

FAA Collects Fines From Drunks And Four Airlines

By ROBERT J. SERLING
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WASHINGTON (UPI) — Almost four years have passed since the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) decided to do something about airborne drunks.

It was on March 10, 1960, that the FAA added "Rule 40, Section 371," to the civil air regulations — that "no person shall drink any alcoholic beverages aboard an air carrier aircraft unless such beverage has been served to him by the air carrier operating the aircraft."

About a year later, the air-

lines greater responsibility for keeping intoxicated passengers off their planes. The FAA informed the carriers they would be held responsible if ramp agents or cabin attendants allowed drunks to board aircraft — if said drunks wound up creating in-flight disturbances or endangering safety.

Rule 40 provides a civil penalty of up to \$1,000 for any passenger who decides he can mix a drink better than a stewardess. It also provides the same maximum penalty on any airline which (1) allows passengers to drink from their own bottles or (2) permits inebriated

customers to board in the first place.

Since March 10, 1960, the FAA has collected more than \$5,500 in fines from 29 passengers. It also has collected \$1,250 in fines from four airlines.

Does FAA think the airborne drinking problem has been brought under control?

"The situation has improved since fines were levied," said the FAA director of flight standards, George Moore. "Mainly it's due to the publicity given some of the worst incidents. We're investigating about two cases a month and that level remains fairly constant."

The overwhelming majority of unpleasant or even dangerous incidents stem from passengers who get loaded before they get on planes.

This, according to Moore, was the FAA's primary reason for telling the airlines their ramp agents, ticket counter personnel and stewardesses had to keep drunks from boarding in the first place.

"Generally speaking," Moore commented, "stewardesses have been very efficient in this. The ground personnel have been far more lax, first because they hate to assume the responsibility of telling a passenger he

can't board and second because they figure 'Let the stewardess make the decision.'"

The 29 fines against passengers since 1960 by no means represent the total number of incidents. These number well over 50. This is relatively low, however, considering the millions of flights that have been operated in the last four years. But each incident represents, at the least, unpleasantness and at the most actual danger.

Review Worst Case
The worst case in FAA's files involved a drunken passenger who was refused champagne by a stewardess. He pulled a gun

on her, belted her in the face with a fist, and threatened to force his way into the cockpit. The captain locked the flight deck door. The passenger is now serving a year in prison for endangering the safety of an aircraft in flight.

In another case, a drunk did force his way into the cockpit and fell across the captain's shoulder. The surprised pilot in turn fell forward against the control yoke and the plane went into a momentary dive. This playful passenger shelled out \$500.

One drunk became so violent it took five crew members to

restrain him. The majority of incidents usually involve vulgarity, profanity and literally "disturbing the peace" — but every such incident carries the seeds of potential catastrophe. Such as the inebriate who threw lighted cigarettes on the floor of an airliner cabin and burned holes in flight schedule brochures.

"No one," Moore pointed out, "can predict what a drunk is going to do."

In retrospect, one incident also carried the seeds of humor. A drunk staggering around New York's Idlewild Airport recently approached a well-dressed man

to inquire "Buddy, d'ya know what gate blank airlines flight 50 leaves from?"

The other passenger courteously escorted him to the right gate, then waited to see if the ramp agent would board him. The ramp agent did. The stewardess threw him off. But the airline wound up paying a \$100 fine. The good samaritan was the then-head of FAA Flight Standards, George Prill.

"There were about 5,000 people in Idlewild that day," chuckled Moore, "and that drunk had to pick out George Prill to ask about the gate number."

While the FAA does not classify drinking as a major problem, it is not letting up in its enforcement. Moore believes the number of incidents reported will increase in the near future, not because the drinking problem is getting worse but because the public itself is more aware of rule 40 and its implications.

"We'd like the airlines to take the lead in making sure passengers know the penalties involved," Moore said. "We may ask the carriers to print rule 40 on liquor menus, for example, or post copies of the rule at airports. Education as well as enforcement is the answer."

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