

# FBI Hit for Shooting Hijacked Jet's Tires

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Associated Press

The fusillade of shots fired by the FBI marksmen at the wheels of a pirated Southern Airways jetliner drew criticism yesterday as a dangerous tactic that enraged the hijackers and placed their 31 captives in even greater jeopardy.

"It drove them into a frenzy," said Alex Halberstad, one of the 27 passengers taken on a violent 3,800-mile journey by the heavily armed hijackers. "They were raving maniacs. Before that, they were docile maniacs."

The FBI sharpshooters had sought to halt the return of the DC-9 to Cuba Saturday night by shooting out four of its six tires as it prepared to leave Orlando, Fla. The plane's wounded copilot said the shooting "really provoked" the hi-

jackers, who told him he would be killed as an example.

The 28-hour nightmare ended early Sunday when the aircraft's bone-weary pilot brought the twin-engine jet, its bare wheels kicking up sparks, down on a foam-covered runway in Havana. The passengers and crew, four of them injured, were flown out of Cuba Sunday by a second Southern Airways DC-9.

The three air pirates were taken into custody by Cuban officials who also confiscated the ransom money, passengers said. The amount of the money paid the hijackers—they had demanded a record \$10 million—has not been disclosed, but one passenger said: "The whole back seat was full of money."

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## HIJACK, From A1

Air piracy warrants were issued yesterday in Birmingham, Ala., for the hijackers, identified as a prison escapee and two men wanted in Detroit on rape charges. FBI special agent Ralph J. Miles said authorities hoped to work out procedures for bringing the men back to Birmingham.

Whether Cuba would return the money was not immediately known.

Orlando was the last of eight cities where the airliner was forced to land after it was commandeered Friday evening over Alabama. It was in Orlando that some 20 FBI sharpshooters blew out the plane's tire after it had picked up more fuel.

The FBI and Southern Airways have declined to comment on the decision.

"I still doubt the decision to shoot at the tires while the plane was fully loaded with fuel and the fuel truck was so close by," Orlando Police Chief Robert Chewning said.

Michael Goff, the mechanic who refueled the waiting jet, said the fusillade of shots jeopardized the lives of "all those on the airplane."

"They shot while I was still near the airplane," he said. "If they had hit the fuel truck, that would have been it—the airplane and everyone else."

After the tires were shot out, Goff said, the hijackers ordered pilot Bill Haas to take off and "he hit full power, . . . Agents kept shooting, trying to disable the engines. There was rubber in those engines and they overheated tremendously. They could have crashed."

Copilot Billy Johnson, hospitalized in a Memphis hospital, said the hijackers responded to the shooting by using him as a shield to keep the pilot from being shot, then shot him to show their other captives "they meant business."

Johnson said in a telephone interview with radio station KRLN of Walnut Ridge, Ark., that once the plane was airborne, the gunmen directed all the passengers to stand, then shot him in the arm with a .38-caliber pistol that "looked like a cannon."

Pilot Haas was quoted by a ham radio operator monitoring broadcasts between the plane and control tower as saying, "Why did they shoot my tires out? Whoever got funny down there sure messed me up."

Haas, of LaGrange, Tenn., was reported by a neighbor to be "resting" yesterday and could not be reached.

There was no immediate comment from the U.S. Air Line Pilots Association, which has been critical in the past of antihijack measures.

The head of the Canadian Air Line Pilots Association, Charles Simpson, charged in Toronto, however, that the FBI tactic was "silly, dangerous and irresponsible."

[A Canadian police official, asked if the authorities in Toronto had considered shooting out the plane's tires when it landed there, told The Washington Post, "In our jurisdiction, this would be an absolute last resort. It wasn't considered. It's always a possibility, of course, and we

might if we got a signal from the captain or something, but it's a last resort.

["Our main interest throughout was to get the passengers off the plane safely, in a civilized manner, or to get the plane off safely."

[The official, Deputy Chief Douglas Burrows of the Toronto suburb of Mississauga, offered to strip to his underwear and deliver \$500,000 in cash to the hijackers when they were on the ground in Toronto Friday night. The money offer was rejected as inadequate.]

The hijack suspects were

identified as Lewis K. Moore, 27; Melvin Cale, 21, Moore's half-brother, and Henry D. Jackson, 25. Police said Moore and Jackson had been freed on \$500 bond last month in Detroit after being charged with forcible rape. Cale escaped from a minimum security prison in Tennessee, where officials said he had a good record.

In Detroit, the judge who set the bond said yesterday that such an amount was not unusually low for suspects with no previous records, as was the case for Moore and Jackson.

The hijackers argued among themselves about where to take the airliner, according to Rita Tidwell, 22, a Delta Airlines stewardess on her way to Miami as a passenger. She said they first wanted to fly to Switzerland to deposit the ransom in a Swiss bank, then talked about going to Algeria.

"Everyone on the plane was personally threatened at least once by the hijackers," said Karen Chambers, one of the two Southern Airways stewardesses on the flight. "There was not a person on that plane whose life was not directly threatened."

Another passenger said the hijackers also took to handing out handfuls of cash, all of which was confiscated in Havana.

In addition to the personal threats made to their captives, the hijackers at one point vowed to send the airplane crashing into the nuclear research facility at Oak Ridge, Tenn., unless the ransom was paid. They were given the money at Chattanooga, Tenn.

The other injuries sustained during the hijack included a sprained knee, a broken leg suffered when a passenger jumped off a wing after the plane landed in Cuba, and head injuries and a broken wrist suffered by an 83-year-old man.

[Passenger Arthur Tonsmire, a banker from Mobile, Ala., was quoted by Reuter news agency as saying that after the plane first landed at Havana, Jackson commented: "You know these fellows (Cuban officials) didn't treat us right. They treated us just about like George Wallace or Lester Maddox."]

[Reuter also quoted a woman passenger, whose young child was aboard the aircraft, as calling the FBI action in shooting out the tires "a criminal act."

[The passenger with the broken leg, J. Frank Robinson, 47, of St. Petersburg, Fla., said the FBI "just about got us all killed," UPI reported.]

In Washington, the State Department expressed appreciation for the cooperation of Cuban authorities. Southern Airways officials said the Cubans were "most cooperative" with the airline and cordial and helpful to the terrorized

Southern Airways Flight 49 was taken over shortly after it left Birmingham. Before winding up in Havana, where it had been forced once before but departed, the aircraft touched down in Jackson, Miss., Cleveland, Toronto, Lexington, Ky., Chattanooga, Tenn., Key West, Fla., and Orlando.