

Greetings from Ontario, Canada.

I write this article shortly after returning to Ontario from The Southern Grand at the Silver Dollar Club in Florida.

It is seasonably cold here. It was unseasonably cold for much of The Southern Grand. We had a contingent of shooters in Florida that did comparatively well against a tough field. I was reminded by Helen Smith (former Canadian National Shooting Team member and wife of Smoky Smith, a former president of the Ontario Provincial Trapshooting Association) that Ontario fielded a squad that hailed from "Northern" Ontario (Sturgeon Falls area) and a squad comprised of "Southern" Ontario shooters (mostly from the Cambridge area). Of course there were other Ontario shooters that shot on squads comprised of people that hailed from across North America. Smoky was scheduled to attain 100,000 targets at the Florida State shoot – Congratulations Smoky!

Just getting to tournaments is often challenging, especially by air and especially from Canada.

Let me explain some problems encountered recently by trap shooters travelling with Air Canada via Terminal One at Toronto Pearson Airport.

In January I missed a direct flight (Toronto to Tampa) enroute to the Dixie. Barry Turner from the Eastern Provinces missed his connecting flight (Toronto to Tampa) and Lloyd Beecroft in February missed his flight (Toronto to Phoenix, enroute to the Spring Grand in Tucson).

The common denominator was that we all were with Air Canada and went through Toronto Terminal One. Lloyd was three hours and fifteen minutes ahead of his flight and was still delayed through senseless red tape to the point that he missed his flight.

Here is what happens when a shooter and his/her trap gun arrive at Toronto Terminal One.

1. You stand in line until the ticket processing personnel open their kiosks and start processing travelers.
2. You will be directed to stay in line and encouraged to go to a computer terminal and get your boarding pass printed. What you should do is advise attendants that you must go to the attendants that deal with oversized or specialty issues like firearms. If you fail to do this, or attempt to do this and are met with resistance as is often the case with some personnel that don't "think ahead", you will waste valuable time. Get to the specialty line asap.
3. When you finally are face to face with the employee that deals with your firearm(s), you will be invariably told
 - You or your travel agent didn't let them know you would be travelling with a firearm (often the employee appears to resent the additional "work" entailed);
 - Many will not be able to find the firearm declaration forms. These forms are quite simple and you check off two boxes: that the firearm is unloaded and that there is no ammunition in the case. One copy goes into the gun case, you keep a copy and the others are kept for airline use.
 - There will be charges (generally) \$35.00 for a luggage fee and \$50.00 for a "firearm handling fee".
4. You then check your "checked luggage" which goes on the conveyor belt. You will then be directed to take your gun case to a nearby area where the case will be put on another conveyor

belt and x-rayed. By now Air Canada personnel have disappeared and you are at the mercy of bureaucrats that will "likely" tell you as they did me: "Your gun and case will go to the destination airport and you can pick them up there."

- When you tell them you have an ATF form 6 that must be reviewed by U.S. Customs and compared to the serial number of the firearm you intend to temporarily import into the U.S.A., you will most likely be told (as was I) that Customs need not inspect the firearm or look at any forms.
 - If you argue with them they often get defensive and righteous. In fact, the response I was given to my question of "if I am right and U.S. Customs & Border Control does need to inspect the firearm, how do they do it?" You may be told as I was, "They'll just break open the gun case." [Can you imagine?]
5. At this point in time your checked-in luggage has been sent down one conveyor belt and your firearm has been sent down another. Air Canada personnel appear unaware of any next steps. The x-ray people appear equally unaware of any next steps.
 6. So what is the next step? Here goes:
 - You go through the security clearing line where you and your carry-ons are x-rayed, frisked, etc.
 - You then go to the U.S. Customs Inspection and Clearance area and use an automated machine where you insert your passport, verify information and get a slip of paper that you take with your passport to another line which you navigate until your turn is reached to see a U.S. Border Agent.
 7. In front of the U.S. Custom and Border Agent you will declare that you have a firearm. You will be sent to the "Secondary Clearance" area and stand in line again until you can talk to personnel in this room.

Personnel will tell you that your gun case and all checked luggage must be located (somewhere downstairs amongst all the other checked baggage) and brought to this Inspection room where they can physically compare your firearm serial number to your ATA form 6. You will be directed to take a seat and wait, and wait, and wait. You can't even use your cell phone as cell phone use is prohibited.

Eventually your firearm and checked luggage will appear at the inspection area where you are patiently waiting. This wait alone is often an hour or more. But now you are good to go – right? Wrong!
 8. Now a firearm officer has to be paged to come to the inspection area. This usually takes 15 minutes or more. Once present, the gun case is opened, the serial number compared to the ATA form 6, the gun case closed, locked and it as well as the checked baggage is sent back down a conveyor belt.
 9. You have by now either missed your flight or are perilously close. If it is still possible to make your flight, you will have to literally run to the gate and hope you can board and hope your gun case and luggage make the same flight.

So what is a possible solution? Well, you can drive, change airlines, leave your gun at home and maybe borrow one at the range (which is not practical), arrive at the airport even earlier (this makes no sense as airline personnel are not open for business in many cases until two to two and a half hours in advance of flights).

Perhaps Air Canada should pay attention to how Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport deals with the identical situation, which goes as follows:

1. Attend at the check-in kiosk.
2. An attendant will ask you to lock your gun case and follow them (with the gun case) a short distance where the locked gun case is x-rayed.
3. The gun case goes on a conveyor belt as does your checked-in baggage. You never see either again until at the destination airport (in Toronto).
4. Depending on the line-up, this whole process can take 20 minutes or less.

My Opinion: Air Canada can't be this inept so there must be an ulterior motive. I suspect they are trying to discourage people from carrying firearms on air craft. They get well paid for the (poor) service they provide. Or, perhaps the blame rests with Terminal One which has put in place an incompetent system that negatively impacts on all passengers and all airline carriers.

My suggestion is that you try to avoid Terminal One in Toronto if you intend to travel with firearms. Or, if you have no choice, be aware of the procedures and do your best to keep ahead of the curves and not miss your flight.

I invite readers to give me any suggestions they have in streamlining the process if possible and I will be pleased to share it with the readers of this column in the future.

Paul Shaw,
Ontario Delegate