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Hijacker Killed by F.B.I. Agent at Kennedy



Richard Obergfell holding gun to back of Idie Maria Concepcion, stewardess, after leaving plane at LaGuardia Airport. The photograph was taken by James Kraakevik of Wheaton, Ill., a passenger on the jet Obergfell tried to hijack. © 1971, The Chicago Daily News via Associated Press

Jerseyan, With 2 Hostages, Tries to Take Over a 2d Jet

By ROBERT D. McFADDEN

A hijacker with a gun at the back of a terrified stewardess was shot and killed on a Kennedy Airport runway yesterday as he moved toward a Trans World Airlines jet he had ordered for a flight to Milan, Italy, his second air piracy of the day.

Earlier, the tall, thin gunman had forced a Chicago-bound T.W.A. jet back to La Guardia Airport and had taken the stewardess and a driver as hostages on a nine-mile truck shuttle to Kennedy Airport.

There, on a runway at the northeastern corner of the sprawling airfield, he was cut down by two high-powered rifle bullets fired by an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation from behind a 10-foot fence.

The slain hijacker was identified as 26-year-old Richard A.

Obergfell of Passaic, N. J., a former mechanic with United Air Lines who was dismissed by that carrier in December for absenteeism.

He carried a nine-shot German-made pistol — stolen from a sporting goods store in New Jersey two days ago — and had kept it pointed for two and a half hours at the stewardess, Idie Maria Concepcion.

The gun had apparently been picked up on an electronic sensor at La Guardia, but was not found in a cursory examination of Obergfell and a search of his carry-on bag just before the first hijacked jet took off.

The fatal shooting of the hijacker at 4:20 P.M. ended an episode of high drama that had threatened the lives of Miss

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Associated Press

Kenneth Lovin of F.B.I. shoots the hijacker at Kennedy

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Concepcion, 60 persons aboard the Chicago-bound jet, the T.W.A. driver, Jake Mernick, and more than a score of F.B.I. agents.

"I really thought I was going to Italy," the 21-year-old dark-haired stewardess told newsmen at the T.W.A. Terminal after her ordeal.

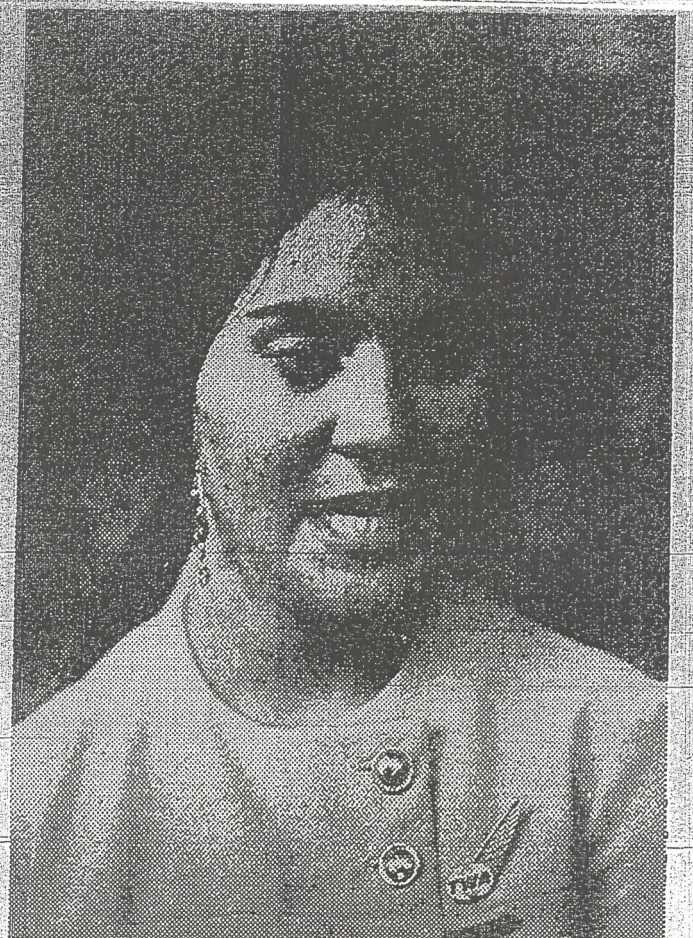
John F. Malone, assistant director of the F.B.I. in charge of the New York office, said the decision to shoot the hijacker was "a calculated risk, but we felt it had to be taken." The shots that killed Obergfell were fired by Kenneth Lovin, who was crouching behind a metal fence at least 75 yards from the victim, according to witnesses.

The F.B.I. said the agent used a .308-caliber automatic rifle with a telescopic sight. One bullet hit the hijacker in the right shoulder, passed through his body and exited from his left arm. The other passed through his mid-section from left to right.

According to a spokesman at Jamaica Hospital, two miles north of the airport, Obergfell was dead on arrival, although doctors attempted for 15 minutes to revive him.

The president of T.W.A., F. C. Wisner, issued a statement last night expressing the company's gratitude to the F.B.I. for saving the lives of the hostages and for "forestalling the further hijacking of a T.W.A. aircraft to Europe with all the potential tragedy that might result from an armed man in charge of a crew."

The shooting of Obergfell—the first fatal shooting of a hijacker in the United States, according to the Federal Aviation Administration—ended a drama that had begun shortly after T.W.A.'s Flight 335 left La Guardia Airport at 1:45 P.M., bound for Chicago.



The New York Times/Donal F. Holway

AFTER ORDEAL: Idie Maria Concepcion, T.W.A. stewardess seized by hijacker, telling newsmen of the events.

On board were 55 passengers and a crew of five, including Miss Concepcion, a petite young woman in a beige pants-suit uniform who has been a stewardess for only two months.

She was working in the plane's first-class section, taking drink orders when, about 20 minutes into the flight, she noticed Obergfell, sitting on the right-hand aisle, because he appeared nervous and was sweating profusely.

Obergfell, a thin man clad in olive-drab chinos and an orange shirt open at the neck, had a jacket draped over his knees and what looked to Miss Concepcion like a white torn T-shirt underneath, which evidently was wrapped around his Luger-like P-38 pistol.

The stewardess offered to get him a drink, but he refused. At the same time, she said, he made some fuss about the torn T-shirt, saying: "Oh, my God. Look at this thing. I've been cleaning the car."

"I was very suspicious," Miss Concepcion said. "Everything they had told us in training about the description of a hijacker—what they told us to report to the cockpit—fitted to a T."

"I wasn't going to the cockpit right away, so I wouldn't make him suspicious. I turned around and I was going to take more drink orders when all of a sudden I felt something hard in my back and an arm around me."

The "something hard" was Obergfell's gun.

"I'm not going to hurt you if you do what I say," the hijacker told her, and ordered her to

accompany him to the cockpit. There, he ordered the captain, Albert R. Hawes, 42, of Hopatcong, N.J., to "take this plane to Milan, Italy."

The pilot explained the plane was neither fueled nor equipped for such a flight and said the hijacker would have to "change planes" to traverse the Atlantic.

The hijacker then agreed to return to La Guardia, and Captain Hawes notified both his passengers and the control tower at La Guardia that he was returning.

The plane landed at 2:28 P.M. and taxied up to the Eastern Air Lines shuttle terminal, where official cars quickly surrounded the craft.

Retaining Miss Concepcion as a hostage, the hijacker allowed the other crew members and all passengers to debark. In addition, the official cars, including the police vehicles, were removed at the hijacker's demand.

Some of the passengers snapped pictures of the hijacker as he walked down a ramp with a blue bag in one hand and his gun in the other, stuck in the back of Miss Concepcion. On the apron, Obergfell met Frank Weaver, T.W.A. manager of passenger services at

La Guardia, to arrange for a vehicle to take him to Kennedy Airport.

take him to Kennedy Airport. A six-passenger panel truck, driven by Mr. Mernick, a maintenance foreman, was provided, along with an unmarked police car as an escort. Police cars along the route to Kennedy—

the Van Wyck Expressway—were warned not to interfere with the truck.

As the truck was speeding toward Kennedy, authorities mobilized for the emergency, fueling a T.W.A. 707 jet normally used for trans-Atlantic flights and stationing F.B.I. men with rifles and bullet-proof vests behind a solid metal fence erected to shield the blast of jet exhausts.

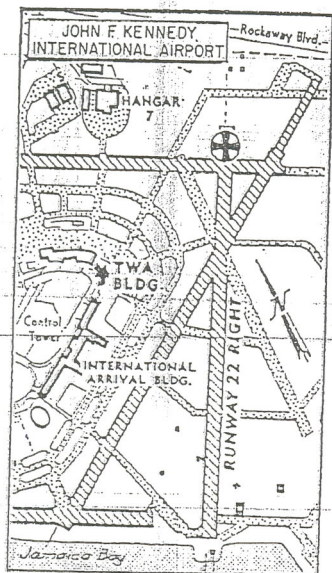
Shortly after 3 P.M., the truck carrying the hijacker, Miss Concepcion and Mr. Mernick arrived at the end of Runway 22 in the northeastern extremity of the airport, three-quarters of a mile from the T.W.A. terminal.

Obergfell yesterday had two conversations with F.B.I. agents who approached the parked panel truck where he sat awaiting the plane that was to take him to Milan. Miss Concepcion said the efforts of F.B.I. agents to dissuade him from the flight only irritated the hijacker.

After the fueled plane taxied up to the end of the runway, Obergfell emerged from the truck, pulling Miss Concepcion with him. As sharpshooters awaited their opportunity, he began walking backward toward the plane, forcing the stewardess to do the same as he held his gun in her back.

The opportunity for the F.B.I. rifleman came as the hijacker moved away from the stewardess a few paces after she accidentally stepped on his foot twice. "All of a sudden I heard a shot, and I didn't know if I was shot or not and I was afraid to look around," Miss Concepcion said.

"Then I saw men running towards me and I heard another shot," she said, adding that when she looked around, the hijacker was lying on the runway.



The New York Times July 24, 1971

Hijacker was shot at the end of runway (cross).