

T.P. 1-30-69

Chalmette Businessman Says Hijack Well Planned

Thomas Diggs Tells of
Trip to Havana

"It was quite a ride and the sky piracy was well planned," according to a Chalmette businessman who was aboard one of two U.S. jetliners hijacked to Havana Tuesday.

Thomas Diggs, 407 Chalmette ave., a service representative for Continental Can Co., was one of 25 passengers aboard the Miami-bound National Airlines jet. Also on board was finance company president Rene A. Curry, 9 Swan.

The jet was hijacked shortly after it left New Orleans by two well-dressed Negroes, identified by police in Los Angeles as Byron V. Booth and Clinton R. Smith, both 24. Officers said the men used the names of R. Banks and A. Matterson when they boarded the plane.

Police said the two men escaped Monday from the California Institute for Men at Chino, Calif., where they were serving terms for robbery.

"HAVANA"

Diggs, reached by telephone Wednesday morning at a Miami motel, said, "My first indication that we were being hijacked was when I saw a stewardess being led toward the cockpit with one of the men poking a gun in her back."

The men threatened the chief stewardess, Miss Victoria Sikorski, 22, with a gun and four sticks of dynamite.

"Havana," one of the men said, and she led them to the cockpit. The passengers were "real calm," Diggs said.

Soon after arriving in Havana, Diggs said, the passengers and crew were taken to a military administration building "right at the airport."

"They asked our names, citizenship and where we were staying. Diggs reported. "Then we were put aboard a dilapidated bus for a three-and-a-half-hour ride across country."

They were taken to the old

International Hotel in Havana, where they were fed, he said.

"We started off with drinks, shrimp cocktails, then soup, steak, fried potatoes and wine. Then, later came coffee and dessert. But it wasn't very good, I tell you," Diggs said.

WELL PLANNED

The captives were taken to another airport and returned to Miami.

"I got back about 6:30 p.m. yesterday (Tuesday)," Diggs said. "And when I look back at it, the whole thing seemed well planned."

He said in addition to the questioning and the meal, the passengers were given newspapers and books in English. It was mostly propaganda, Diggs said.

Diggs flies about 100,000 miles a year, he estimated. He hoped to complete his business in Miami Wednesday and return to New Orleans Thursday.

"I wouldn't like another side trip," he stated.

A few hours after that hijacking, an Eastern Airlines jet with 105 passengers and a crew of eight aboard also was hijacked to Havana. They returned to Miami early Wednesday to tell of being ordered to Havana by three Negroes in "typical hippie dress" and alligator shoes.

Capt. Robert J. Sullivan said one of the hippie hijackers ordered the change of course while holding a gun at the neck of a stewardess.

Souvenir Posters

Given Passengers

By THEODORE A. EDIGER
MIAMI (AP) — Passengers of this year's 10th hijacked plane returned from Cuba Wednesday

with souvenir posters showing mess end of bombs.

Underneath was the word Ha-noi.

"The Cubans offered them to everybody and those who wanted more could have all they wanted," said Peggy White, 21, of Watchung, N.J. She was one of 94 persons flown here after their Eastern Air Lines jet from Atlanta was diverted to Havana Tuesday night.

Three passengers described as hippie-clad Negroes remained behind.

JUST FOR LARK

Miss White said, "One passenger told us not to accept the posters and that the younger generation is going to the dogs. But we did it just for a lark. Where else can you get souvenirs like these."

Also dispensed at Havana's airport, said Miss White, a student at Athens, Ala., College, were books such as Fidel Castro's "History Will Absolve Me," in English.

"The people at the airport told us all to pose and they took pictures of us," Miss White said. "They took both movies and stills. But they wouldn't let us take any pictures."

"We all posed all right, but many of us made faces—like this," she said, sticking out her tongue.

Miss White continued, "Our mother doesn't even know we were hijacked."

With the brunette was her 18-year-old sister, Cathy.

SENT SELF CARD

John Graham, 18, said, "It was fun. I even sent myself a card saying 'I'm in Cuba, wish you were here.'"

Graham of Miami said he mailed the card to the University of North Carolina where he is a sophomore.

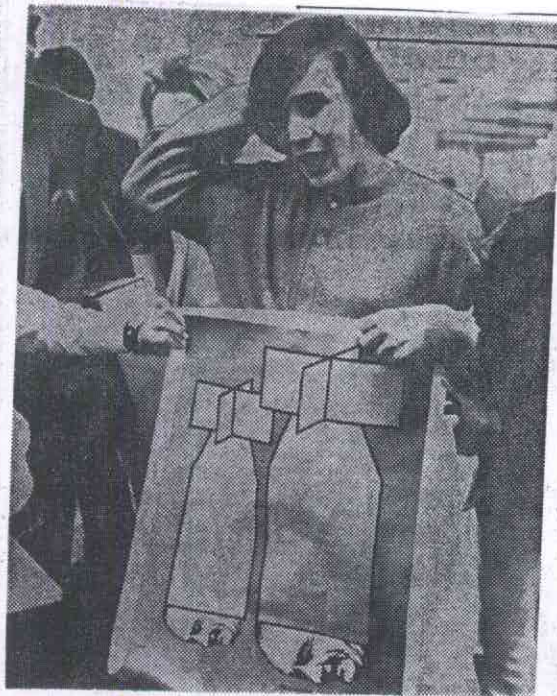
As the number of airliners diverted to Havana rose to 10 in just 28 days of the new year, a \$50,000 reward for information leading to arrest and conviction of hijackers who returned to this country was announced in New York.

Floyd D. Hall, chairman and president of Eastern Air Lines, said the reward would be offered by the Air Transport Association, an airlines trade organization, and would become effective in mid-February.

The crew and eight passen-

gers of an EAL jet taken over
Tuesday night by three Negroes
in hippie clothes arrived in Mi-
ami early today. The remaining
passengers, minus the hijack-
ers, were bussed to Varadero to
await pickup.

Thirty passengers and crew-
men of a National Airlines jet
hijacked Tuesday morning by
two escaped California convicts
returned that evening.



—AP WIREPHOTO.
SCRATCHING his head as he displays a poster given him in Cuba is Jon Graham, 18, a University of North Carolina student from Miami. Jon was among the passengers of the hijacked Eastern flight who spent Tuesday night in Cuba and returned to Miami Wednesday afternoon. The poster depicts Lyndon B. Johnson on the business end of two bombs. Beneath the bombs is lettered "Hanol."