

TWA Says FBI Sent It AF Data On Pilot-Critic

By Nick Kotz
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The board chairman of Trans World Airlines said yesterday that FBI director J. Edgar Hoover wrote him personally to reveal a TWA pilot's prior "difficulties in the Air Force" after the pilot had strongly criticized the FBI's handling of an airplane hijacking incident.

TWA Board Chairman Charles Tillinghast said in a telephone interview that Hoover later again complained to him about TWA Capt. Donald J. Cook at a meeting in Hoover's office.

The issue was raised yesterday by Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.), who urged a congressional investigation of what he called "Hoover's illegal attempt to discredit a TWA pilot who criticized the FBI."

McGovern said Hoover's letter to Tillinghast, containing derogatory information about Cook's service record, constituted a violation of the Civil Rights Act, of various constitutional rights, and of Air Force regulations covering disclosure of information about Air Force personnel.

Justice Department and FBI spokesman declined to comment on the matter.

Tillinghast, in a letter to McGovern, said only that Hoover had "touched on Capt. Cook's difficulties in the Air Force," but added that he "would be very happy to produce our correspondence with the FBI" if he received a congressional subpoena.

Tillinghast elaborated in an interview. Hoover wrote him objecting to Cook's remarks about the FBI and saying "Cook's criticisms were particularly inappropriate" in view of his past conduct in the Air Force, Tillinghast said.

Tillinghast would not reveal what information Hoover supplied about Cook's service record, but said: "We didn't regard it as relevant so far as his work with us is concerned."

A TWA spokesman said Cook received an honorable discharge from the Air Force in 1960 with the rank of airman second class and the duties of an air traffic control radar operator. He joined TWA in 1965 after first becoming a flight instructor with full instrument and multi-engine ratings. He is now captain of a transoceanic airliner.

The disagreement between Cook and Hoover began with the October, 1969, hijacking of Cook's plane by Raffaele Mini-

chiello, an AWOL marine corporal who commandeered the TWA craft over California and demanded to be taken to Italy.

FBI agents attempted to take over the plane at Kennedy International Airport in New York, but Cook fended the agents off—after Mini-chiello had fired a shot—and flew on to Rome.

"The FBI plan was damned near a prescription for getting the entire crew killed and the plane destroyed," Cook told the New York Times after landing safely in Rome. "The FBI just thought they were playing Wyatt Earp and wanted to engage in a shootout with a supposed criminal and bring him to justice."

Cook's criticisms of the FBI received widespread publicity, and he was hailed on his return as a cool hero. And Hoover wrote TWA to protest the criticism.

Hoover's letter of complaint to TWA President Tillinghast first came to McGovern's notice in what he said was an anonymous telephone call from an FBI official.

McGovern said he has been told by former FBI agents and officials that Hoover attempted to retaliate against TWA by forbidding agents to use the airline and by refusing to have FBI agents serve as air marshals on TWA flights. Concerning these allegations, Tillinghast wrote McGovern, "We are not in a position to supply any first hand information."

Questioned yesterday about why Hoover had supplied him with information concerning Cook's military record, Tillinghast replied: "I don't think I have anything useful to volunteer about Mr. Hoover's motives."

In addition to his letter from Hoover, Tillinghast said, the subject of Cook came up again at a meeting in Hoover's office to discuss "slightly strained relations with the FBI" on the whole matter of skyjackings.

Tillinghast said he requested this meeting after another hijacking incident, to discuss "some disagreement, at least confusion, between the FBI and us about who made what decisions when." The TWA official said he proposed a conference of airlines and various concerned federal agencies to discuss hijacking responsibility, but none has been held.