

FPast
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Panther Hijacks Airliner

HAVANA (AP) — A Negro in an American Black Panther uniform hijacked a National Airlines jet Monday and forced the pilot to fly him to Havana where he stepped from the craft and raised his clenched fist in the traditional Black Power symbol.

Witnesses said they saw no weapon in the man's hand when he came off the Boeing 727, which carried 58 passengers and a crew of seven.

However, Cuban officials said he was armed with a .38 caliber pistol.

Reports from the airport said the man was dressed in a black beret, black jacket and wore beads. He was quickly hustled out of sight by security guards at Jose Marti Airport.

There was no immediate word on when the crew and passengers would be permitted to return but a Swiss Embassy spokesman said the passengers were all in good condition.

Federal officials in Miami said a return flight plan was filed shortly after the plane landed at 11:11 a.m. EST.

In the past Cuban authorities

have made the crews return without the passengers, contending the Havana airport runway was too short for the big jets. Passengers were brought back later aboard regular refugee airlifts.

First word of the hijacking came shortly after National flight 186 left New Orleans en route to Miami. Thirteen minutes after takeoff the craft veered southward over the Gulf of Mexico and the pilot, Capt. Antone Hunter radioed the Houston control tower, "I am being hijacked to Havana."

A short time later, Hunter reported the hijacker had identified himself as a black nationalist and said he would christen the aircraft "Republic of New Africa."

The man volunteered the information, Hunter said, that "the Cuban people have no prior knowledge of this act."

Thereafter, said a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration, there was no further communication from the plane.

Flight 186 originated in Houston and had taken off from New Orleans at 9:49 a.m. EST. It was the third National plane to be hijacked to Cuba this year and the 13th commercial airline to be forced to the Caribbean island in 1968.

The wife of Capt. Hunter said in Miami her husband is always joking and had remarked when leaving home for the diverted flight:

"Maybe I'd better take an extra shirt. I might be in Cuba."