

Hazardous Cargo Perils Air Safety

By Jack Anderson

The greatest threat to air safety, in the opinion of men who fly the great jetliners, is hazardous cargo.

While the airline industry is mobilizing to stop skyjacking, there may be a worse threat to the passengers in the cargo holds.

Pilots have told us that 90 per cent of the 14,000 daily domestic flights carry dangerous cargo. Anything from carbolic and sulphuric acids to highly flammable fuels may be on the next flight you board. In case of an accident, the consequences are obvious and ominous.

Radioactive materials, for example, are illegally but routinely shipped aboard passenger planes. In 1971, a leak developed in a lead container holding radioactive material. It wasn't discovered until nearly 1,000 people had been exposed to dangerous radiation as the contaminated plane visited 11 cities.

Yet at the request of the radioactive manufacturers and the Air Transport Association, the Federal Aviation Administration has obligingly "clarified" a ruling that would have the effect of allowing even larger amounts of radioactive materials to be shipped

The Air Line Pilots Association, in conjunction with Ralph Nader, has brought suits against the FAA charging that the "clarification" was an illegal rule change. The pilots are also trying to stir up a congressional investigation of the hot cargo problem.

Footnote: The pilots' case against the FAA can be summed up in one dramatic statistic. To check the safety of truck cargo, the highway authorities have 15,000 inspectors. To check the safety of air cargo, the FAA has one inspector. The FAA told us their cargo checks were "comprehensive and intensive." Under questioning, however, they acknowledged that only "spot checks" were made of the cargoes. The pilots are checked regularly and they have responsibility for the cargo storage on board their planes.

Zumwalt vs Kissinger

Adm. Elmo Zumwalt, the dynamic, bushy-browed Navy chief, has been making some stinging remarks in private about Henry Kissinger.

Zumwalt has complained that Kissinger's handling of American foreign policy, particularly in Asia, has left the U.S. adrift like "a rudderless ship."

The outspoken admiral was caustic about Kissinger, for example, at a private briefing for freshman senators. He grumped that "the Soviet Union has an active foreign policy" but the U.S. "regrettably has a passive one."

Footnote: The Navy chief, whose famous Z-grams brought liberal reforms to the Navy ranging from hair length to beer rations, is now tightening up again. He has disputed complaints that his reforms had hurt the Navy, citing the Navy's combat record in Vietnam and the high re-enlistment rates. Nevertheless, he is quietly cracking down on lax discipline in a new campaign called "Operation Shape Up."

Washington Whirl

Women at Sea—The Navy is in an uproar over the assignment of two women aboard ship for a five-day cruise. They were selected, along with 33 male clerks, to see how their clerical work affected actual ships. But the salty old admirals and captains who run the Atlantic fleet weren't willing to pipe women aboard their vessels. The two ladies were rejected after being told they could take the cruise. This upset Navy materials chief Adm.

Isaac Kidd who authorized the trip. He got on the teletype to the Atlantic fleet, and the reigning Atlantic salts grudgingly agreed to take aboard both women and any other staff candidates nominated by Kidd.

Flanigan Flops—President Nixon is privately placing some of the blame for the energy crisis on his top business adviser in the White House, Peter Flanigan. This is the view of oil industry sources who cite the President's recent action in removing import controls from home heating oil. Flanigan had blocked the lifting of controls for months before he was overruled by the President. The White House's oil policy unit has also now been shifted to tough-minded Treasury Secretary George Shultz, no great friend of the oil industry. The industry had hoped the unit would stay directly under Flanigan or be shifted to Interior, which traditionally has danced to Big Oil's tunes. Consumer oil experts, however, say some of this positive action may be erased because Jack Bennett, a former Esso International vice president, will be running the day-to-day oil policies at Treasury where he is an under secretary.