

Skyjack '72

On the morning of Veteran's Day in November 1972, a commercial DC-9 circled over Oak Ridge amid threats that it would be deliberately crashed into the Laboratory or perhaps the Y-12 or K-25 plants. Three men wanted on criminal charges, holding hand grenades with the pins pulled, took over the plane carrying 27 passengers and 4 crew members. If their demands for a \$10 million ransom and parachutes were not met, they threatened to crash the aircraft into an AEC facility.

Although few personnel were at the Oak Ridge facilities because of the holiday, the AEC closed the facilities, shut down the reactors, and evacuated personnel except for security forces. After circling Oak Ridge for two tense hours, the plane flew to Lexington for refueling. In less than an hour, it was back over Oak Ridge, with the skyjackers again threatening to crash the plane into the facilities if their payoff demands were not met by 1:00 p.m. that day. Ground investigators, in the meantime, learned that the criminals were from Oak Ridge, Knoxville, and Detroit and were prison escapees and bail jumpers.

After lengthy negotiations by radio, the criminals landed the plane at Chattanooga, where they received part of the cash ransom and left the area headed south. At another refueling stop near

Orlando, Florida, waiting FBI sharpshooters shot out the plane's tires in an attempt to prevent its takeoff. The criminals, however, shot the co-pilot and forced the pilot to get the plane airborne. The skyjackers ordered the plane to Cuba, where the pilot made a safe landing, even without tires. There, the skyjackers entered the waiting arms of Communist soldiers. After their return to the United States, the exhausted passengers commented that the highlight of their trip was watching Cuban soldiers take the ransom money from the criminals and march them away under guard.

As the drama unfolded aboard the airplane, the Laboratory and Oak Ridge facilities reopened at 3:00 p.m. that day. The incident, in fact, caused little stir in the Oak Ridge community because both a National Guard airlift to Fort Campbell and a mock Civil Defense disaster drill had been planned and were under way in the town on that holiday. Two days following the incident, the Laboratory restored its nuclear reactors to full operation.

This incident at Oak Ridge was one of the most frightening of more than 150 skyjacking attempts made during the early 1970s, prompting the intense airport security screening instituted in the following years.

Richard Genung, Charles Hancher, and Wesley Shumate, all of the Chemical Technology Division, managed the ANFLOW program, and in 1978, a subcontract was awarded for design of a larger demonstration plant, which was installed as part of the Knoxville sewage treatment system.

Research on use of organisms to treat waste efficiently, however, has proceeded slowly. Moreover, municipalities seldom build new sewage treatment plants; they are capital-intensive, time-consuming projects that may require a decade or more to negotiate and construct. Therefore, energy

savings derived from more efficient sewage treatment would be a long time coming. Despite these obstacles, work on ANFLOW has encouraged broader Laboratory investigations into potential biological solutions to waste disposal problems.

In contrast to long-lived sewage systems, homeowners replace several electric appliances each decade. Believing that aggregate energy savings could be substantial, Laboratory researchers launched detailed studies of ways to improve the efficiency of heat pumps, refrigerators, furnaces, water heaters, and ovens.