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Nicaraguan Exile Hijacks Colombian Plane

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Jan. 31, Colombian and Costa Rican officials said that a lone hijacker seized control of a Colombian airliner, and surrendered after diverting the plane to Costa Rica. According to Colombia's Civil Aeronautics Department, the Ace airline Boeing 727 was commandeered at about 11 a.m. after taking off from San Andres Island, Colombia, en route to the city of Medellin. Costa Rican air traffic controller Carlos Paniagua said, "The hijacker during the flight told the pilot, Jaime Perez, he would burn a passenger alive if he did not divert the flight to Costa Rica." Costa Rican radio station, Radio Reloj, said it received an anonymous telephone call saying the hijacker was seeking the release of a US citizen and several Colombians under arrest in Costa Rica on drug charges. Costa Rican Public Security Director Hernan Garron said the hijacker turned himself in at about noon after the plane landed at the Juan Santamaria airport near San Jose. Colombian officials said the plane carried 116 passengers and six crew members. The hijacker was identified by the Public Security Ministry as Nicaraguan exile Alvin Antonio Siu. On Feb. 1, the Ministry said that Siu, a 24-year-old Miskito Indian, would either be deported to Colombia or face charges in Costa Rica. Minister Garron said that Siu had been living on San Andres Island along with thousands of other Miskito, Sumo and Rama Indians that had left Nicaragua's Atlantic coast region in 1981 during conflicts with the Sandinista government over forced relocation. Most of the Nicaraguan Indians have returned to Nicaragua after reaching agreements with the government in Managua. Passengers overheard Siu in the captain's cabin demanding that the plane be taken to Jamaica, Miami, or any country in Central America. Perez, the pilot, then persuaded him to land due to a fuel shortage. The co-pilot overpowered Siu and removed the gas containers shortly before landing, according to witnesses. On Feb. 2, Costa Rican Interior Minister Antonio Alvarez announced that Siu would be deported to Colombia to face charges. (Basic data from AP, 01/31/89, 02/01/89; Xinhua, 02/02/89)

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