

Cuba Gives U.S. 3 Suspects in Air Hijackings

Washington

Cuba has sent three American citizens to Barbados and into FBI hands on aircraft hijacking charges, the State Department said yesterday.

The three were the first alleged hijackers to be sent back by Cuba since it signed an agreement with the United States more than two years ago either to hold or to return to them to the United States. e

The State Department said it was studying the significance of the move, coming at a time when the United States and other members of the Organization of American States are considering the possibility of lifting diplomatic and trade sanctions imposed on Cuba in 1964.

“The U.S. government was not informed by Cuba” of its decision to release the three Americans, a State Department official said. “The U.S. government does not yet know whether this is the beginning of the release of hijackers by Cuba . . . It may well be, but we don’t know.”

Gregory Alexander Graves, 26, was flown to Georgia yesterday to stand trial for the 1971 hijacking to Cuba of a Delta Airlines plane on a flight from Atlanta to Savannah, the FBI disclosed in San Juan, Puerto

Rico.

Graves was arrested by the FBI at San Juan International Airport Sunday on his arrival from Bridgetown, Barbados. Graves gave Kansas City as his home address.

Eight days earlier, FBI agents at the same San Juan airport arrested Carl White and his wife, Norma, of Detroit, on their arrival from Barbados. They have been flown to San Diego, to face trial for hijacking a National Airlines plane to Cuba in 1971 while it was en route from Los Angeles to Tampa, Fla.

State Department officials said Cuba informed the United States of the release of the Whites and Graves only after their arrival in Barbados. Commercial flights between Cuba and Barbados were established a few months ago.

Officials said Washington does not know how many of the estimated 100 U.S. citizens who have hijacked airplanes to Cuba are under arrest there or even still on the island. They said one known hijacker is attending a university in Cuba.

The officials said that with the exception of a “mentally unstable” ex-GI released by Cuba in 1969, Graves and the Whites are the first known cases of U.S. citizens charged with air piracy who have been allowed to leave the island to return to the United States.

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