

Report: Air marshals not on few flights

by UPI

ATLANTA - Less than 1 percent of the average 28,000 daily U.S. commercial airline flights have armed federal air marshals on board, a CNN investigation found. The investigation found the low numbers even as the Transportation Security Administration recently conducted tests in which it could smuggle guns and bomb-making materials through airport security checkpoints, CNN said Tuesday. The air marshal program began in 1970 and expanded after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The marshals were seen as critical in the effort to secure the United State's commercial aviation system. Several people -- pilots, marshals and a federal law enforcement officer -- told CNN they've flown for months without seeing an air marshal. "I would have to guess it's fewer than 1 percent of all my flights," one pilot who flies out of New York told CNN. "I'm guessing by the coverage of when I go to those cities, fewer than 1 percent." TSA officials called the percentage "a myth." Since the air marshal program expanded "the volume of risk-based deployments has consistently remained at, near or exceeded target levels," Greg Alter, assistant special agent in charge of the program, wrote via e-mail to CNN.

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