

Stewardess In Hijacking Is Praised

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MIAMI, Dec. 1 (UPI)—Seven passengers on board an airliner hijacked to Cuba returned to the United States today none the worse for wear and extolling the bravery of a manhandling stewardess.

A 38th passenger, a gunman giving his name simply as "J. Sanche" remained behind in the custody of Cuban officials. He pulled a gun in flight and diverted the Eastern Airliner from its Miami to Dallas route late Saturday. It was the 15th hijacking of an American airliner this year.

Most of the passengers returned to Miami in good spirits, complaining only that they were given too much Cuban food during their overnight stay.

After their arrival here on a chartered aircraft, the passengers boarded another plane and headed for Dallas, their original destination.

Oklahoma City rancher Gene McGill returning from a hunting trip to Columbia, praised a stewardess, Phillis Howton, 24, of Miami, whose quick thinking and a fast action possibly averted panic aboard the airliner as it flew toward Cuba.

McGill said the stewardess kicked a passenger in the groin after he became hysterical on learning the plane was heading toward Cuba. McGill helped wrestle the man to the floor of the plane.

Premier Fidel Castro's Cuban Communist regime permitted the seven-man crew of the airliner to return early today with the jet liner. The pilot, R. J. O'Gorman of New York City, said the hijacker, who also gave his name as "Lopez," indicated he had been a passenger aboard one of the recent hijackings.