place her bag up for inspection. She was a bit put out but complied. Based on the color of the passport she was carrying (red) she was obviously a British subject. She tossed her bag upon the table rather forcefully and let out a very audible sigh.

The female security agent searched the woman’s bag and purse and was very respectful and polite given the job she had to do. The woman calmed down and answered the litany of questions. The woman was then asked to remove her coat and empty any items she might have on her person into the container on the table for inspection. It was then that I noticed something odd. The woman’s expression changed from calm to one of panic.

I noticed this right off and so did the security guard. Now this concerned me because, as you may already know, there had been several days of riots in and around London as well as several larger cities in England during the preceding two weeks so this “expression” set off alarm bells in my head and I was immediately transfixed on this woman, wondering why her demeanor had suddenly changed. After all, this screening operation had been carried out so many times that to those witnessing the event it seemed pretty mundane and boring.

The girl just stood there not moving a muscle so the officer explained the reason for her request and politely asked the woman to place her coat upon the table and empty her pockets.

The woman flatly refused and kept shaking her head “no.”

To her credit, the officer remained calm though it was clear she was on a heightened state of alert. She once again explained the reason for her request and asked the woman to empty her pockets and place her coat upon the table.

The girl replied, “I can’t. I just can’t.”

The officer’s posture changed and she rounded from behind the table to stand immediately in front of the woman and this time firmly instructed the woman to empty her pockets and place her coat in the table.

By this time I too was growing quite anxious and apprehensive as to the reason this woman didn’t want to comply. Was she carrying a bomb or something or perhaps a weapon of some kind? That seemed unlikely as she would have already cleared security once. Still, the woman’s actions were very suspicious.

The girl was frantically looking around the waiting room and then back at the officer. She then said something like, “I changed my mind. I’m not going to travel today. I’m just going to go home.” She turned to leave but was stopped by the officer who grabbed her arm. The officer explained that once in the gate area she couldn’t leave and that she was acting very suspicious. The officer demanded once again, this time with firm authority, that the woman empty her pockets and remove her coat.

The woman was fidgeting and continued looking frantically around the room. She kept saying, “I can’t. I just CAN’T. Don’t make me do this. Just let me go, okay?”

By now EVERYONE on the gate area was focused on the two women waiting to see what was going to happen. A couple of men even stood up from their seats in the back, presumably to assist the officer if it became necessary.

The woman pleaded one last time and the officer told her that she was not going to ask her again to comply.

The woman lowered her head, which was now beat-red and began to unbutton her mid-thigh length coat. To everyone’s shock there was no bomb or dangerous weapon hidden beneath her garment. As she reluctantly tossed her coat on the table, it was obvious to the entire waiting room that the young woman was only wearing a bra and somewhat transparent panties under her coat!

I’m not sure if it was the adrenalin rush of facing a possibly dangerous situation or the fact that she now had a large audience, but the up-to-now calm and respectful security officer lost it. She began shouting at the woman asking her what she was playing at and whether she realized how close she came to getting hurt by her suspicious actions all because of a silly, childish prank. Clearly she was in no mood to see the situation as anything but grave.

The passenger began choking back tears and stated it wasn’t a prank and that she usually only wears her coat when traveling as it is more comfortable and that she hadn’t expected to be screened like this, or something to that effect.

I’m not sure I believed any of what she said as she was talking a mile a minute appearing to say whatever was coming to her mind. I recalled that at the main terminal in the airline check-in area I had to remove my coat when entering the metal detector for the first time so I assumed she would have had done that too and would have been “caught” way before now. Still I was glad she wasn’t some weirdo terrorist.

All this verbal exchange took place as she stood there in her underwear as everyone looked on. The officer did the pat down – I assumed to reassert her authority, rebuked her one last time and warned her how close she came to getting hurt by her actions and how serious this was. The passenger eventually was given back her coat but instead of taking her seat, she was allowed to leave the gate area and I never saw her again. In all the confusion I don’t know if she was told to leave and escorted to some place for further interview or if she left voluntarily, but left she did.

Clearly she was mortified by the entire incident.

Later on I had a chance to reflect on what had happened and I must say it was very interesting to say the least.

I can only imagine what the female passenger's intent was. I mean I can't understand how she got that far (to the gate) if she arrived at the airport like that (wearing just a coat.) I wondered if she ditched much of her clothing after clearing the first security hurdle thinking she was "safe" because she was meeting a lover for a romantic trist at the end of her flight and wanted to surprise him or something. Maybe there are really people out there like the characters in some of these stories here at ASN that like to take risks. Who knows. All I can surmise is that in this instance it seemed not to work out to her advantage ... and I LOVED IT!

Hooked6