

# Judge Sends Pilot On Panama 'Raid'

Newark, N.J.

A former pilot for Robert Vesco flew the financier's multi-million-dollar Boeing 707 jet here yesterday from Panama, and said he had taken the plane without Vesco's "knowledge and consent" at the direction of a judge of the New Jersey Superior Court.

The pilot, Alwyn Eisenhower, said he brought the plane back under a court-approved arrangement and at the direction of John J. McLaughlin, a Newark lawyer who has been named receiver for Fairfield General Corp., one of Vesco's former companies.

Eisenhower refused to detail his adventure, but Superior Court Judge Irwin I. Kimmelman confirmed last evening that he had authorized the pilot to go to Panama to "spirit" the plane out of Panama and bring it back to his court jurisdiction to help satisfy a lien against Vesco.

A State Department legal expert, expressing incredulity over the incident, called taking the plane unprecedented and said it raised two issues: United States courts have no jurisdiction in another country and this was therefore a violation of Panamanian sovereignty, but the plane can be legally attached once it reaches this country no matter how it arrives and therefore could not be returned.

Judge Kimmelman said, "We authorized him (pilot Eisenhower) to file a \$55,000 lien against Fairfield General Corp. in order to win his cooperation," Kimmelman said. "We took a slight gamble but got something worth much more than \$55,000."

Eisenhower was employed by Skyway Leasing, a subsidiary of Fairfield General, when he piloted the plane for Vesco. He apparently was still owed money when Vesco's financial empire crumbled and Vesco fled the

country to avoid federal prosecution.

Kimmelman said he authorized attorney McLaughlin to advance Eisenhower \$7500 on Monday to pay for

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expenses and for enough jet fuel to get the plane back to the U.S.

Once in Panama, it was left up to Eisenhower how to proceed. According to sources familiar with the escapade, Eisenhower and a few unnamed associates put on airline uniforms and presented themselves as test engineers to inspectors at Tcumen International Airport.

They said they wanted to take the plane up for a test run, but learned the plane was grounded until someone paid a \$2500 penalty assessed by airport officials when the plane was flown in without a prior filing of a flight plan.

Eisenhower paid the \$2500 penalty and put only enough fuel in the plane for a short run to avoid arousing suspicions of airport personnel. He then flew to Mexico City where he wired McLaughlin for additional fuel money.

The plane, which was impounded by Essex county sheriff's deputies at Kimmelman's order, has been completely renovated by Vesco. All the seats have been removed and replaced by a sauna, bedrooms, exercise area, a discotheque and a bar.

Jay Benenson, McLaughlin's law partner, said the renovation cost \$750,000.

Benenson said he didn't know what the receiver would do with the plane to convert it into money to pay off creditors of Fairfield General.

"Outside of the Shah of Iran and Onassis I don't know many people who could use it," he said.

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