

“DB Cooper”; An Alternate Theory

“Golden Nuggets” of information

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December 2016

In my previous published works titled, “*DB Cooper; Step out of the shadow*” and “*DB Cooper; New theory for cause of ‘pressure bump’ on flight 305*”, I provided narratives that are contrary to the accepted beliefs regarding this infamous 1971 skyjacking. This article will complement the previous works by providing “*Golden Nuggets*” of information about the skyjacking that did not quite fit into the previous written works.

Golden Nugget #1

Applying “DB Cooper” OP PLAN to five subsequent skyjackings

My article, “*DB Cooper; Step Out of the Shadow*” addresses the strong possibility of the skyjacking having been done in a military manner, using an “Operation Plan” (OP PLAN). That article presents an OP PLAN and addresses many aspects of the skyjacking as if it were perpetrated by an experienced military parachutist. During the six month period following the November 1971 skyjacking, there were five successful “copycat” skyjackings. The term “successful” means that each of the five skyjackers parachuted from the aircraft and survived. Four of the five were captured within days of their caper and one turned himself into authorities weeks later.

Two of the five skyjackers were experienced military parachutists, the remaining three skyjackers were not. In reviewing the two skyjackings conducted by the experienced military parachutists, it can be safely presumed that one, Richard McCoy, had prepared an “OP PLAN”, albeit perhaps only as a mental checklist. The other military parachutist, Robb Heady, did not prepare an OP PLAN. Heady thought only far enough ahead to park his getaway car in the mountains under the aircraft’s departure flight path, approximately 10 minutes after take-off. After parachuting, Heady succeeded in getting to his car but law enforcement had already discovered it and waited for him. He was arrested without incident, though the money he parachuted with was never found. The use of the military OP PLAN does not appear to apply to the remaining three skyjackers.

Though Richard McCoy was captured days after his skyjacking of United flight 855, it is quite interesting to study his attempt by applying the “DB Cooper” military OP PLAN to his caper. I have to admit that a smile appeared on my face as I saw how smoothly McCoy’s skyjacking also fit the “DB Cooper” OP PLAN template. McCoy’s actions certainly appear to show that he used knowledge of an OP PLAN for his skyjacking, including the critical use of multiple diversions. To go into detail regarding his skyjacking would take many pages of information, I will condense it to the three most significant parts of the OP PLAN.

- **False Insertion (Diversion);** In US Army airborne operations, diversions called “false insertions” are quite commonplace, they are the rule rather than the exception. In my earlier narrative “*DB Cooper; Step Out of the Shadow*”, I claim that “Cooper” created such a “false insertion” (diversion) while the aircraft was flying over Washington state. It is my contention that “Cooper’s” diversion was effective enough to have fooled law enforcement into searching the wrong area, where they believed he had parachuted, for over 45 years. Analyzing McCoy’s skyjacking attempt, it is clear that he also used a “false insertion”, not once but three times in an effort to cause multiple diversions. The first diversion was a detailed flight route he provided to the aircrew. The designated route had the aircraft flying at different altitudes and different headings, making it much more difficult for anyone monitoring the flight to determine when and where he parachuted from the aircraft. His second diversion was the tossing of one of the two main parachutes out of the aircraft. He was correct in suspecting that both main parachutes, provided along with his demand of \$500,000 cash, each contained a homing/tracking device. His third diversion was a repeat of the previous one. He threw the second, and remaining main parachute overboard, which also contained a homing device. Law enforcement authorities scrambled, zeroing in on the tracking devices signals, not realizing he was not at either location. While law enforcement was preoccupied with these diversions, McCoy removed from his carry on bag, his personal parachute and used it to jump from the aircraft. He also brought an equipment bag harness to rig the money bag to his parachute rigging. As with all good OP PLANs, he controlled the situation.
- **Operation Security (OP SEC);** To reduce the chance of his skyjacking plans being compromised, McCoy conducted the entire operation with only the assistance of his wife, who was to have been the getaway driver. He made one slight mistake and that mistake resulted in his capture. Many weeks prior to his skyjacking attempt, he and an acquaintance were discussing the earlier “DB Cooper” skyjacking. McCoy made the simple remark that he would not have done the skyjacking for only \$200,000, as “DB Cooper” did. He added that he wouldn’t do such a skyjacking for anything less than \$500,000. When McCoy skyjacked his targeted aircraft, he indeed demanded \$500,000. This detail in the news reports struck McCoy’s acquaintance as being quite coincidental, perhaps too much so. The acquaintance contacted law enforcement and provided McCoy’s name as a suspect. Good investigative work quickly identified McCoy as the bandit, he was arrested and the money recovered at his home.

- **Return to Base;** McCoy's skyjacking included a detailed flight path the aircraft was to take upon departure from San Francisco, California enroute to Denver, Colorado. This pre-set flight path took the aircraft almost directly over McCoy's residence in Utah. Upon landing by parachute, he was approximately four miles from his home. By one account, his wife was not present at the drop zone (landing site) as planned. He stashed the parachute equipment and money, then walked to a local soda shop and caught a ride to his house. Apparently, his wife had waited at the drop zone for a number of hours before she returned home. She was not aware of the extended delay in the aircraft taking off from the San Francisco airport.

Lesson Learned?

With McCoy's arrest, law enforcement authorities now had an experienced military parachutist in their custody. Had law enforcement taken the extra step and looked at this skyjacking as a planned military operation versus a criminal act, they would have realized that McCoy's "false insertions" (diversions) were merely standard operating procedure (SOP). Additionally, since law enforcement authorities suspected that "DB Cooper" may have also been a military parachutist, it would have been simple and logical to apply the same concept of a "false insertion" to "Cooper's" skyjacking. Had this been done, the search area in southern Washington state would likely have shifted quickly to north of Reno, Nevada, while the trail was still relatively "hot". Was there a lesson learned with McCoy's arrest and knowledge of his diversions? Apparently not.

Golden Nugget #2

McCoy was also a Vietnam war helicopter pilot

Applying "DB Cooper's" OP PLAN to the McCoy skyjacking reveals another important aspect regarding his use of the false insertions / diversions. In addition to being an experienced military parachutist, McCoy was also an experienced, combat seasoned helicopter pilot, flying soldiers in his UH-1 (Huey) "slick" into landing zones. As such, he would have conducted airborne / air assault (helicopter) false insertions countless number of times during his flying days in Vietnam. Again, it would have been SOP for McCoy to incorporate such diversions into his skyjacking, as I believe "DB Cooper" did with his caper. McCoy's use of "false insertions" diverted the attention of law enforcement authorities into searching the wrong area. This "after the fact" knowledge lends further credence to my alternate theory that "DB Cooper" was an experienced military parachutist, survived his parachute jump and left the drop zone without being detected.

Golden Nugget #3

“Copycat” skyjackers

Of the five “copycat” skyjackers, four were US military veterans of the Vietnam war. Of the four Vietnam veterans, two were experienced military parachutists.

The two experienced military parachutists were:

- Richard McCoy; two tours in Vietnam; first tour in 1965, US Army Special Forces (Green Berets), attached to ARVN (Army Republic of Viet Nam) infantry forces. Second tour in 1967, returned as a Huey helicopter pilot.
- Robb Heady; one tour in Vietnam; airborne infantry, served with US Army’s 173d (“3rd Herd”) Airborne Brigade.

The remaining two Vietnam war veterans were:

- Richard C. LaPoint; one tour in Vietnam; infantry, US Army’s 1st Cavalry Division
- Frederick Hahneman; late 40’s at time of skyjacking in 1972. Served in US Air Force as a radar technician. Veteran of WWII, Korea and Vietnam wars.

The fifth “copycat” was Martin McNally. There is no record of him having served in the US military. His parachute jump from the commercial airliner was his very first parachute jump. Even though he had been instructed on how to don the parachute equipment, he had difficulty putting the parachute rig on correctly. Yes, he too survived the parachute jump.