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Kissinger Has A Close Call-- Gun Accident

Damascus

A submachine gun accidentally discharged aboard Henry A. Kissinger's jet plane at Cairo Airport yesterday, injuring his principal bodyguard only 20 feet from the Secretary of State.

Fearing a terrorist attack, Kissinger hurried to his private compartment on the plane and the shutters were drawn. The Secret Service agent, Walter Bothe, 33, of Alexandria, Va., suffered a deep scalp wound and a second wound in the right forearm.

"You are damn lucky," Kissinger told Bothe after it was determined he had not been injured seriously. The shot came from inside the Boeing 707 when a case carrying the submachine gun tumbled from a rack onto the floor.

Bothe told a reporter that two other weapons cases were similarly jostled free toward the front of the blue and white jet as it taxied off the flight line. Martin Wolfe, a State Department physician, treated the injured agent and wrapped his head with bandages.

The bullet pierced the ceiling of the jet after passing through a cloth bag of Undersecretary of State Joseph J. Sisco. The incident delayed Kissinger's take off for Syria half an hour.

At the Damascus airport, Kissinger joked with Bothe about the submachine gun incident.

"I've always known you are more a menace than a help," Kissinger told Bothe with a smile. "If you want to get off the detail just say so."

The agent shook his head, and was permitted to rejoin the Kissinger entourage after doctors at the French Hospital in Damascus stitched up his 2½-inch scalp

wound. Spokesman Robert Anderson said Bothe would probably leave the group when it reaches Tel Aviv tonight and return home.

A spokesman said tests will be conducted to determine if the safety mechanism of the Israeli-made Uzi submachine gun malfunctioned.

Kissinger and his staff are extremely apprehensive about the presence of terrorists along the route of his Middle East peacemaking tour. Although only a half a dozen or so agents fly with him, dozens more are posted in advance at his stops to ensure security.

Bothe customarily carries an Uzi in a case or in a canvas wraparound bag when he accompanies Kissinger in public, often clinging to the outside of a moving limousine.

The Secret Service is known to consider the Uzi particularly effective at short range. It is easy to carry because of its compact size and light weight.

The Uzi — named after its designer, Israeli Major Uziel Gal — is considered by gun experts to be one of the best machine guns available. It weighs 8.9 pounds and is 25.2 inches long with its folding butt extended.

Bothe is the senior member of Kissinger's security detail. He was first assigned to protect the secretary of state two years ago when Kissinger was former President Nixon's national security adviser.

The secretary referred to him as a "close friend" in talking with newsmen at the Damascus airport after the incident.

"He will stay on my detail as long as he wants to be on it," Kissinger said.

Associated Press