

FEBRUARY 27, 1986

Checking out of France was an easy matter. I just joined in with a group of those dark Mideastern guys that looked like they might have double edged swords hidden under their robes and double barreled derringer pistols concealed in their turbans, and walked on through. I'd watched how the custom inspectors treated the same brand of hombres at other ports of entry. The smartly dressed French officers were handling their visas and passports like they were turning in test tubes of flu virus, instead of presenting their official documents, so I knew that when it came time for them to leave there sure wasn't going to be any delay on the part of the French government.

When I passed through the custom gate I chose a party of Americans to lead the way to security, these Dallas bound ladies were fresh from spearheading an attack on the principal retail outlets on the left bank in Paris. I knew from the size of their shopping bags that unless they had found firebombs marked down 50 percent, or a winter closeout on machine guns, they were too sorefooted to be heavily armed.

It turned out that my walking along with them wasn't an imposition. I was able to steer them clear of passages that were too narrow for them to pass fully loaded, and on one occasion I saved them an extra portage by helping them pass over an escalator that wouldn't move that much cargo in one lap.

Security procedures, we found, had been tightened because of a bombing the day before in Paris and all that tacky misbehavior that had been going on in Athens and the Mideast.

The chief pilot on the flight was standing up where our suitcases were being searched, puffing on a big fogger of a briar pipe and carefully watching every passenger through huge updrafts of smoke. Immediately, I felt safe. Any bandit that was going to hijack that driver's plane was either going to have to wear a gas mask or have a history of deep coal mining. In the few minutes the pilot had been working in the area he'd laid out a smoke screen that'd make the fog off a Georgia swamp look like it's been diluted with distilled water.

After security, I dropped my new friends. I figured the least they could be charged with at the U.S: Customs in Dallas was upsetting the balance of trade between North America and the European Common Market. I am not saying those girls looked like smugglers, but I sure wouldn't have been surprised to see any of them try to bring home an upright pipe organ or a full sized bull ring among their foreign booty.

The main thing I learned about jet lag on this trip is that it's contagious, just like ground lag and the drop that folks get in the spring when the trees start budding out, I don't know why I am willing to make such extreme sacrifices. I always have been a good hearted soul.