

Plane Hijacking Problem Still Baffles Officials

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By Vern Haugland

The typical reaction to each new report of an airplane hijacking could be: "That's incredible. Why doesn't someone do something about it?"

The airlines, the Federal Government, aircraft crews and others would reply: "We're trying, we're trying hard. But after all is done, do something about it?"

David D. Thomas, acting administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, calls the situation frustrating. He noted that the criminals involved in most hijackings go to Cuba, where they are beyond the reach of U.S. law.

Furthermore, the nature of their crime is so dangerous as to inhibit resistance.

The airlines have advised their crews, and the crew members heartily agree, that it's better to obey the hijacker's head-for-Havana command than to risk gunplay that might inflict death or injury, or that might start a fire, cripple a plane, or bring about high-altitude explosive decompression of the aircraft.

Thomas said the FAA has conferred on possible solutions with a number of agencies and organizations, including the State Department and the FBI, with little or no success.

"We are really scratching for ideas," he said.

Also continually checking on the skyjacking problem is the aviation subcommittee of the House Commerce Commit-

tee, which wrote the 1961 law making aircraft piracy a crime punishable by death.

A staff member said the subcommittee can be expected to look into the recent upsurge in hijackings when the new Congress convenes.

The staff aide said Chairman Harley O. Staggers (D-W. Va.) feels the existing law is about as complete a legislative remedy as Congress can write.