

D. B. Cooper, step out of the shadow;

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When reaching an impasse, an investigator will often have to step back and consider solving a case in an “unconventional” way, often referred to as, “thinking outside the box”. Thus, the purpose of this article is to address the successful and unsolved November 24, 1971, skyjacking of a Northwest Orient Airlines Boeing 727. The plane was skyjacked by an unknown individual using the alias, “Daniel Cooper”, later erroneously dubbed “D B Cooper” by the media.

The skyjacking occurred on Northwest Orient flight 305, between Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington, on the afternoon before Thanksgiving day 1971. After the skyjacked flight landed in Seattle, the ransom money and parachutes were provided to “DB Cooper”. Subsequently, the passengers and all but one flight attendant, the pilot, co-pilot and flight engineer were allowed to leave the A/C (aircraft).

The A/C was refueled in Seattle with the final destination of Mexico City, with one additional refueling stop enroute. After departing Seattle airport, the A/C would fly to Reno, Nevada for refueling, then continue on to Mexico City. There have been many scenarios as well as speculative opinions offered over the years about this skyjacking. Additionally, there have been many individuals suspected by some as being “DB Cooper”. Not surprisingly, there have also been more than one deathbed confession from individuals claiming to have been “DB Cooper”. To date, none of the scenarios and identities of possible subjects have solved the skyjacking.

Certainly, I will not state that the scenario I am offering necessarily has any more merit than other scenarios. What makes mine somewhat unique is that I’m not offering a suspect’s identification, merely details of how the skyjacking could have been executed in a practical sense and the type of person capable of doing it. I will state that this scenario will be the first one to fully address the matter from a military perspective. This article will provide yet another hypothesis, albeit perhaps an “unconventional” one, with a critical and thorough look at the skyjacking having been executed in the manner of a military operation. Additionally, many aspects of this scenario will be contrary to the accepted “beliefs” of the skyjacking and of who “DB Cooper” is. That is fine, since the “accepted” beliefs have not yet solved the skyjacking. Perhaps those “accepted” beliefs should be questioned, put aside and a new playbook brought into the mix.

Ultimately, what is hoped to be accomplished through this article's publication, is to generate a renewed interest in the skyjacking among the public in general and among Vietnam-era military veterans specifically. I am 90+ % convinced that "DB Cooper" was a US military experienced parachutist, most likely US Army, but possibly from another branch of service. I also believe he had special knowledge regarding the airborne delivery platform capabilities of the Boeing 727; knowledge not known to the public, or commercial aviation, in 1971. Had "DB Cooper" indeed served in the US military anytime prior to, during and after the skyjacking, then there are hundreds of US military veterans living today that have served with him during the Vietnam-era and are unaware of his involvement. It is to my fellow veterans of that era which I ask the favor of your reading this article, perhaps more than once. Determine if you will, any of the active duty members you served with who may qualify as a prime candidate in fitting this article's description of the skyjacker. Using military jargon, having veterans review this article will be a "force multiplier" in trying to solve the skyjacking.

It has been 45 years since the skyjacker parachuted from the Northwest Orient Airlines 727 with \$200,000 in ransom money. During that span of time, slightly less than \$6,000 (*actual amount \$5,800*) of the ransom has been recovered. The money recovered was found buried in a riverbed many miles from the area the skyjacker is believed to have parachuted from the aircraft. The recovered bills consisted of three \$2,000 bundles, minus \$200 (*ten \$20 bills*) from one bundle. The bundles were found by a young boy, a few inches below the sandy surface of a riverbed, almost nine years after the skyjacking.

First, the "conventional" approach to this event has been a traditional investigative one. The investigation has been extremely thorough, yet stubbornly still unresolved. To date, the investigation has not positively identified the skyjacker. Many profiles have been developed but none that I would consider as being a fairly specific, credible profile of the type of person who would have committed this successful skyjacking. Additionally, over the years more than one individual has been identified as "possibly" being the bandit, "D B Cooper". Keep in mind that traditional criminal investigations look at the "*who, what, when, where, why, how and how much*" of a crime from an historic, "*after the fact*", perspective.

Second, no one has thoroughly and critically looked at the situation through the eyes of a military strategist. This is evident by the direction the case has gone for over four decades. In this article, I will look at the skyjacking as if I (we) were planning it as a military operation, or "*before the fact*". I will combine my experiences as a former US Army Paratrooper and having flown fixed-wing aircraft. Though never a commercial pilot, my flying experience includes logging solo time in propeller A/C as well as multi-engine jet A/C. These experiences, especially those of being a military parachutist, are the basis of looking at this event not as a criminal investigator but from an "unconventional" perspective of a military strategist.

Come join me as we plan the skyjacking as a military operation, not merely as a criminal act. From this perspective, you will easily see how many of the unanswered questions, puzzling pieces of evidence and contrary opinions are easily resolved. Hopefully, as a result we may be able to identify “D B Cooper”. I for one, am convinced he had served in the military where he acquired the skills to successfully carry out the skyjacking. If I’m correct in my belief, then he very likely served in the same military unit as one of military veterans reading this article. Perhaps you hold the key to “DB Cooper’s” true identity.

It should be clearly understood from the “get-go” that based upon my experiences as a military parachutist, I believe “D.B. Cooper” easily survived the parachute jump. Contrary to most investigators, I also strongly believe he safely and quickly exited the area he landed in, lived for a number of years afterwards and yes, spent most of the ransom money, albeit overseas.

This “unconventional” investigative approach to the skyjacking has to start with my experiences as a former US Army Paratrooper. My military service started during the Vietnam-era, when I was an airborne-infantryman with the 82nd Airborne Division, stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I was promoted through the enlisted ranks to the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) rank of Sergeant (*E-5*). On numerous occasions, I was involved in preparing operational plans, aka (*also known as*) “OP PLANS” at the company/platoon level, for airborne / parachute operations.

For the sake of simplicity, I will not go into the detailed format used for “OP PLANS”; besides, the details have probably changed over the years. I will address the planning in a plain concept, easily understood by non-military readers. Given the responsibility to prepare an “OP PLAN” for a skyjacking, we will not forget to continually apply the “KISS” (*“keep it simple stupid”*) principle. Here are the important elements of our “OP PLAN”:

- first and foremost, whenever possible, control the situation
- second, maintain operational security (OPSEC)
- identify the best / safest type of commercial A/C to parachute from
- identify / assess the targeted airline
- identify the best day / time of day to execute the skyjacking / parachute jump
- determine proper equipment, ordnance and uniform to be used
- determine W/X (weather) conditions
- identify the best drop zone
- determine need for “false insertion(s)” prior to actual parachute jump
- assess the response by law enforcement
- safe / covert parachute jump and withdrawal from the drop zone
- return to base

Each of the “OP PLAN” elements will now be addressed more specifically:

Whenever possible, control the situation

This is our operation, we must control as many factors as possible to be successful. It is accepted that we will not be able to control every aspect of an operation. We must build in contingencies, remain flexible and not allow situational paralysis to set in. If we don't like the risk factor in any aspect of our plan, we'll change it to an acceptable alternative. Always ask ourselves if we are still controlling the factors involved or are leaving some factors to random chance. The fewer factors left to “random chance”, the more likely our operation will be successful. In the scenario I'm presenting, “DB Cooper” controlled most of the factors, as per a well thought out “OP PLAN”

Maintain “Operational Security” (OPSEC)

The fewer people involved in the operation, the less likely it will be compromised prior to executing the skyjacking. Think of the popular saying from WWII, “*Loose lips sink ships*”. Additionally, the fewer people involved, the more likely the details / participant(s) will remain unknown for years to come. If I were to carry out this skyjacking, I would do it without the involvement of any other persons.

Identify the best / safest type of commercial A/C to parachute from

Through my military experience of parachuting from both fixed-wing and rotor-wing (helicopter) A/C, I am aware of the options to exit through a rear side door of fixed-wing A/C, or from the “tailgate”, located at the rear of the fuselage. Due to the location of the rear side doors of Boeing 707's, Douglas DC-8's and similarly configured commercial A/C, with engines mounted below the wings, rear side door exits would be possible but risky. Exiting from rear side doors of Boeing 727's or Douglas DC-9's would be out of the question due to the rear fuselage mounted jet engines, located immediately downwind from the rear side exit doors. The parachutist would stand the good risk of being sucked into the jet engine should he exit a rear side door.

Boeing 707's, DC-8's and similarly configured wing-mounted engine commercial A/C do not have “tailgates” on them as found on the military C-7's, C-123's, C-130's and C-141's of the day. Ironically, both the Boeing 727 and DC-9 rear fuselage mounted engine A/C, essentially have “tailgates” in the form of the rear passenger access staircase. These staircases were a selling point of the A/C for use at small airports. Passengers could easily and quickly board and disembark from the rear of the A/C without requiring the groundcrew moving the bulky portable stairs to the A/C side exit doors.

Prior to the skyjacking in November 1971, there had not been any testing done in the United States regarding lowering the rear staircase of a Boeing 727 or DC-9 in flight, for the purpose of parachuting. However, parachuting from a Boeing 727's rear staircase in flight was done on multiple occasions in southeast Asia prior to this skyjacking. In 1971, this information was not known to the general public, nor known to commercial aviation pilots, nor to the FAA but was known by a small number of US military personnel, US government personnel and selected Boeing personnel. I believe "D B Cooper" was aware of this information, perhaps having participated in the activity and he selected the Boeing 727 as a result. Knowing the Boeing 727 is a safe A/C to "tailgate" from during flight, our "OP PLAN" can now move forward.

Identify / assess the targeted airline

By 1971, most major US airlines of the day were using the Boeing 727's for domestic routes. Absent having a specific reason to target a certain airline, the choice would be made based upon an airline's use of Boeing 727's for a desired location / flight route, date and time.

Identify the best day / time of day to execute the skyjacking / parachute jump

By design, we will plan to conduct the skyjacking during the week of Thanksgiving, with Christmas week as an alternate. Why? Because it is known within the active duty military that during both the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, a large percentage of active duty members travel home. The absence of a single member from any military unit during the skyjacking time-frame, will essentially go unnoticed and not draw any undue attention of their involvement.

Regarding the time of day, as a military parachutist I was trained to "jump" during hours of darkness. This allowed for a higher degree of landing safe from observation and remaining undetected while moving on the ground.

So, working on a reverse timetable, we will plan the skyjacking around a nighttime parachute jump. During the winter months of the holiday season, the sun sets early, so the skyjacking would best be planned for the afternoon of the day selected, as "D B Cooper" did. He controlled the situation.

Determine proper equipment, ordnance and uniform to be used

In keeping with the "KISS" principle, this will be quite easy. Regarding the "equipment" to be used, we will require the airline to provide, along with the ransom money, two main parachutes and two reserve parachutes, as "D B Cooper" did. Of course, there may have been the concern of "DB Cooper" that one or both of the main parachutes had been sabotaged to not open. (this concern will be further addressed in the section, "*Safe / covert parachute jump and withdrawal from the drop zone*") With regards to the "ordnance" to be used, the ordnance will be a (simulated?) explosive carried in a briefcase. The "uniform" will be that of a respectable business man, a coat

and tie combination with raincoat. Why? Remember “*whenever possible, control the situation*”? Since we are going to choose the time and location of exiting the aircraft, we will choose to do so near a highway, preferably outside a city limits. A respectable looking business man in a coat will be more likely to catch a ride as a hitchhiker, to a nearby town.

Determine W/X (weather) conditions

My military parachuting experiences included jumping during daylight hours, at night time, in cloudy / cold / rainy weather, on land, in water, over desert, over jungle and over pine forested areas. The only major concern weather wise is avoiding high winds. Should there be high winds during the week of Thanksgiving, we will select another region of the country or fall back to the alternate time frame of the Christmas holiday week. Once again, we will control the situation.

Identify the best drop zone

A/C approaches to most commercial inland airports will fly over unpopulated areas containing highways and isolated houses many miles from touchdown. We will follow “DB Cooper’s” lead by requiring the A/C to fly at 10,000 ft. msl (mean sea level). At this altitude, the rear staircase can remain lowered during flight and the A/C does not have to be pressurized, as is needed at higher altitudes. As long as the A/C lands at an inland commercial airport, we will plan on visually monitoring the approach to the airport and select the best drop zone, near a highway.

As “DB Cooper” did, we will also control this situation. He provided very specific written instructions to the flight crew, instructing them the A/C was to fly at 10,000 ft (msl), remain unpressurized, landing gear will be lowered and flaps set at 15 degrees during the entire flight. It is interesting to note that he also wanted the rear staircase lowered during the take-off from the Seattle airport. The flight crew was concerned about A/C safety in doing this. “DB Cooper” assured them it was a safe condition and would not affect the handling of the A/C during take-off. Later tests were conducted and proved “DB Cooper” being correct. This should be an obvious clue that he had specific knowledge of the flight characteristics of the Boeing 727 for such an operation. He knew more about this aspect of the Boeing 727 than did the aircrew, the airline and the FAA.

Once again, I strongly believe he obtained this knowledge via military experience, from the southeast Asia covert parachute jumps from the rear of a Boeing 727. Prior to takeoff from Seattle, “DB Cooper” did relent and allowed the staircase to be in the raised position during the take-off. However, within minutes after take-off, he lowered the staircase. Interestingly, he did have to ask the flight attendant where the staircase lowering switch was located. His knowledge of knowing the staircase was safe to parachute from but not knowing the exact location of the lowering switch, indicates to me he was most likely not a B-727 crew member but a parachutist on the covert parachute operations.

In our “OP PLAN”, we will do as I believe “DB Cooper” did regarding the timing of the parachute jump. When the A/C is on approach to the inland airport and about 5,000 ft. agl (above ground level), we will look for a highway and exit the A/C near one. During a night jump, blacktop roads are easy to pick out of the landscape, they look like black ribbons on the ground. One word of caution, streams and rivers also look like black ribbons on the ground at night.

The “OP PLAN” must avoid the A/C flying to a coastal commercial airport, e.g. San Francisco, Los Angeles. Otherwise, the approach to the airport may be over open water. We do not want to parachute over open water, could be deadly. So, if we see what looks like the largest blacktopped parking lot in the world below us, it’s probably open water, stay clear of this.

Determine the need for “false insertion(s)” prior to the actual parachute jump

“False Insertions” are to airborne operations as “misdirection” is to an illusionist / magician. In both cases, attention is diverted from what is actually happening to make an observer (investigator in this case) into falsely believing something else has happened.

In airborne-parachute operations, a “false insertion” could be as simple as the A/C carrying the paratroopers flying circuitous routes and frequent changing of altitude, rather than flying a route straight to / from the drop zone. This avoids telegraphing to the enemy exactly where the paratroopers were dropped at.

A good example of an airborne parachute “misdirection” occurred during the Normandy invasion by the Allies during WWII. In conjunction with the night time paratrooper drops, other allied aircraft flew throughout that area of France, dropping 2 foot tall paratrooper figures, complete with scaled down parachutes. At night, during descent, it was difficult from the ground to tell the difference between real and fake paratroopers. The German forces did quickly identify the use of these miniature paratroopers but this diversion played havoc with their intelligence. For the remainder of the night and into the next day, the Germans had a difficult time determining which reported sightings of paratrooper activity were actual paratroopers or miniature paratrooper figures. German records reflect one account of their ground forces getting into a fierce firefight with Allied paratroopers, which turned out to be the 2 foot tall “action” figures. Inasmuch as actual paratroopers did not land at those locations, the use of the 2 foot tall figures could be considered a “false insertion”, or a diversion.

In airborne-air assault (helicopter) operations, the helicopters ferrying the soldiers will often set down on open fields (landing zones) without anyone exiting the craft. Moments later the helicopters will lift off the landing zone to deliver the soldiers to another location. This “false insertion” often makes the enemy falsely believe troops have been delivered to the first location where the helicopters momentarily touched down.

As a diversion, we will include a modified “false insertion” into our “OP PLAN”. Again, we will apply the “KISS” principle. During the early part of the flight, we will climb down the lowered staircase (tailgate) and throw items off to “salt” the location below as being the area we parachuted into. This will create a diversion for law enforcement authorities and buy us time to leave the actual drop zone area. At a minimum, I would throw the briefcase containing the explosive off the staircase. I believe “D B Cooper” also threw overboard the training / dummy reserve parachute he was unintentionally provided as one of two reserve parachutes in his ransom demand instructions. After all, he is an experienced parachutist and quickly recognized the dummy reserve parachute and knew he was not going to use it. Contrary to popular belief, I do not believe he was an amateur and jumped with the “dummy” reserve.

There is another very important reason to climb down the lowered staircase early in the flight. Experience in the southeast Asia parachute jumps determined that the weight of the jumper forced the staircase to lower even more than under its own weight. This resulted in additional aerodynamic drag that could often be felt by the pilot, resulting in a momentary change in A/C pitch. In “DB Cooper’s” skyjacking, this would hopefully lead to the false assumption by the pilot (and investigators) that the skyjacker had just parachuted from the A/C. Indeed, records show the pilot felt a noticeable change in A/C pitch approximately 45 minutes into the flight. It is the result of this change of A/C pitch that was used by investigators to determine the skyjacker “probable” landing location in southern Washington state. This “probable” location is in a heavily forested area, where the search for “DB Cooper” has always been focused. I’m of the opinion “DB Cooper’s” use of the modified “false insertion” had proven quite successful and diverted law enforcement’s attention to search the wrong area for decades.

Based upon my experience as an FBI Agent and having handled \$200,000 in “buy” money, I would state that the bank bag containing the \$200,000 ransom money was larger and heavier than “DB Cooper” anticipated. He had requested the money be placed in a knapsack when delivered. To his chagrin, the ransom money was placed in a large canvas bank bag, not a knapsack. A knapsack, similar to a military rucksack, would have been fairly easy to secure to the parachute rigging. Consequently, he had to figure out a way to securely strap the money bag to his body. He cannibalized the one working reserve parachute and attempted to use the parachute pack to secure the money. This did not work, the pack was too small. He settled on securing the bank bag by using suspension lines he had cut from the reserve parachute. He wrapped the suspension lines around the bag a number of times. According to the flight attendant who witnessed this, he used a “lasso” style motion to wrap the lines around the bank bag. Once the bag was bundled, he used more suspension line to attach an anchor line from the bag to his parachute rigging. He would parachute from the A/C while holding the bank bag. Should he accidentally lose his grip on the bag during the jump, it would still be attached to his rigging and dangle a few feet below him.

Assess the response by law enforcement

Inasmuch as this was to have been the first time a skyjacker parachuted from the hijacked airline, "D B Cooper" did not have a precedent to draw from. I would have anticipated great dedication by law enforcement authorities. This is all the more reason for "salting" the area of the "false insertion", to divert attention away from the actual jump site. Consequently, I believe he tossed the briefcase and dummy reserve parachute out the staircase at that time. If I'm correct, they are still in the wilderness of southern Washington state. Yet another example of the "KISS" principle.

Safe / covert parachute jump and withdrawal from the drop zone

There was absolutely no rush for "DB Cooper" to parachute from the A/C during the flight. I'm placing emphasis on this because the A/C was not disabled or in peril of crashing. An experienced parachutist would not jump over an isolated, remote area, at night, in bad weather for any logical reason, absent an in-flight emergency pending an imminent crash. Keep in mind, there are not any passengers on board and the reduced flight crew (4 persons) are on the flight deck, with instruction not to come back into the passenger area beyond the first class curtain. Additionally, "D B Cooper" had knowledge the A/C was to land in Reno, Nevada for refueling prior to flying to Mexico City. Under these circumstances, our "OP PLAN" will call for us to visually monitor the A/C altitude, which will remain fairly static at 10,000 ft. (msl) until the A/C is on approach to the airport in Reno. It will be during the approach phase of the flight we will pick and choose, when and where we will parachute from the A/C. Since we have already created a diversion by faking a parachute jump over Washington state, there is no immediate need to jump prior to the approach phase of the flight.

Considering "DB Cooper's" demonstrated knowledge of the flight characteristics of the Boeing 727, I am of the opinion he also knew how it would shoot the approach to the airport in Reno. Specifically, flying slow with flaps set at 15 degrees, the A/C will handle like a wallowing pig. The pilot will not be able to "yank and bank" during the approach, otherwise he will risk stalling the A/C. The approach will be done with as few turns as possible and the turns will be very conservative. This will be advantageous to parachuting from the A/C during the final 5-15 miles of the approach to the Reno airport.

As planned, anytime after decent starts but at least 5-15 miles from the airport, we will exit the A/C once it is over a highway. Our "OP PLAN" will call for a parachute exit between 4,000 - 5,000 feet above ground level. The exit from the staircase will be done one of two ways: 1.) a very simple "hop and pop", pulling the ripcord within a few seconds of stepping off the staircase, or; 2.) standing at the bottom of the staircase facing forward. The staircase will act as a wind deflector, allowing us to look for highways below. Once over a highway, we will give ourselves the "green light" to jump. We merely pull the parachute ripcord, stand there with a moment to bear hug the money strapped to our rigging before the deploying parachute catches the slipstream and safely pulls us off the staircase.

“DB Cooper’s” choice in using the military type parachute over the civilian / sport parachute, has been second guessed and criticized over the years as being quite amateurish. On the contrary, if I were given the choice of the two in the scenario provided, I would also opt for the military parachute because; 1) I was more familiar / comfortable with using it, and 2) it was a slightly safer parachute for either exit as described.

My option for the type of exit from the A/C would be to use #2, which I believe “DB Cooper” did. This type of exit from the A/C would be the most simple (“KISS” principle) and safest. Doing so adds an extra safeguard to the money bag, keeping it from being ripped from his body by windblast and opening shock of the parachute. Also, if the main parachute had been sabotaged and didn’t deploy, “DB Cooper” would be left standing on the staircase and would simply walk back up the stairs and into the A/C. I do not believe the accepted notion that “DB Cooper” did a dramatic jump and freefall, from the A/C at 10,000 ft.

“D B Cooper” dealt with rain clouds and broken cloud cover during the flight over Washington state, a fairly safe situation for both the “hop and pop” or the deployed parachute extraction. More importantly was weather at the Reno airport at approximately 11:00 pm that night, when the A/C landed. The weather was beautiful for a night parachute jump. The temperature was 30 degrees (Fahrenheit), the skies were clear, the moon had 41% illumination and ground winds were less than 6 mph.

This begs the question, “What about the pilot, wouldn’t he feel the pitch of the plane changing momentarily for a second time when the skyjacker actually jumps during approach to the airport?” A very fair question indeed. If we keep in mind that the jump occurs on approach to the airport, with the staircase down, wheels down and flaps down, the pilot will be making control surface inputs and jockeying the throttles. These actions may very likely mask any momentary, slight pitch of the A/C. Besides, the pilot “may” believe the skyjacker had already exited the A/C some time earlier, during the “false insertion” three states away. Interestingly, records reveal the aircrew were not convinced he had parachuted prior to landing in Reno, Nevada. Afterall, his demand was to be flown to Mexico City, Reno was merely a refueling stop. So, the concern of the pilot detecting the A/C change in pitch during the actual exit, is a moot one.

Our “OP PLAN” calls for us to be moving within minutes of landing, towards the highway we used as our “green light” to jump. Depending on wind drift and terrain, we could be minutes or hours from the highway. If our earlier “false insertion” was convincing, law enforcement authorities will be searching an area three states away, allowing us time to safely reach the highway.

Once at the highway, we stash the ransom money and parachute, and walk onto the highway wearing our businessman attire. As a hitchhiker, we explain to the kind driver giving us a ride that we are on a business trip. Our company car broke down on a side road and we have walked for hours, thus explaining why our clothes are dirty. We ask to be dropped off at the first hotel as we enter town, most likely in Reno, Nevada. As part of the conversation, we can tell the

driver we will call for a tow truck in the morning. This scenario should not arouse any suspicion in a driver merely picking up a stranded motorist.

In the morning, we check out of the hotel and rent a car. We drive to the location the ransom money and parachute have been stashed, collect both and proceed home to visit family for Thanksgiving. We watch the nightly news and marvel at how brazen of an act the skyjacking was and wonder out loud who could have done it.

Return to base

In our "OP PLAN", after Thanksgiving we bid good-bye to our family and travel to our duty station overseas. We have already shipped the ransom money to our overseas duty assignment prior to leaving CONUS (Continental United States). In turn, we fly commercially to the foreign country we are stationed in. For the remainder of our overseas deployment, we know we can use the money off base with very little chance of the US government being able to track the bills.

Follow-up

At some point, perhaps within two to three years, I believe "D B Cooper" had a permanent change of station (PCS), or possibly retired, in either case returned to CONUS. With one exception, I do not believe he used any of the bills from the ransom while stateside.

For reasons I'll go into momentarily, I believe he "toyed" with law enforcement and intentionally "salted" the riverbed where the three bundles of money were recovered nine years later. Having served in the military, I know how "frugal" most active duty members are with money. I'll speculate the missing \$200 from one of the bundles was merely "peeled" away by "D B Cooper" and used for one night's lodging, meals and gas for his vehicle to travel to the area where he planted the money. Conversely, he may have intentionally circulated this \$200 in marked bills in the area where the three bundles were found in order to draw attention to the area. If this is correct, I believe the time frame of the burial in the sandy riverbed of the recovered \$5,800 can be fairly easily determined in two ways:

- 1.) How much time would be needed to weather the recovered bills to be in the condition they were found.
- 2.) How long can rubber bands survive in the sandy riverbed environment before breaking. Surprisingly, all three bundles of cash still had intact rubber bands.

Only a handful of years ago, tests were conducted on rubber bands to determine how long they would last in a similar environment as those wrapped around the recovered bills. The results indicated the rubber bands would last approximately one year. This means that the \$5,800 in bills recovered from the river bed during February 1980, almost eight and a half years after the hijacking, were most likely there since early 1979, perhaps slightly earlier or later.

I believe "DB Cooper" planted the money there as a way to taunt law enforcement and to see his crime in the news once again. What would spark his interest in doing so? Simple, in November 1978, the emergency exit placard from the staircase of the Boeing 727 was found by a hunter in southern Washington state, where the diversion parachute jump was conducted. The news would have served as a nice lead in for a portion of the ransom money later being discovered, which would add more questions to the investigation. "Cooper" likely waited a few months for a break in the winter weather before planting the money in the riverbed. This would be in early 1979, with the anticipation of it being discovered during the spring or summer of 1979, since the riverbed was located in a commonly used area by fishermen and picnickers.

Another popular belief is that "DB Cooper" was not an American but a foreigner, most likely a Canadian. This is based on his ransom note demanding \$200,000 in "*negotiable American currency*". With all due respect, I believe to the contrary and will add that the wording further demonstrates that "DB Cooper" was in the US military. During the post-WWII "Cold War", the United States had military bases all over the world. Our military global footprint was huge during that era. Some of the countries where our military bases were located, did not allow the use of US (American) currency within the host country. Most countries though, did allow the use of American currency in the local markets. As such, it was quite common for military members to ask local merchants the cost of an item in American currency, or "*negotiable American currency*". "DB Cooper's" use of this phrase indicates to me he was still on active duty and stationed at an overseas duty assignment.

Seeking your help

The entire purpose of this article is to seek the assistance of you, the reader. If you served in the US military, anywhere in the world during the Vietnam war, "DB Cooper" may have served in your unit with you. During veteran functions, openly discuss this with fellow veterans. The following items might paint a picture of who "DB Cooper" is:

- a white male, 5' 10" to 6' 00" tall
- dark hair
- brown eyes
- weight 170 - 180 lbs
- in his 40's during 1971
- no discernable accent, as if from the US midwest
- parachuting experience, most likely military "jump" experience
- well versed on the Boeing 727 as an airborne delivery platform
- stationed OCONUS (Outside Continental US) during early 1970's
- traveled to CONUS for Thanksgiving holidays, 1971
- possibly experienced financial problems that disappeared after Thanksgiving 1971; upon return to unit he may have explained receiving an inheritance, winning a jackpot, etc.

- possibly previously stationed at Ft. Lewis (US Army), or at McChord Air Force Base (US Air Force), both in the Seattle area. During the plane's approach to Seattle airport, "DB Cooper" correctly identified to a flight attendant, McChord AFB from the air and knew it was a 20 minute drive to the Seattle / Tacoma airport. He was familiar with the area.

"DB Cooper" would now be approximately 90 years of age, if he is still living. Consider the possibility that he may have adult children, nieces and/or nephews who may be able to identify him. Perhaps he may have kept some of the ransom money as a souvenir, the serial numbers are available for confirmation. In short, there may still be an evidence trail leading to his identification. If he has passed, family members may now be more open to the idea of discussing his caper.

This investigation was administratively closed by the FBI during July 2016. If you have any information that may assist in identifying "DB Cooper", contact your local office of the FBI.

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Vietnam Veterans of America

Life Member

The American Legion

Life Member

82nd Airborne Association

Life Member

Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI

Annual Member