BRITISH MAN POSED FOR PHOTO WITH EGYPTAIR HIJACKER WHILE STILL ON PLANE

News / Airlines



Seif Eldin Mustafa hijacked an EgyptAir flight on Tuesday morning shortly after it left Cairo by producing a fake suicide belt and forcing the pilot to divert the aircraft to Larnaca airport in Cyprus.

At some point during the hijacking, 26-year old Ben Innes from Leeds, England, decided to snap a photo with Mustafa, and sent it to his roommate Chris Tundogan via WhatsApp.

"You know your boy doesn't fuck about!!" he wrote, according to an exchange that Tundogan shared with the *Daily Mail*, a British tabloid. "Turn on the news lad!!!"

Tundogan responded with concern.

"Wtf?" he wrote in a series of messages. "Is that a bomb attached to the guys chest? You ok? Let us know when you get off."

"I have no idea why he took the selfie but I imagine he probably volunteered to take it as he's not afraid to shy away from anything," Tundogan told the Daily Mail. "I find it pretty mental but that's just Ben I guess!"

Both men seem surprisingly at ease in the picture, which may have been taken while the aircraft sat on the tarmac in Larnaca as hostages were being evacuated. Mustafa is still wearing the dummy suicide belt, which Cypriot Foreign Minister Ioannis Kasoulides later told reporters was made up of cellphone cases rather than explosives.

When the aircraft landed in Larnaca, Mustafa reportedly tossed a letter written in Arabic onto the tarmac and requested that it be delivered to his Cypriot ex-wife.

After authorities began negotiations, 74 of the 81 passengers onboard were freed. Three passengers and four members of crew remained onboard. Innes was reportedly one of the final three. Mustafa ultimately surrendered and nobody was injured.

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Kasoulides said Mustafa had initially threatened to detonate his belt and demanded that the aircraft be refueled and leave for Istanbul. "It looks like he realized his demands would not be met, allowing the last two hostages, Britons, to flee the aircraft," Kasoulides said. "He was arrested."

Flight MS181 took off from Alexandria's Burg el-Arab airport on Tuesday morning and was bound for Cairo. The plane's pilot, Omar al-Gammal, told authorities that Mustafa appeared to be wearing an explosive belt and forced him to divert the aircraft to Larnaca airport in Cyprus. Gammal told Reuters that the hijacker seemed "abnormal" but that he was obligated to treat him as a legitimate security threat.

Although the incident was not related to terror groups, the fact that Mustafa was able to board an aircraft with enough materials to build a believable looking suicide belt has raised serious concerns over Egypt's airport security. Last October, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for planting a bomb on board a Russian aircraft, which crashed shortly after leaving Cairo, killing all 224 people onboard.

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