

Post 12-12-68

TWA Jet on Inaugural Flight Is Hijacked by Negro Couple

HAVANA, Dec. 11 (UPI)—A Trans World Airlines jetliner with 38 persons aboard, including country music star Tex Ritter and professional golfer Mason Rudolph, was hijacked by an American Negro couple today and forced to fly to Havana.

The hijackers, who seized the plane at gunpoint during an inaugural flight from Nashville, Tenn., to Miami, Fla., were not identified by Cuban authorities.

Havana International Airport eyewitnesses described the hijackers as a Negro man and a woman. Both wore light tan topcoats. The man wore a black beret and was attired in an orange sports shirt and dark slacks. The woman carried several packages.

As in previous cases, the hi-

jackers were the first to leave the plane after it landed in Havana at 12:30 p. m. (EST). The couple left the plane by the rear door and shook hands with a Cuban security agent awaiting them there. They were immediately escorted to the main airport office and isolated.

The rest of the passengers and crew aboard left the jetliner 10 minutes later.

At 9:43 a.m. EST, 20 minutes after the tri-engine Boeing 727 lifted from the Nashville runway, Pilot Dennis L. Maloney of Kansas City radioed:

"A guy has a gun in my back. He is forcing us to go to Havana. We are proceeding there."

The flight continued in silence to the Communist Island. Cuban authorities were

expected to release the plane and its passengers later.

Rudolph was en route to the Lehigh Acres Country Club, near Ft. Myers, Fla., which sponsors him on the professional golfers tour.

Ritter, who has appeared in 78 western movies and has cut such record hits as "Wayward Wind," "High Noon," "Boll Weevil," and "Hillbilly Heaven," was to have performed at Marathon, in the Florida Keys, tonight, and at Key West Thursday night.

The TWA flight, No. 496, originated in St. Louis and stopped off at Nashville en route to Miami. The aNshville-to-Miami leg of the run was a new one for TWA, which until today had escaped the rash of hijackings that have occurred in recent years.