

# ICAO TIE-INS

By Albert Pelsser

## Hijacked Pilots Urge UN Action

This story of the series titled “**ICAO TIE-INS**” focuses on the commemorative cover shown at Figure 1 related to the *Number One* problem for pilots and airlines in the years 1968-1971, i.e. the acts of sabotage against aircraft and passengers, both in the air and on the ground.

Aviation is statistically the safest means of transport, but it will never be absolutely safe and will remain vulnerable. Although the first hijacking was apparently recorded in 1931, international terrorism became a prominent issue from July 1968, when aircraft hijacking became a favored tactic in which political demands were made. Between 1968 and 1970, the number of aircraft hijackings and attempted hijackings rose to very serious proportions for a total of 151, usually for politically-motivated reasons. As a result, the International Federation of Air Line Pilot's Associations (IFALPA) had been obliged to devote a major part of its efforts and resources to what had been for some time the chief concern for the three Organizations working closely together in the field of aviation security, namely IATA, ICAO, and IFALPA.

Aware that something as radical as grounding an airliner to make a political point would be controversial with airline pilots, the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA, member of IFALPA), the largest pilot union in the world representing pilots of the USA and Canada, prepared for it in unusual ways. The innovative step was a celebrated Boeing 747 ride sponsored by United Nations (UN) Diplomats on 6 November 1971 in an attempt to persuade world governments to act on legislation halting skyjackings and sabotage. The total budget for this trip was set to US\$40,000 approximately, made up through contributions from numerous companies and individuals mostly in the aviation history. The latter amount defrayed the cost of the chartered aircraft and the four-course dinner in the airport restaurant.

UN Delegates from more than 80 countries and 35 airline crew members who had experienced hijackings were flown in a chartered jumbo jet from Pan Am, piloted by Capt. Stanley L. Doepke (1917-2004) of Pan Am. The diplomats were urged to press their governments to bring about universal ratification of three international treaties designed to deal with attacks against aircraft. Hijack victims wore a button designated T+, meaning more support for international hijacking treaties or laws, exchanged views with the United Nations members and told of their concern over the slowness with which the treaties were being ratified.

The flight, which was kept secret until after the plane had returned to New York on Saturday afternoon 6 November 1971, arrived in Montréal at 1:10p.m. carrying a total of 285 people and was named United Nations Special Flight. Montréal was chosen as the destination point for the flight, because it is the home of ICAO and pilots wanted the flight to be an international one. The Representative of the Canadian External Affairs greeted the envoys upon their arrival in Montréal.

Although far from universal acceptance, three treaties on safe air passage were referred to by the above-mentioned T+ button, namely:

1. The 1963 Tokyo Convention, which entered into force on 4 December 1969, calling on all nations to bring about the prompt release of crews, passengers and aircraft following the arrival of hijacked planes on their territory;
2. The 1970 the Hague Convention, which came into force on 14 October 1971, calling on nations either to extradite hijackers to their country of origin or to punish them under their own laws; and
3. The 1971 Montréal Convention calling for severe punishment for hijackings or sabotage; it came into force on 26 January 1973.

At that time, the Tokyo agreement had been ratified by only 13 nations and only 11 ratified the Hague

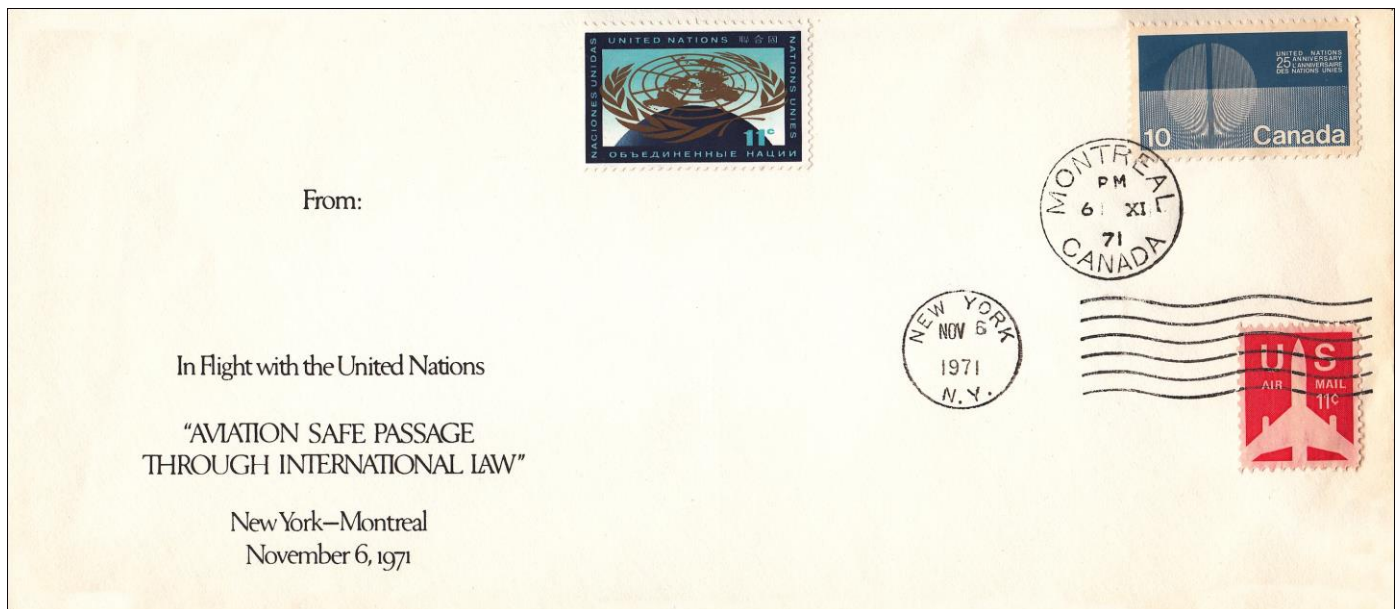
Convention; the Montréal pact had been drawn up in September 1971 and had not been ratified by any nation.

All the international politicians who accepted ALPA's hospitality on the Montréal excursion went home vowing immediate action by their countries. In parallel with the acceptance of the treaties and in response to the wave of hijackings and airline bombing that occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s, airport security measures were increased, resulting over the years in an overall drop of attacks against civil aviation. Despite the decline, however, hijackings will always remain a serious problem.

500 covers as shown at Figure 1 were printed with cancels illustrating the itinerary, Montréal and New York, on 6 November 1971. It is interesting to note that this cover combines stamps from three postal authorities with mixed cancels; the stamp from Canada was issued on 13 May 1970 for the silver jubilee of the United Nations. To commemorate the UN 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Canada Post Office issued two stamps (10-cent and 15-cent) symbolically representing a sense of emergence and illustrating the tremendous force and energy being focused towards a unification of the world.

Two other stamps were affixed, one from the USA with its cancel, and another one un-cancelled (11-cent, with UN emblem and globe) issued on 25 May 1962 by the UN.

Figure 2 shows the special insert which clearly indicated the goal of the special flight.



**Figure 1 – Aviation Safe Passage Cover.**

*Airline Pilots Special 747 Flight Committee*

PAN AMERICAN BUILDING - 56TH FLOOR  
200 PARK AVENUE, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10017  
(212) 661-8757

This first day cover marks a unique event. There are only 499 others like it.

Airline pilots, convinced that such disorderly occurrences as aircraft hijacking can be brought within control by firm action of governments, and equally convinced that governments can be persuaded to so act, invited the membership of the United Nations General Assembly to join in an airborne briefing conducted on a 747 en route between New York and Montreal!

As a social rather than official event, it was not exactly a Parliament of Man meeting between Earth and Space, but who knows what it may portend?

It did speak of faith in law, fairly and firmly applied.

November 6, 1971

**Figure 2 - Special Insert.**

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