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ARTICLES

Croatian Separatists Hijack TWA Flight

The four men and one woman who commandeered a Trans World Airlines 727 jet aircraft over upper New York state on the night of 10 September were back in New York City awaiting arraignment on federal charges of air piracy less than 48 hours after the hijacking occurred. They also faced the likelihood of being charged with first degree murder in the death of a New York bomb squad policeman. Four of the hijackers are Yugoslav-born Croatian nationalists resident in the United States and the fifth is the U.S.-born wife of one of them.

The five seized control of the New York-to-Chicago flight shortly after 2000 hours and ordered the pilot to change course to Montreal where the plane was refueled and set out for Gander, Newfoundland. During that leg of the trip the hijackers relayed to authorities their demands that a 1,600 word communique and a 2,500 word declaration of independence of the Croatian people be published in four large U.S. metropolitan newspapers and the International Herald Tribune, published in Paris. Authorities were told that copies of the documents would be found in a locker at Grand Central Station. Along with the documents authorities found a bomb and a note stating that a similar bomb, emplaced "somewhere in the United States," would be detonated if the terrorists' demands for publicizing the documents were not met. The bomb found at Grand Central was taken to a police disposal area where one police officer was killed and three other members of the bomb squad were injured while attempting to disarm it. No other bomb has been located.

When the short-range (1,600 miles) 727 aircraft arrived at Gander the terrorists released 35 of the passengers. There the hijacked plane was met by a 707 dispatched by TWA to provide necessary navigational aids for the onward flight to Europe. The two planes proceeded to Keflavik, Iceland where they refueled again and where leaflets entitled "Declaration of the Headquarters of the Croatian National Liberation Forces" were transferred from the hijacked plane

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to the 707. The leaflets were dropped from the plane in low-level sweeps over central London and then over Paris, before the two planes landed at Charles de Gaulle airport.

French authorities immobilized the aircraft and issued an ultimatum to the hijackers to free the hostages unharmed and surrender. The female member of the group was allowed to leave the aircraft, and she placed long distance phone calls to the United States to learn if the newspapers had published the statements as demanded by the terrorists. Photocopies of newspaper articles were provided to her, but French authorities refused to allow her to re-enter the plane. Shortly thereafter the hijackers showed their hostages that the explosive devices which they had used to threaten and control the crew and passengers were fake, consisting of clay rather than plastique. The passengers were then allowed to disembark and the hijackers gave themselves up to French police. There were no casualties among the passengers or crew. The five hijackers were placed aboard a French military aircraft and returned to New York under guard.

The five are Zvonko Busic and his wife Julienne, Petar Matovic, Frane Pesut, and Mark Vlasic. All support the cause of Croatian nationalism, and Busic was reported to have said as he was led off the hijacked jet, "We are proud of what we did. Don't be surprised if you hear about other attacks in the future...."

This episode is the latest in a long chain of terrorist attacks and murder stretching back over decades, in the continuing deadly skirmishing among rival Yugoslav emigre groups in the U.S. and around the world, and between the exiles and Yugoslav officials. Recent examples of such violence include the assassination of the Yugoslav vice consul in Frankfurt, the bombing of the Yugoslav embassy in Washington in which two people were injured, and the killing of a Yugoslav political refugee whose car was blown up while he was driving in Nice, France. (See the issues of 10 February; 15 June, page A1; and 31 August, page A1. Also see the 7 September issue, Tab C, in which the U.S. embassy in Belgrade warned of possible future terrorism.)

The Yugoslav government and press vehemently criticized the U.S. handling of the hijacking. They complained bitterly

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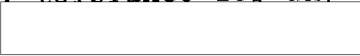
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about the dissemination of the hijackers' communique and declaration of independence and described this as an unfriendly act against the interest of Yugoslavia. A more general complaint was voiced over U.S. tolerance for any sort of anti-Yugoslav organizations.



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