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CPYRGHT

## Slovak Earned His Freedom And Knows How To Enjoy It

Mira Slovak and five confederates had hijacked this airliner to bust out of Czechoslovakia, and they were holding the crew at gunpoint in the baggage compartment when one of the passengers began pounding on the cabin door.



**Mira Slovak** bought the story," recalls Slovak. "We were flying in bright moonlight and when we took off from Prague the moon was on the left side of the plane. Then we did a 180-degree turn and the moon was on the right. That character didn't even notice."

One suspects that Slovak wasn't born; he must have been created by the pen of Ian Fleming. He was only 21 when the political atmosphere of Czechoslovakia became so suffocating he organized a daring escape that took 29 unsuspecting passengers to free Germany. And it was a chilling experience.

When the English-speaking member of his bold group called the tower at Frankfurt, requesting asylum, the reply was discouraging. The man on duty was a minor functionary who lacked authority to grant the request.

### Wanted: A Place To Land

The next call went to London. Sorry, chaps, but the whole ruddy island is socked in with fog. Slovak was circling over Amsterdam, considering his next move, picturing a crash landing in London, when the Frankfurt radio called him back.

Somebody had rounded up a responsible official in a saloon. Asylum awaited them. The coup was a

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success.  
Young Mira Slovak had thought about this for a long time and he knew what he was doing, and why. He feared there might be reprisals against his parents and other relatives. But he had to go, and his father agreed.  
"I couldn't stay in a country where you are not judged by ability, but by how strongly you believe in communism," says Mira. "Where you cannot say what you want to say; where you are not free to do the things you like to do; where you cannot trust friends because you are afraid they will betray you — I don't know how anybody can live in a country like that."

Freedom is more than a slogan to Mira Slovak. Today, at 36, he is a co-pilot for Continental Airlines, flying 707s, and his idea of relaxation is competing in air shows and driving a hydroplane at terrifying speeds. Freedom includes the right to live dangerously, and Slovak exercises his prerogative as a citizen at every opportunity.

He is a citizen by act of Congress and he went to the White House to receive the cherished papers from President Eisenhower. Not merely because he had swiped a Czech airliner and fled to Frankfurt; this was a reward for his service with the CIA. Slovak was a CIA agent for a year and one-half, and his pay was board and room and a promise of getting to America.

He became a citizen in 1959 when Ike signed the special bill, and he still regards that 30-minute ceremony at the White House with wonder.

"In a free country and a free world you can get to see the No. 1 man," he says, "if you try hard, you get it."

Citizenship was important to Slovak for both practical and patriotic reasons. Without those precious papers, he couldn't find work as an airline pilot. "Twenty four applications I made," he remembers, "24 nos. I wasn't a citizen and I couldn't speak English."

Now he is a citizen — "I am the best," he says proudly, "there is no better citizen than me." And he speaks lots of English, picturesque English, heavily accented. And flying a 707 for Continental sure beats crop dusting.

### Crop Dusting Not For Mira

He didn't want the crop dusting job. "I wanted a nice, clean cockpit," he says. But there was this thing about eating. Mira is 6-1 and skinny as a reed at 170 pounds. But he eats now and then. He knocked on a door and asked for the job.

They sent him to Yakima, Wash. "They showed me how to fly between trees," he says. Then he fought fires in Montana and dusted cotton in Arizona and Mexico. Finally, tiring of that nonsense, he went to Seattle and became the personal pilot of Bill Boeing.

When Boeing decided to build an unlimited hydroplane, Slovak became the driver of that, too. In 1963

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