

# Pilots Union Chief Assails FBI in Hijack

11/16/77  
**Bureau Defends Gray's Action**

By Sanford J. Ungar  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The FBI says it believes that if the flight of the hijacked Southern Airways jet had not been aborted last weekend, the drama would have ended with the certain death of all 34 persons aboard.

So convinced was FBI Acting Director L. Patrick Gray III of that prospect, after the three armed hijackers demanded maps and charts for a flight to Africa or Europe, that he made a crisis decision last Saturday night to sacrifice the lives of some passengers and bureau agents if necessary to save the rest.

That decision was based on the FBI's belief that the DC-9 jet was severely disabled by an oil shortage, that the pilot was physically and emotionally exhausted, and that the aircraft could not possibly survive the long-distance flight envisioned by the hijackers.

The bureau had also been told by the Federal Aviation Administration, the airline and pilots not on board that the plane could not possibly take off again after its tires had been shot out in Orlando, Fla.

After the plane was immobilized, according to the plan devised by Gray and other key FBI officials, agents were to board



L. PATRICK GRAY III  
... crisis decision

through its emergency exits and shoot it out with the hijackers.

This plan could not be carried out, however, because despite the odds against it, the hijackers demanded and Southern pilot William Haas managed a takeoff on the damaged tires.

The FBI has declined to comment publicly on the hijacking events of last weekend, which have provoked charges by airline pilots and others that agents acted irresponsibly by shooting out the tires as the plane prepared for takeoff.

But The Washington Post obtained the bureau's ver-

See FBI, A16, Col. 4

**Says Shots Blocked Release**

By Stuart Auerbach  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Three armed skyjackers were about to release the 27 passengers aboard a pirated Southern Airways DC-9 last weekend when FBI sharpshooters opened fire at its tires, the president of the Air Line Pilots Association reported yesterday.

As a result of the FBI action, the hijackers became irrational, tried to murder copilot Billy H. Johnson and forced pilot William Haas to fly his crippled plane to Cuba from McCoy Air Force Base in Orlando, Fla., ALPA President John J. O'Donnell told a news conference here.

"This incident was the closest to the total loss of a plane and its passengers we've had from a hijacking," said O'Donnell after talking to Haas for seven hours on Tuesday and Wednesday.

"The plane was very close to being a ball of flames at McCoy Air Force Base."

O'Donnell called the news conference to attack the FBI's decision to try to shoot the tires off the plane without consulting the pilot. He coupled the criticism—based on a version of the hijacking that conflicts with the FBI's—with a threat of another worldwide strike of airline pilots in January if the government fails to take action against hijackers.

According to O'Donnell,



JOHN J. O'DONNELL  
... interviewed pilot Haas

pilot Haas "was very close to having convinced the hijackers to release the passengers" when the sharpshooters started firing.

The hijackers and Haas, O'Donnell said, were in the midst of discussing how the passengers could go out the rear landing door when they heard the gunshots and the tires began to go flat.

"He had the hijackers mentally conditioned to let the passengers leave," said O'Donnell.

The same thing had happened twice before the final shooting incident, the ALPA head quoted Haas as saying.

See PILOTS, A16, Col. 3

# Gray Willing to Sacrifice Few for Many, He Says

FBI, From A1

sion of the crisis from qualified FBI sources yesterday.

The bureau insists, for example, that passengers and others who have made public statements are wrong when they contend that the wheels of the jet were shot out while the aircraft was actually moving and that a fuel truck was too close for safety at the time.

According to the FBI, eyewitnesses are unanimous in their assertions that the plane was "motionless" when the shots were fired.

As evidence of that fact, it is pointed out that when the plane did lurch forward, the blast from its jet engines threw several agents to the ground, ripped their clothes off and injured them.

Gray told a St. Louis press conference Tuesday that he personally made the decision to shoot out the tires.

That decision, relayed from his Connecticut home at 8 p.m. last Saturday night to all FBI field offices east of the Mississippi, was based on advice from aviation experts, including the FAA, and concurred in by top officials of Southern Airways.

It is the FBI's view that the pilot could not possibly have been consulted, in view of the fact that one of the hijackers was holding a gun to his head at the time and was listening to all outboard radio communications.

It was learned yesterday that Gray personally directed the government's actions throughout the drama, beginning with a phone call he received in Connecticut at 7:25 a.m. Saturday.

By the time the plane safely made its landing in Havana in the early hours of Sunday—after which the crew and passengers were released and the hijackers taken into custody by Cuban authorities—Gray made or received at least 20 emergency phone calls on the

subject.

Key decisions were made in Washington by Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen, chief of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, who was in close contact with the White House and by Robert Gebhardt, assistant FBI director in charge of the bureau's General Investigative Division.

Gebhardt, who assumed his post at FBI headquarters here only late last week after his transfer from San Francisco, stayed up all night Friday and through the resolution of the crisis early Sunday.

At one point, Petersen and Gray authorized the FBI field office in Knoxville to prepare a false document purporting to be a White House statement

giving the hijackers a non-repayable "grant" of \$10 million, the amount of ransom they originally demanded.

The document, typed up on parchment with "The White House, Washington, D.C." at the top, and a U.S. Attorney's seal and dime-store ribbon at the bottom, carried the false signature of John D. Ehrlichman, President Nixon's chief domestic adviser.

It was "witnessed" with the false signature of John Wesley Dean, counsel to the President, and "certified" by "John F. Davis," who was denoted as clerk of the U.S. Supreme Court. (The clerk of the Supreme Court is actually Michael Rodak, Jr.)

The document, utterly worthless and without legal effect, was passed into the plane along with an estimated \$2 million in cash, bullet proof vests and other materials demanded by the hijackers, during the DC-9's touchdown in Chattanooga.

Just before the airplane made its final landing in Havana, the hijackers distributed some of the ransom money to several of the passengers as "compensation" for any "inconvenience" they had suffered.

But Cuban authorities required the passengers to hand over the money, along with the rest that was still in the possession of the hijackers at the end of the flight.

The FBI, concerned over the need to create a deterrent against future hijackings, has asked both the State Department and the office of Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's national security adviser, to press the Soviet Union for assistance in convincing the Cuban government to extradite the three hijackers as well as four Arlington residents who recently forced an Eastern Airlines jet to fly to Cuba.

At one point during last weekend's hijacking drama, U.S. authorities asked Delta Airlines to have one of its mechanics disable the jet's engines while it was being refueled. The airline initially refused, citing its concern that it might be held financially liable to Southern.

When Delta finally agreed to that plan, however, the mechanic assigned to do the job panicked and refused to approach the hijacked plane.

# Pilot Chief Raps FBI In Hijack

PILOTS, From A1

Both times, he said, the hijackers were frightened by activity on the ground alongside the plane. Both times, O'Donnell said, Haas tried to get FBI agents and other security officers to stay away.

The first time was in Chattanooga late Saturday afternoon, when the hijackers in the 28-hour air piracy received an estimated \$2 million to \$2.5 million in ransom.

But the hijackers, now being held in Cuba, said there were too many people around the plane with guns and ordered Haas to take off, O'Donnell reported.

The same thing happened at Key West, Fla., where the hijackers saw movements in the high grass alongside the runway. Haas complained and was told the movements were made by deer, but he said the moving figures looked to him like men with guns strapped to their backs.

O'Donnell said the FBI's

action violated an agreement that its late director J. Edgar Hoover made promising no intervention in a skyjacking by federal officials "without the express approval of the pilot in command."

"Nothing short of a miracle prevented a major disaster over the weekend," said O'Donnell, head of the union that represents 31,000 U.S. airline pilots and 15,000 flight attendants.

"It is beyond comprehension that notification was not given to the pilot in command of the FBI's intentions," he said.

"It is incredible," O'Donnell continued, "that once the precipitous action was taken the FBI did not take the proper steps to immobilize the aircraft. In other words, a bad decision was compounded by inept follow-through."

In a separate statement the Transport Workers of America, which represents 14,000 flight attendants, attacked the FBI shooting as "unnecessarily hazardous to passengers and crew."

O'Donnell said the ALPA board of directors will discuss a worldwide pilots' strike in two weeks.

Airline pilots around the world called such a strike last June. It was partially successful in the United States, where the airlines got a court injunction against the walkout.