

Beat: News

Stowaway teen survives 5-hour flight to Hawaii in landing gear

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USPA News - A teenage boy who ran away from home hid inside the wheel well of a passenger plane as it flew a nonstop five-hour flight from California to Hawaii, surviving without serious injuries despite extreme cold and a lack of oxygen, authorities said on Monday. The 16-year-old was reportedly running away from home when he hopped over a fence at the Mineta San Jose International Airport (SJC) in California on early Sunday to get onto a plane.

He then snuck into the landing gear well of Hawaiian Airlines Flight 45, which took off at 7:55 a.m. PDT and landed at 10:25 a.m. HST at Kahului Airport in Maui in Hawaii. FBI Special Agent Tom Simon, a spokesman for the FBI's Honolulu Field Office, said the teen was unconscious in the wheel well of the Boeing 767 aircraft for most of the flight, facing cold temperatures and a lack of oxygen at 38,000 feet (11,580 meters). "It's amazing he survived such extreme conditions," he said. The boy, whose identity was not released, was discovered wandering around the tarmac by airport personnel after the plane landed at Kahului Airport. He was later turned over to child protective services in Maui and will not face any federal charges as investigators determined the stowaway did not pose a threat, Simon said. Mineta San Jose International Airport said they were thankful the teen survived the dangerous journey. "He was very lucky. Our thoughts and prayers are with him and his family," the airport said in a statement on Monday. Airport officials said video footage showed an unidentified person walking on the airport ramp in darkness and approaching the Boeing 767, though it was not picked up by security personnel at the time of the incident. The airport said it was not aware of video footage showing anyone scaling a fence, but all video footage will be reviewed as part of the ongoing investigation. Sunday's incident at the airport in California immediately raised security concerns among some politicians. "I have long been concerned about security at our airport perimeters. Stowaway teen demonstrates vulnerabilities that need to be addressed," Congressman Eric Swalwell tweeted on early Monday. The airport, however, said its security program meets all federal requirements, including components regarding the facility's outer perimeter fencing, surveillance video equipment, and 2,800 badged employees. "We have an excellent track record. We work closely with TSA, San Jose Police Department, and our airline partners to provide a safe and secure environment for all our users," the airport said. Research by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) indicates that, from 1947 through 2014, including Sunday's incident, there have been at least 94 flights worldwide involving 105 people who stowed away on board an aircraft. Of those 105 people, 80 of them - more than three quarters - died and only 25 survived. According to the FAA, the last known survivor of a stowaway incident was in August 2013 on a domestic flight within Nigeria. The last fatality was found at Dulles International Airport near Washington, D.C. in February, when a plane landed there after a flight that began in Johannesburg, South Africa with a stop in Dakar, Senegal.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
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