

Skyjacked SF Jet Lands in Cuba

Examiner News Services

MIAMI — A black man and woman who apparently smuggled a shotgun aboard with an infant and its cradle hijacked a San Francisco airliner to Cuba today.

In less than 12 hours, the Pacific Southwest Airlines jet flew from the West Coast to Tampa, then to Havana and finally back to Miami.

During the refueling stop in Tampa, the hijackers vainly sought a plane capable of taking them to Africa.

The Boeing 727 returned to Miami at about 12:15 p.m. PST, after a cross-country trip that included a refueling stop in Los Angeles.

In Cuba

An FAA spokesman said the hijackers and the baby remained in Havana.

Pacific Southwest Airlines Flight 902, a low-cost Sacramento-San Francisco-Los Angeles run known along the coast as the "midnight flyer," was taken over by the

sky pirates at 12:10 a.m., 20 minutes after it left San Francisco.

It was not known whether the hijackers boarded at Sacramento or San Francisco.

Shotgun

Authorities said the hijack began when a black man jumped out of his seat, grabbed a stewardess by her ponytail, pushed the shotgun in her back and forced her to accompany him to the cockpit.

Meanwhile, authorities said the woman held a pistol on the passengers with one hand and cradled the baby in the other arm.

The hijackers let the 138

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passengers off the plane at Los Angeles. Remaining on board were 10 crew members — three flight officers and seven stewardesses.

The red, white and silver plane touched down at Havana's Jose Marti Airport at 10:01 a.m. pst.

FBI agents shut down Tampa International Airport and ordered passengers and airport personnel inside the terminal after the hijackers radioed ahead there was to be "nobody in sight" when the plane landed. Arriving flights were diverted to other Florida airports.

With hundreds watching from the terminal, FBI agents drove to the runway apron and communicated with the plane via ground control. As the craft was being refueled, the hijacker said he wanted a plane capable of going to Africa.

He also demanded aeronautical charts.

CHARTS

A jeep trailing a 12-foot ladder carried the charts — of the U.S. East Coast and the northwest coast of Africa — to the plane. They were handed up to the cockpit on the end of a pole.

When the plane landed in Tampa, airport officials said, there was no aircraft on hand capable of going to Africa. The FBI, which was to make the decision on the plane, was attempting to get closer to the Boeing 727 to negotiate when the craft suddenly took off and headed for Cuba.

The FBI said the pilot, whose identity was not released by the airline, radioed the plane was going to Havana.

A passenger who got off the plane in Los Angeles told newsmen the hijacker was about 25, 6 foot 3 and wore a green sweater. The man, Larry Ward of Los Angeles, said the hijacker was sitting in the front of the plane when he arose and walked toward the back where the woman and baby sat.

The next thing he knew, Ward said, the stewardess was being pushed toward the cockpit.

"She had her eyes shut," he said. "She looked like she was praying."

Yanked

"I really felt sorry for her," said Lynn Thomas, 24, of San Mateo. "The hijacker yanked her head back by the ponytail . . . He pointed his gun at the passengers and said:

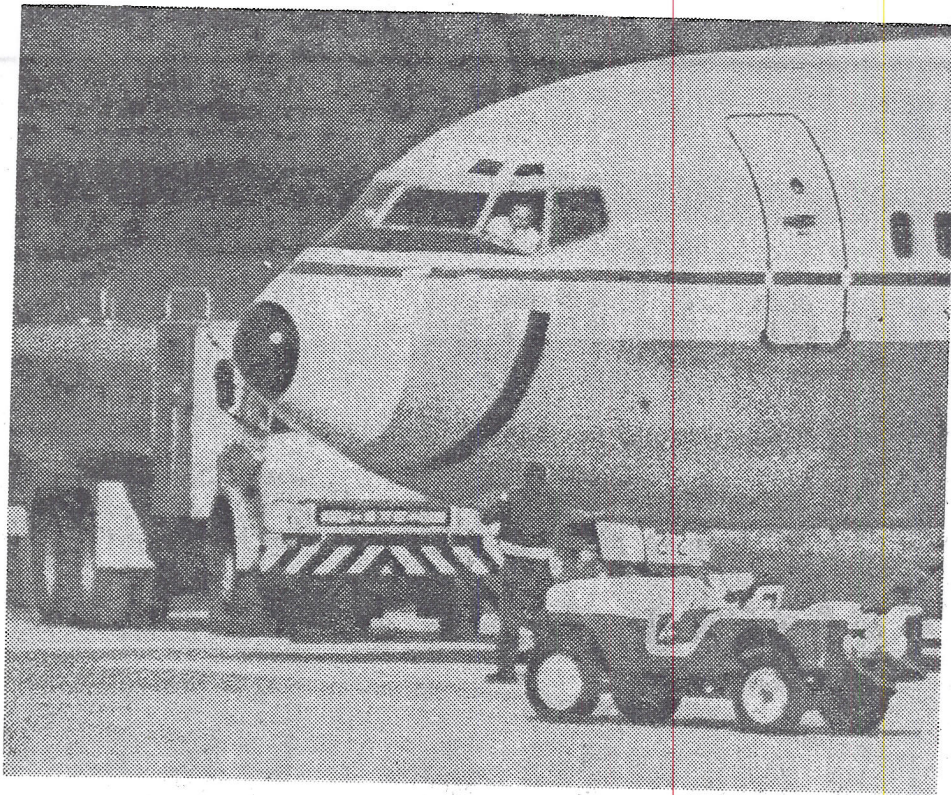
"Any m----- moves, you all die."

One of the passengers, a long-haired youth, did move and the hijacker "called him a hippie and hit him in the stomach with the butt of the shotgun," Thomas said.

Policeman

"The guy kept repeating, 'I ain't jiving you,'" said passenger Charles Wright, 26 of San Francisco.

One of the passengers was an off duty Los Angeles policeman, Lee Prentiss, a department meday of valor winner, with his wife. He said he sized up the situation and decided there was nothing to do but just stay calm.



SKYJACKED JET PILOT PREPARES FOR TAKEOFF AT TAMPA

From cockpit above painted smile, he instructs maintenance man

—UPI Photo