

Basic Detail Report

Plane hijacker Raffaele Minichiello escorted by policemen

Date

1969-1979

Medium

gelatin silver print

Description

A native of Melito Irpino, Italy, who had immigrated to Seattle as a teen, Raffaele Minichiello earned a Purple Heart as a Marine in Vietnam. Upon his return to California's Camp Pendleton in April 1969, he came to believe that his unit's paymaster had shorted him \$200 in salary. Despite the relative pettiness of the disputed sum, the 19-year-old Marine considered himself the victim of a great betrayal. One night in May 1969, Minichiello decided to exact his own form of justice. He guzzled eight cans of beer and broke into the Camp Pendleton post exchange, where he took precisely \$200 worth of radios and wristwatches. When he was court-martialed for the burglary in September, Minichiello opted to flee the country rather than face trial. Carrying a bag containing a disassembled M1 rifle and 250 rounds of ammunition, Minichiello took a bus to Los Angeles International Airport and bought a ticket for TWA Flight 85 to San Francisco. After downing two shots of Canadian Club aboard the Boeing 707, he put together his gun in a lavatory, then pointed it at a stewardess and asked to be taken to New York. The plane stopped in Denver first, where Minichiello released the passengers. As the jet refueled, he informed the captive crew that New York was not his ultimate destination: He was actually trying to get back to Italy, a country that would understand why he considered the Marines' \$200 slight such a grave affront to his honor. The FBI tried to stop Minichiello at John F.

Kennedy International Airport in New York, where the jet made a second refueling stop. Agents in bulletproof vests surrounded the parked plane, hoping either to frighten Minichiello into surrendering or to mount a decisive assault. Minichiello responded by firing an M1 round into the roof of the fuselage. The startled agents backed off and allowed the plane to depart on its long journey to Rome, via Bangor, Maine, and Shannon, Ireland. Minichiello avoided capture at Rome's airport by taking a carabiniere officer hostage and stealing the policeman's car. He found brief sanctuary in a rural church, where police tracked him down on Nov. 2, 1969. "Paisà, perchè m' arresti?" he asked as he was hustled away— "Countryman, why are you arresting me?"

Dimensions

Overall: 21.2 x 30.3 cm (8 3/8 x 11 7/8 in.)