

Past 1-76-69

16 Hijacked GIs Tell of 'Badgering'

MIAMI, Jan. 25 (AP)—Uniformed servicemen hijacked to Cuba by a Navy deserter said today their Communist interrogators badgered them.

Sixteen servicemen, most of them sailors assigned to the sprawling Key West Navy Base, were among 40 passengers hijacked Friday on the National Airlines flight from Key West to Miami.

Yeoman 2/C Johnny Coulter, 24, Vietnam veteran from Riverview, Ala., said one interrogator "started clapping his hands at me saying, 'You're a brave man! You're a brave man!' When I wouldn't answer questions." "I just told them my name, rank and serial number," Coulter said.

Hospitable, Derisive

David Jones, 24, Navy jet mechanic from Dallas, Tex., said the interrogators alternated between hospitality and derision.

"They came in with cigarettes, coffee and Cuban sandwiches," Jones said. "It was just harassment and propaganda to get our hair down—

the food and coffee and all. But it doesn't work like that with the military. It might work with civilians."

Jones said the Cubans told him, "We could throw you in the brig for this," saying he had entered the country illegally. "I told them it wasn't by choice," he said. Coulter said an interrogator asked why he didn't jump the hijacker. "I think about women and children," Coulter said he told the interrogator. "There was a woman with a child right close and she could have gotten hurt."

Actually, the sailors said they never saw the young hijacker stick a knife against stewardess Kim Tatum's neck four minutes out of Key West. They said their first knowledge of the hijacking was when the pilot announced it over the intercom.

Another stewardess, Sue Morrill, 22, said the "fidgety" hijacker told her: "I don't want to kill. I don't want to go to Vietnam."

Seemed Indecisive

Miss Morrill said he was young, with shaggy but not long hair and wearing tight slacks and a sport shirt. She said he seemed indecisive.

"He didn't necessarily want to stay in Cuba," she said. "He just wanted to get out. He seemed to think that the Swiss Embassy in Havana would give him political asylum."

She said he told her he was a 19-year-old American who deserted the Navy six months ago at San Diego, Calif.