

## Stowaway From Ethiopia Found at Dulles

Thursday, 11 June 2009

A stowaway who apparently hid aboard a flight from Ethiopia to Washington was found in the plane's baggage hold by workers at Dulles International Airport, authorities said last night.

As baggage handlers unloaded the Ethiopian Airlines flight Saturday morning, they spotted an arm protruding from between luggage pallets, officials said.

At that point, the workers "went in" to the hold of the Boeing 767 and found the stowaway, who was dehydrated and exhausted, said Customs and Border Protection spokesman Steve Sapp.

After what officials called an extremely rare incident, the man was taken into federal custody. But after checking databases, Sapp said, officials decided that the man presented no threat.

"He was just a gentleman who tried to travel to the United States . . . illegally," Sapp said.

The flight, which originated in Addis Ababa, made a stop in Rome before flying on to Dulles. But Sapp said authorities are "pretty sure he got on in Ethiopia" and was probably in the luggage compartment "the whole time."

The man, who was not named but was described as 36 or 37 years old, was taken by airport ambulance to a hospital for treatment and then returned to the airport. He remained in federal custody last night in preparation for being sent back to Ethiopia.

In describing attempts to enter the United States illegally, Sapp said, arrivals by sea are far more common.

"We don't normally see too many people stow away on airplanes," he said.

Security precautions at airports are intended to prevent unauthorized persons from access to airliners.

In the Saturday incident, although the man reached this country, "the process worked," because he was quickly picked up, Sapp said.

In January 2008, two men stowed away on another Ethiopian Airlines flight and were found at Dulles after an inspection. A news report said they had probably hidden in the cabin ceiling.

News accounts of people who have attempted to stow away in airliners' wheel wells indicate that most have not survived.

A news account in 2007 said there had been 74 incidents in the previous 60 years of people trying to stow away in wheel wells on 64 flights. Sixty of the 74 reportedly died.

However, in 2000, the Los Angeles Times reported that a wheel-well stowaway who survived a 7 1/2 hour flight to Los Angeles from French Polynesia was recovering.

In contrast to wheel wells, airliner cargo holds are pressurized and heated, and provide a relatively benign environment, according to a study published in 2002.

In 2003, a man described as a former shipping clerk had himself sent by air from New York to Dallas inside a wooden shipping crate.

In the Dulles case, Sapp said the man would face an administrative, not a criminal, charge.

Sapp said the man will be sent back on an Ethiopian Airlines plane.

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