

T.W.A. Pilot Scored by Queens Official Over Rome Flight

By LESLEY OELSNER

The captain of the airliner hijacked from California to Rome was accused yesterday of having acted "irresponsibly" in criticizing an attempt by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to stop the plane here and in portraying himself as "the sole hero of the escapade."

"The F.B.I. did not increase the risk—there was a risk of death the minute the hijacking started," Albert T. Taub, a Queens Assistant District Attorney who worked with the Federal agents, said.

The airline pilot, Capt. Donald J. Cook Jr., "leaves you with the feeling that but for the fact that Captain Cook acted as he had, the lives would be lost," Mr. Taub said. "This is an absurdity. It was a team effort."

Captain Cook, in an interview printed in yesterday's New York Times, called the F.B.I. agents "idiots" and said that they jeopardized the life of the crew members when they moved close to the plane after it had landed at Kennedy International. Yesterday, a few minutes after his arrival in New York from Rome, Captain Cook said he regretted the use of the word "idiots," but he repeated his contention that

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the agents had endangered the people aboard the plane.

The hijacker, Raffaele Minichiello, had remained in Rome. Yesterday he was charged formally there with six crimes arising from his seizure, at gunpoint, of the Boeing 707 after its departure from Los Angeles Friday morning. The action, including a charge of abduction, could block indefinitely his extradition to the United States.

It was Minichiello's possible reaction to the F.B.I. action at the airport Friday that gave rise to Captain Cook's criticism and to Mr. Taub's counter-criticism of the captain. According to Captain Cook, the sight of the law enforcement agents who were positioned around the plane on the run-

way agitated the hijacker to the point where he shot a bullet from his gun.

Captain Cook feared that the hijacker would then shoot at the crew, he said yesterday. He therefore pleaded with the agents to move away from the plane. But, he said, the length of time it took for the agents to move away, and even the presence of agents at all, added up to what he previously called "damned near a prescription for getting the entire crew killed and the plane destroyed."

Mr. Taub, who went to the airport as the representative of the Queens District Attorney, did not believe that the F.B.I. activity had increased the risks already facing the three men and one woman aboard the plane with the hijacker.

"At that point, the only idea, the only intention was in sav-

ing the life of the crew," Mr. Taub said. Before the T.W.A. jet landed he said, the F.B.I. had planned and tested a strategy for entering the plane. The agents went ahead with the strategy, he said, because "it was possible with the cooperation of the pilot inside to be able to successfully overcome the hijacker without any danger to the people involved."

This strategy was for John F. Malone, assisting director in charge of the F.B.I. office in New York, and James Sullivan, an agent, to enter the plane through a door on its underside and then enter the cockpit through a second door.

To get into the cockpit, though, they would need the assistance of the captain, or someone else in the cockpit, who would have to adjust the captain's seat and help pull the two men up the hatch. They would also need some diversionary action to attract the hijacker out of the cockpit into the cabin.

The two men conducted a dry run of the plan, Mr. Taub said, in an identical Boeing 707 craft already at the airport. They did this with the permission of T.W.A. officials, and, when they decided it was successful, they determined to try the same maneuver once the hijacked plane landed.

Thus shortly after the jet arrived at Kennedy, Mr. Malone and Mr. Sullivan removed their bullet-proof vests (to enable them to move more easily) headed for the plane.

At the same time, other agents began "diversionary" activity—calling to the hijacker to give up.

Assistant United States Attorney Raymond B. Grunewald of the Eastern District said Saturday that one of the agents said that he "talked to" the hijacker as a diversion. Both Captain Cook and Mr. Taub, though, said there was no conversation between the agents and the hijacker.

The affidavit submitted to the United States Attorney, though, did say that the efforts of the three agents who tried to divert the hijacker by calling to him to surrender "were of no avail, culminating in the firing" by Minichiello of his rifle. After the firing, according to the United States Attorney, the agents backed away.

Mr. Malone raised himself through the first door, Mr. Taub said, but was unable to get through the second, to the cockpit, because he received no assistance from anyone inside the cockpit. At this point, he turned back, and shortly thereafter, the agents moved further away from the plane.

"I'm not blaming the pilot," Mr. Taub said. But if the diversionary activity had succeeded, he said, or if the captain could have persuaded the hijacker to leave the cockpit, this plan would have enabled the F.B.I. agents to take the hijacker. "The F.B.I. made an attempt to get the full facts of what was happening inside, and what if anything they could do," Mr. Taub explained.

According to Mr. Taub, the F.B.I. plan, though it ultimately failed, did not, when conceived and when carried out, entail any additional risk to the crew. Criticizing Captain Cook's accusation that such additional risk was incurred, Mr. Taub said:

"He is in an emotional state. He has no experience as a law enforcement officer. He has no idea if the risks were increased. He only knows that his fear was increased—that I'll agree to. He only knows that his fear was increased—that I'll agree to."

Pilot Explains Statement

The captain conceded that he had made his charges in somewhat of an emotional state. Asked at the airport if he had called the F.B.I. agents "idiots," he said that if he had, it was "after being up for 40 hours and having a couple of glasses of wine with my dinner."

The pilot did say, though, that "they [the agents] crowded us a little too far" and, when asked if he had any words to

say to the F.B.I., that "maybe a few words to them on the authority of the captain might not be out of order."

The F.B.I. had no comment on Captain Cook's statement.

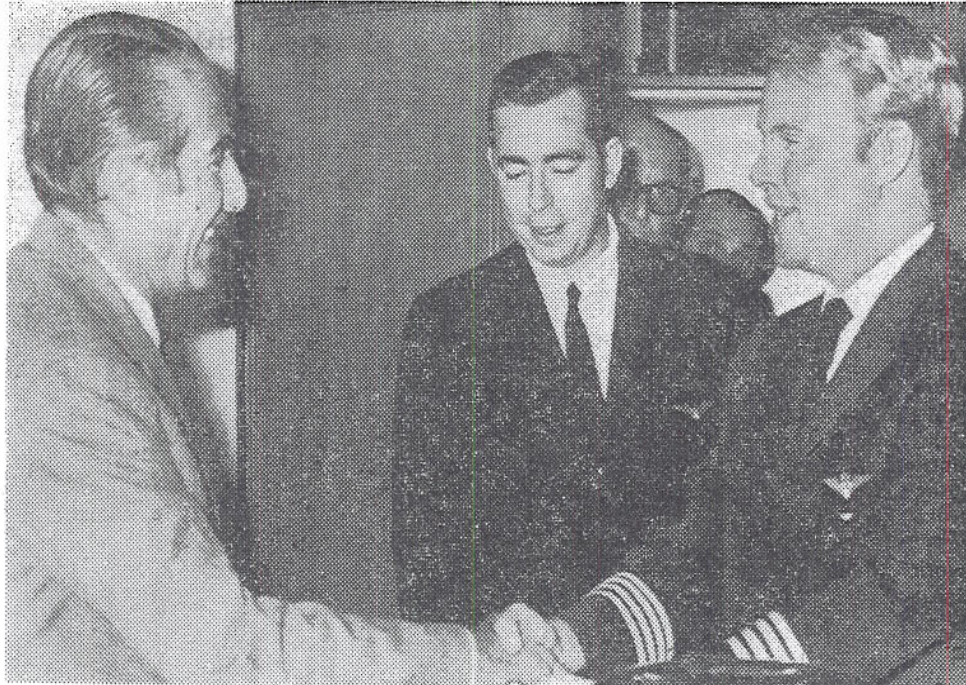
F. C. Weiser, president of T.W.A., who introduced the pilot and his three fellow crew members after their arrival in New York yesterday afternoon, defended the F.B.I. "They know how to do their job," Mr. Weiser remarked, and said that the agents were required to act when they did because they didn't know when the hijacker would "blow his top."

Captain Cook's earlier complaints about the F.B.I. brought little criticism from his crew or his fellow pilots. Ray Gerber, a Pan American pilot who is vice president of the International Federation of Airline Pilots Association, said yesterday: "If what Cook said is accurate, I think the complaint may be justified."

And Tracey Coleman, the young stewardess who was on the flight throughout its California-to-Rome trek, stood before the press yesterday afternoon, clutching a bouquet of cellophane-wrapped roses, and explained her own feelings about the incident at Kennedy: "I was very sure he would shoot all of us if the F.B.I. wasn't moved out."

The interview with Captain Cook is reprinted on Page 26.





Associated Press

THANKED BY CREW: Dr. Pietro Guli, left, deputy commander of police at Leonardo da Vinci airport, with first officer Wenzell Williams, center, and Capt. Donald J. Cook Jr.

Jet Captain Scored for Criticism of F.B.I.