

Plane Stolen, Novice Pilot Talked Down

KEY WEST, Fla., Jan. 30

(UPI)—A novice pilot toting two flintlock pistols stole an airplane today and announced he was flying to Cuba, but Navy jets intercepted him and herded him back to the mainland.

Under radioed instructions, the young pilot then made what he claimed was his first landing in an airplane.

Police immediately arrested him and identified him as Ernest Hall, 28, of Albuquerque, N.M. He denied that he was going to Cuba and Sheriff Reace Thompson said Hall told him "he just wanted to get caught."

Dick Johnson, a pilot for the American Air Taxi Service of Miami, gave Hall the landing instructions. Johnson said he was on a mail run to Key West when he overheard Hall's conversation with the Boca Chica tower and offered to "talk him down."

Asking About Knobs

"I heard this fellow asking the tower what the different controls and colored knobs and switches were for," Johnson said. "I figured he was a

passenger and something had happened to the pilot. I told the tower I knew the plane and would try to talk him down, and they said okay.

"I didn't make visual contact with him until we were right over Key West. I set him up for a landing three times, but he was high and too fast the first two times.

"He seemed fairly calm, but said he was 'scared to death' on the first landing run. I just told him to keep cool and relax," Johnson said.

"On the third landing approach, I stayed with him until he hit the deck. Then I pulled off and told him how to switch off the engines. The police already had him in the car when I landed," Johnson said.

To Charge Larceny

Sheriff Thompson said he would charge Hall with grand larceny for stealing the twin-engine Piper Apache.

Thompson said Hall had come to Key West looking for a job as a shrimp fisherman.

"It looks like he was not intending to hurt anyone," the sheriff said. "He seemed to be somewhat depressed because he couldn't find work."

The plane was stolen from a private airport at Marathon, about 30 miles north of Key West. Thirty minutes later, Hall blundered into the air defense zone and the naval air station at Boca Chica scrambled two jet interceptors.

A Navy spokesman said the Boca Chica tower ordered Hall to land there, but Hall retorted that he didn't know how and anyway, he wanted to go on to Cuba.