

HIJACKING CASE SUSPECTS HELD

T-P 12-6-68
Puerto Ricans Charged
with Conspiracy

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI arrested two men in New York Thursday on conspiracy, piracy and other charges in connection with the hijacking of a U.S. airliner forced to fly to Cuba Nov. 24, Director J. Edgar Hoover announced.

The FBI said the possible punishment if they are convicted is death.

Hoover's announcement said the men, Alejandro Figueroa, 37, and David Gonzalez, 34, conspired with four other persons to bring about the commandeering of the plane with 96 passengers and a crew of seven.

The actual hijackers presumably are still in Cuba.

The FBI announcement identified Figueroa as "a reputed organizer and leader of the Puerto Rican Liberation movement."

Both were described as natives of Puerto Rico now living in New York. Hoover said the liberation movement is a Puerto Rican pro - independence group formed this year.

Charged in the same warrant, the FBI said, are Jose Rafael Rios Cruz, 27; his wife, Wilma Reyes Lopez de Cruz, 21; Luis Armando Pena Soltren, 25, and Miguel Castro, about 40.

All six were charged, the announcement said, under several provisions including conspiracy to violate the federal kidnaping statute, piracy aboard an aircraft, assault with a deadly weapon and carrying a concealed deadly weapon aboard an aircraft.

Pan American Flight 281 en route from New York to San Juan, Puerto Rico, was seized at gunpoint by three armed men accompanied by a woman and a small child.

The FBI account said the men took pistols from a diaper bag carried by the woman and used these and hunting knives to take control of the aircraft.

When the plane landed in Cuba, the account continued, quoting witnesses, the alleged hijackers were cheered by Cuban soldiers and one of the men scrawled "Long live Free Puerto Rico" on the plane cabin wall.

The two men will be arraigned soon before a U.S. commissioner in New York, the FBI said.