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# **EDITORS' NOTE**

# Ingenuity of hijacked amateurs



PICTURE-TAKING UNDER THE EYES OF CUBAN GUARDS

Many news stories, particularly action stories like this issue's lead on aircraft hijacking, cannot be covered by staff photographers working on assignment. Instead, we must depend on the initiative of cameracarrying amateurs who happen to be on the spot, like the airline steward busy grinding away above. Our problem then is to find the amateurs. Two months ago, when we started collecting material for this story, Miami Bureau Chief Marshall Smith got the assignment: meet passengers being returned from Cuba, pick up their pictures.

As Marshall recalls it, "At first it seemed a reasonable project. Surely, some passenger with a camera would sneak a picture of action inside the plane? As it turned out, I was optimistic. All in all, about 1,000 hijacked passengers returned to Miami's International Airport and we had staff members waiting for them at the end of the concourse. They were eager to talk about their adventures and about one in five carried a camera. These we asked first, 'Did you happen to take any pictures of the hijacking?' To our surprise, most of them said no. They were too scared, or there wasn't enough light, or they didn't have film in their cameras. The few that took pictures had their film confiscated by the Cubans. We were lucky when we found Paul Omoletski, an Eastern Airlines mechanic. He had photographed some pictures of the hijackers leaving the plane in Havana and persuaded a lady passenger to hide the film in her purse. Of course, then we had to wheedle the pictures out of the FBI, which always got there ahead of us. Paul Omoletski's pictures appear on pages 22D, 23.

Brooks Fleig of Greenville, Texas was another passenger who outwitted the Cubans. His pictures appear on pages 26, 27 and above. Mr. Fleig, returning from two weeks' vacation in the Caribbean, had his underwater Nikonos with him but had used up all his film. "When I got to the hotel in Varadero where they put us overnight, I asked where I could buy film. First I was told they didn't have any, but then they sold me two rolls of East German stuff for about a dollar each. Right away, I started taking pictures outside the hotel but one of those armed guards came up and told me no picture-taking allowed. 'To hell with you,' I said to myself. 'I paid for the film and I intend to use it.' So I turned myself into an undercover photographer. What made it possible to fool the guards was the way the Nikonos is built. It has one lever which cock, it, winds it and triggers the shutter. I hung it around my neck, aimed, turned and shot and they never caught on what I was up to." One of his photographs made this.



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