

## *An in-air gunfight on a civilian jet*

After a visit to Princeton University I took the Eastern Flight shuttle from Newark to Boston. In those days one simply boarded the plane and paid the fare aboard to the stewardess. One passenger claimed not to have the needed cash, but took out a gun and insisted on seeing the captain. He forced his way into the cockpit and brandishing the gun, insisted on having the plane go eastward. The answer "we do not have enough gas to reach Europe" was countered with "then keep going until you run out of gas". I then saw considerable commotion in the cockpit, heard about 4 shots and saw the assailant on the floor in the doorway to the cockpit. A stewardess called on the microphone: *"Is there any pilot among the passengers?"*

Here is a quotation from the account by J. P. Tristani. Retired Eastern Airlines Captain, which appeared in the Boston Globe 3-30-2009. (More specific than an earlier account).

" Captain Robert Wilbur Jr., 35, a former Air Force pilot who had only been promoted to captain six months prior, was shot in his arm by the suicidal hijacker. And yet with a .38 slug in his arm and bleeding profusely, he flew his aircraft safely to a landing while talking to the tower, telling them his copilot was shot (but not himself) and needed an ambulance. His copilot, First Officer James Hartley, 31, was mortally shot without warning by John J. Divino and he collapsed. Divino then turned the gun on the captain, wounding him when suddenly Hartley arose, ripped the gun from Divino's hand and shot him three times before relapsing into unconsciousness. Although wounded and slumped between the seats, Divino rose and began clawing at Wilbur, attempting to force a crash. That's why Wilbur hit him over the head with the gun he had retrieved where it had fallen on the center console."

My recollection is that after I heard he shot the plane was flying somewhat irregularly and it occurred to me that the assailant might be at the controls. This was in line with the stewardess' inquiry. Perhaps the pilots were trying to throw the assailant off balance. I also remember seeing the assailant being hit in the head with a hard object. After the landing, the plane seemed to go at a much faster than normal speed which might have been caused by captain Wilbur being heavily wounded in one arm. Nevertheless, the plane landed safely to the relief of about 70 passengers.

Sadly Hartley did not survive the shooting assault.