

Vesco's 707 Jet Spirited To Jersey at Court Order

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By JOSEPH F. SULLIVAN MAY 11 1974

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NEWARK, May 10—A former pilot for Robert Vesco flew the financier's multi-million dollar Boeing 707 here today from Panama, and said he had taken the plane without Mr. Vesco's "knowledge and consent" at the direction of a judge of the New Jersey Superior Court.

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

Mr. Eisenhower refused to detail his adventure, but Superior Court Judge Irwin I. Kimmelman confirmed this evening that he had authorized the pilot to go to Panama to

"spirit" the plane out of Panama and bring it back to the court's jurisdiction to help satisfy a lien against Mr. 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.

The plane, which was impounded by Essex County sheriff's deputies at Judge Kimmelman's order, had been completely renovated by Mr. Vesco.

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All the seats were removed and replaced by a sauna, bedrooms, exercise area, a discotheque and a bar.

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

Pilot Was Convinced

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

Judge Kimmelman said he had authorized Mr. McLaughlin to advance Mr. Eisenhower \$7,500 on Monday to pay for expenses and for enough jet fuel to get the plane back to the United States.

"We authorized him to file a \$55,000 lien against Fairfield

General Corporation in order to win his cooperation in bringing back the plane," Judge Kimmelman said. "We took a slight gamble but got something worth much more than \$55,000."

On the way to Panama, Mr. Eisenhower filed his lien against Fairfield General in Florida, according to Mr. Benenson.

Once in Panama, it was left up to Mr. Eisenhower how to proceed. According to sources familiar with the escapade, Mr. Eisenhower and a few unnamed associates donned airline uniforms and presented themselves as test engineers to inspectors at Tucumen 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 \$2,500 penalty assessed by airport officials when the plane was flown in without a flight plan on file.

Mr. Eisenhower paid the

\$2,500 penalty yesterday and put only enough fuel in the plane for a short run to avoid arousing suspicions of airport workers. He then flew to Mexico City, where he wired Mr. McLaughlin for additional fuel money.

Judge Kimmelman said that after an overnight layover in Mexico the jet was flown to Miami International Airport this morning, where United States marshals discussed impounding it before allowing it to continue after a short delay.

Approaching Newark

As he was approaching Newark International Airport at about 3 P.M., Mr. Eisenhower radioed the control tower to relay a message to Mr. McLaughlin, informing the receiver that the plane would soon land.

Mr. McLaughlin then went to the Essex County Courthouse, and Judge Kimmelman

signed the impoundment order. Sheriff's deputies were on hand when the plane landed and taxied to a little-used area between the old North Terminal building and the Butler Aviation Building. Members of the crew, which included a copilot and navigator, quickly left the plane and disappeared.

Mr. Eisenhower, who was described by an associate as "someone right out of Terry and the Pirates," is a Repub-

lican candidate for Freeholder in Morris County. He refused to detail his trip for newsmen, saying, "You'll have to read it in my book."

Mr. Benenson said he did not 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.