

TERRORISTS IN TRIPLE BOMBING



Post Photo by Joe DeMaria

Thomas Gallagher, a baggage handler who survived

By DAVID SEIFMAN
and MARALYN MATLICK

An anti-Castro terrorist group has taken responsibility for last night's bombings at Kennedy Airport and in two New Jersey cities.

No one was seriously hurt in the blasts, which hit TWA, a refugee agency and a medical supply firm.

The airport explosion, which slightly injured four baggage handlers, went off at 8:50 p.m. as passengers were boarding an L-1011 jumbo jet for a non-stop flight to Los Angeles.

The bomb was in a suitcase about to be loaded on the plane.

"If it had gone off when we were airborne it would have been a catastrophe," said a stewardess. "It would have blown us right out of the air."

Detectives were investigating the terrorists' claims but were not certain it was responsible.

The calls to the wire services came about four hours after the airport blast.

The New Jersey explo-

sions, which went off moments apart about three hours after the Kennedy bombing, blew out the storefront windows of the Cuban Refugee Program in Weehawken, which advocates closer ties with the Castro government and the El Macen Pharmacy in Union City, which ships medical supplies to Cuba.

Callers to the Associated Press and United Press International, who spoke in heavy Spanish accents and identified themselves as members of "Omega

Continued on Page 2



Associated Press photo

Investigators leave site of blast in Union City, one of two sites an anti-Castro terrorist group claimed to have struck.



Post photo by Joe De Morio

James Atkins holds a card saying, "Now I am a Christian," which a fellow worker gave him just before the blast.

Bombers hit JFK

Continued from Page 1
Seven," said they opposed firms and agencies dealing with the Cuban government, saying these companies financially aid the Castro regime.

A TWA spokesman said the airline had run charters to Cuba but they were discontinued two months ago. However, an empty plane was scheduled to leave for Cuba today to pick up a group going to Canada.

Officials at Kennedy said it was fortunate the blast came before the suitcase was put on board.

"My guess is that it could very well have blown a hole in the hold of the plane," said Deputy Inspector Peter J. Prezioso.

A TWA spokesman said it's "impossible to speculate" on what would have happened if the bomb went off on the plane.

There were 157 passengers and 11 crew scheduled

to travel on the flight.

The suitcase was on a baggage cart several hundred yards from the plane when it blew up with a tremendous blast.

"I thought a gas tank exploded," said Mark Fisher, an employee of an airline catering firm. "You could smell gunpowder all over the place. It was like Chinese New Year. There were pieces of metal and baggage all over the place."

The only people in the immediate area were four baggage handlers six to ten feet away. They were treated at Jamaica Hospital for minor injuries.

The damage was not extensive, although the blast knocked down a cinder block wall.

Police said they did not know what kind of explosive had been used but said it had the force of three sticks of dynamite.

They believe it might

have been in a blue suitcase, since that was the piece of luggage most extensively damaged. There was almost nothing left of the bag — any tag or other identifying mark had been obliterated.

TWA got two calls warning of the blast; a third was made to 911. All three came minutes after the blast, leading officials to speculate the bomb might have gone off prematurely.

The takeoff was delayed seven and a half hours while police and FBI agents questioned the passengers to try to determine who checked in the bag.

Police ruled out an early lead that the bomb was the work of a person involved in a "love triangle" whose target was on the flight.

The two other TWA flights scheduled to leave Kennedy last night — one to Rome and Cairo, the other to San Francisco — were delayed while baggage was checked.

Baggage handlers said TWA — like most airlines — does not normally x-ray checked-in luggage. A TWA spokesman said he could not comment because it involves security.

There were no injuries in the Jersey explosions, but glass was shattered for miles in all directions.

The blasts occurred at 11:06 p.m. at 3600 New York Av., Union City and at 11:10 p.m. at the 4910 Park Av. storefront in Weehawken.

"I was watching 'The Ten Commandments' on television — Moses was just about to hand down the Commandments — and suddenly everything started rattling," said a man who lives across the street from the Weehawken refugee program and asked not to be identified. "It was the loudest thing I've ever heard."

Both communities have large Cuban exile populations.

Omega Seven has claimed responsibility for a number of bombings in the Metropolitan Area and Southern Florida.

On Dec. 29 the group took responsibility for bombings that rocked the Cuban Mission to the UN and Avery Fisher Hall, where a Cuban orchestra had performed. No-one was hurt to the blasts.

Act of God saved me, says survivor

By SAM ROSENZOHN and DAVID SEIFMAN

TWA baggage handler James Atkins can't put his finger on it, but he believes the hand of God saved his life last night.

Hours before the explosion at Kennedy Airport last night, Atkins' partner, Ed Rosario, urged him to go to church more often.

"It was weird. We were discussing the scriptures, and it stayed on my mind," Atkins said.

"I walked over to talk to Ed and the thing blew up," said Atkins, 37, as he left the emergency ward at Jamaica Hospital this morning.

"I was just two steps from the back of the baggage cart when it exploded. It was an act of God, I can't figure anything else," said the father of two.

With his ears still ringing from blast, Atkins described loading the last bag on the cart.

"I stood there until I saw Rosario on the tractor. Then I thought let me go back and talk to the guy."

"Otherwise I would have stayed there. I would have been right there, and that would have been it," he said.

Baggage runner Raymond McCoy, whose job it is to haul baggage carts from the terminal to waiting jets, thinks a mistake he made last night saved his life.

"I had backed into Flight 45, instead of 17," said the 61-year-old tractor man.

"I made a mistake. If I had hooked up the right one, I would have been a dead man right now. My body is still twitching."



Post photo by Hal Goldenberg

Bomb squads join FBI agents and Port Authority police in sifting through the rubble of an explosion at JFK.