

Passengers on Hijacked Jet Recall Anger, Fear,

By ROBERT LINDSEY

Alex Halberstadt, a 47-year-old construction engineer, recalls thinking fleetingly of how odd he must have looked sitting in an airliner without his trousers on, a fistfull of ransom money in his lap, and a man sitting beside him with a Luger in one hand and a hand grenade in the other.

Then, soon afterward during the 29-hour, terror-filled aerial odyssey that he shared with 30 other Southern Airways passengers and four crew members over the weekend, Mr. Halberstadt recalled a sense of doom. That was when rifle shots from Federal agents sounded outside the plane and, moments later, one of the three hijackers, enraged, fired at the co-pilot.

"For a while, everything deteriorated," he said in a telephone interview yesterday. "They told us the pilot was dead. For one hour, I thought I was a dead man."

An hour later, as the jet approached Havana with two of its four main landing-gear tires punctured by the rifle fire, Mr. Halberstadt said:

"The captain [William R.

Hass] walked out of the cockpit and we could see he was okay. He was such a hell of a good pilot I knew then everything would be all right."

Back to Normal

Yesterday, the 31 persons who had shared the long ordeal had returned to their homes and begun to resume their normal lives. For most, there were memories of agonizing fear mixed with occasional humor; for a few, a fascination with the three men who hijacked the plane that bordered on friendship; for many, bewilderment and anger over the decision of Federal Bureau of Investigation agents to attempt to cripple the commandeered jet by blowing out its tires.

"That drove them into a frenzy," Mr. Halberstadt, who lives in Key Biscayne, Fla., said of the tire shooting. "They were raving maniacs after that. Before, they were just docile maniacs."

Another passenger, J. Frank Robinson, said of the decision to attempt to disable the DC-9 by shooting out its tires:

"They just about got us all killed."

However, Arthur C. Tonsmier, a Mobile, Ala., banker, said:

"Maybe it wasn't such a bad idea. Looking back on it, their whole attitude changed after the tires were shot; I think they started to think: 'How do we get out of this alive?' I feel they decided then they had to end it."

Again to Havana

After the abortive F.B.I. attempt to cripple the plane, which occurred at Orlando, Fla., the jet landed safely in Havana—for the second time in its long odyssey, which also included stops at Jackson, Miss.,

Cleveland, Toronto, Lexington, Ky., and Chattanooga. After the second landing in Havana, the three hijackers and the ransom they had extorted from the airline—more than \$2-million—were taken into custody by the Cuban authorities.

During the first stop at Havana, two of the hijackers left the plane briefly and met with the Cuban authorities. But later, they ordered the plane into the air again, apparently because the Cuban officials would not accept their terms for asylum.

Mr. Tonsmier, the Alabama banker, said that for a few moments during the first stop at Havana while the two men were gone, several passengers briefly plotted an attempt to overcome the air pirate who was still aboard.

"We might have been able to," he said, "but we decided it was too dangerous; he had a gun and had threatened to shoot everybody."

The passengers said life aboard the plane settled into a kind of routine during the 29 hours. After the first few hours, many of them began calling the three hijackers by their first names.

Had to Raise Hands

If anyone wanted to use the rest room, he was allowed to after raising his hand. Most said they managed to get some sleep.

They ate two meals—one that had been placed on board before the flight and another, a box lunch of fried chicken that had been put aboard at Chattanooga.

Some passengers accepted free cocktails offered by the stewardesses. The hijackers alternately sipped vodka from the airliner's cache of miniature

bottles or from cans of Sprite, a soft drink.

Male passengers were ordered to remove their trousers, apparently to make sure they carried no concealed weapons.

"It was a little embarrassing at first," Mr. Halberstadt recalled wryly yesterday, "but I decided that, under the circumstances, it wasn't so important."

When the ransom money was placed aboard the plane, several passengers said the hijackers became a little giddy and began giving away some of the cash.

"They were spreading it around like leaves," Mr. Halberstadt said.

One passenger, Mrs. Mary

Humor and a Sense of Doom

Melton, 66, of Jonesboro, Ark., said: "They gave me \$300 and told me to buy something nice for my grandchildren." The cash gifts to passengers were confiscated by Cuban officials.

Had Long Talks

Mr. Halberstadt said that one hijacker, Louis D. Moore, 27, sat beside him several times and, as he fingered his automatic pistol and a hand grenade, they had long talks.

"Louis said they were doing it because they felt they had been wronged by the police and judicial systems," Mr. Halberstadt said. He said he did not necessarily believe the story, but began to develop a kind of friendship with him.

Despite moments of humor and fraternization, however, the passengers saw the hijackers' mood change often, sometimes to one of anger.

"Everyone on the aircraft was personally threatened at least once," a stewardess, Mrs. Karen E. Chambers, told a reporter.

Mr. Halberstadt said the fondest memory he will have of the experience will be the "extremely kind treatment" by the Cuban officials in Havana.

"From the moment we landed until [about 15 hours later] they treated us excellently. I felt they were trying to tell us something—that they wanted to be friendly," he said.