

Ukrainian, Arrested Drunk With 19 Passports, Pleads Guilty to Disrupting U.S. Flight

April 01, 2014

The  Moscow Times

Delta planes lining up at their gates at the Salt Lake City Airport. Baranovich's Delta flight was descending to the airport when he began yelling in Russian that he thought the wing was on fire.

SALT LAKE CITY — A Ukrainian national who told the FBI he had been drinking heavily for 50 days before causing a ruckus on a flight from Boston to Salt Lake City pleaded guilty to interfering with a flight crew as part of a deal with U.S. prosecutors.

Authorities say Anatoliy Baranovich, 47, of Portland, Oregon, yelled in Russian that a wing had caught fire and tried to pry open the rear door, damaging the aircraft in October 2012. Baranovich told authorities he had been drinking heavily in his native Ukraine before returning to the U.S. on the Delta Air Lines flight.

Baranovich was also accused of offering money to federal agents to let him go.

Ron Yengich, Baranovich's attorney, said prosecutors are working on an agreement for Baranovich to pay for some of the damage he caused to the plane, but he did not say how much that would total.

"The plea is a fair plea," Yengich said.

Baranovich is scheduled to be sentenced June 25 and could face up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

He originally pleaded not guilty to interfering with a flight crew and three other charges, including damaging an aircraft, trying to bribe federal agents and resisting arrest. He only admitted to the first charge on Monday.

Baranovich in 2012 traveled to Ukraine to build a house but began getting drunk when he was unable to begin construction, he told authorities.

"I never sobered up," Baranovich told an FBI investigator after the incident.

He continued drinking as he flew from Ukraine to Amsterdam and on to Boston. He slept during most of the flight to Salt Lake City but awoke as the plane was descending and began yelling in Russian that he thought the wing was on fire, prosecutors said in charging documents.

After the plane landed, Baranovich ran to the back and tried to pry open the exit door as flight attendants yelled at him to stop. The door jammed and an emergency inflatable slide malfunctioned, causing "extensive damage" to the plane's fuselage, the FBI said.

Several passengers tried to wrestle Baranovich to the ground while he attempted to open another emergency exit door. One passenger forced him to the ground and held him until the plane taxied to a gate, where law enforcement and medical personnel had been called.

Baranovich offered federal agents \$6,500 to let him go, according to an indictment.

Officials said they don't believe Baranovich, who was carrying a Ukrainian passport and U.S. visa, posed a terrorist threat.

Investigators found 19 passports in Baranovich's luggage, including 16 for women, ranging in age from their 20s to their early 30s. Authorities said they were investigating why he had them but haven't publicly disclosed what they found.

Baranovich's son, Roman, in June told The Associated Press that those passports had expired, some were for dead people. He said they had been fished out of a trash bin near a government office in Ukraine, then placed in his father's luggage without his knowledge.

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