

D. B. Cooper:
An Incomplete History

David C. Velasco

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This is a work in progress. As the FBI releases files, or *credible evidence* comes to light, information may change or updated to reflect the new data.

This is not the story of a hijacker. It is the story of a hijacking. There is no intent to condemn or praise, to display timidity or bravado. It is a tale of outward calm masking quiet resolve mingled with silent fear. It is the account of a night and days thereafter forever burned into the memory of those living it. Of those drawn into an event not of their choosing, but whose mind's eye will forever see until they too belong to the ages.

This is their story...

How can I convey the texture of this gone time so that you and I, reader, will be able to grasp, remember, believe that astonishing things actually happened, and made sense to the many who made them happen and were overtaken by them?

Todd Giltin *The Sixtes: Years of Hope, Days of Rage.*

Лучше ударить по правде, чем поцеловать ложью.

It is better to be slapped with the truth than kissed with a lie.

Russian proverb

AN AIRPORT

The Wednesday before Thanksgiving 1971 was another busy travel day. Portland International airport bustled with those traveling in anticipation of another holiday, like many before and more to come. Another gathering with friends and family, remembered long after fading into the past. The partly cloudy, overcast afternoon sky produced a light rain. It fell on and off since sunrise. A snow covered Mount Hood loomed in the distance. Today this vista goes unseen. A parking garage obscures such a view from the front of the terminal. Within Portland International, guests marveled at the mural created by Louis Bunce hanging near the ticketing area. Relocated over the years, the beautiful oil painting put up in 1958 remains there to this day. Red and yellow hues from various glowing signage reflected off the polished floors. The staccato clicking of footsteps from passengers with dress shoes or heels reverberated throughout. This was long before carpet graced the terminal.* Later on, the care of tapestry lead to an odd decision: banning the sale of gum within the terminal. The prohibition stood until 2000. That one could bring gum in —concealed on their person or well chewed within their mouth— was lost on the designers of the ban.¹ Now defunct Airlines such as Eastern, Western and Pan Am graced the ticket counter area. The Zodiac Room overlooked parts of the runway and terminal, allowing those sitting for a meal a warm, dry, comfortable view of the operations outside. This was no chain restaurant. A uniformed waitress complete with small white hat took your order and served the meal.

* The iconic teal carpet first laid in 1987 and replaced in 2015 attracted a cult like following on social media. So much so that on the day prior to its removal, hundreds of selfies were taken and posted. Sheila V. Kumar, "Only in Portland? Old airport carpet gains cult hero status," USA Today, April 04, 2015, accessed December 28, 2016, www.usatoday.com/story/todayinthesky/2015/04/04/fervor-over-portland-oregon-airport-carpet-spurs-new-life/25287489/.

For many, the innocuous beginning was no harbinger of events to come. Instead, a handful became unwitting characters in the only unsolved hijacking in US history. Copycats followed the “bailout bandit” but the drama of November 24, 1971 would draw in, and consume, a host of others long after the sun rose the next morning.² Their experience in a real twilight zone did not end with a cautionary, deadpan homily delivered by Rod Sterling. The name D. B. Cooper would haunt them, the FBI and a nation long after.*

Airports like Portland International (PDX— its airport code) are a far cry from those decades later. The same holds true for countless other dotting the globe as the upheaval of the Sixties reached its peak. Gone now are the opulent waiting and dining areas, enthralling visitors to JFK, LAX, Heathrow (London), grace by those dressed as if off to church, job interview or photo shoot. Nothing but the latest fashions and Sunday best would do for traveling. Nor were people able to reach out at will to friends, family, co-workers or the world via a smart phone, computer tablet or lap top. For this, banks of pay phones lined a nearby wall or circled a kiosk. Newsstands stacked a plethora of newspapers announcing the goings on upon the Earth. This day's edition of the Oregon Statesman carried depressing stories about budget cuts at state universities and the ongoing India–Pakistan war. The paper cost ten–cents. So too the Seattle Times. For an extra nickel a copy of the New York Times. Charging station or flat screen televisions within earshot did not exist. And no ATMs or electronic payment options for the news, food, coffee or ticket. With the exception of those few carrying a Diner's Club, Carte Blanche card or the few bank issued credit cards in existence, cash was still king.

Above the bustling din, no soft voice made the occasional announcement reminding everyone in a polite mechanical voice of the airport's no smoking policy and the standard

* The *Twilight Zone* was a popular TV show airing from 1959–64. Host and the late Rod Sterling ended each episode with a few words pointing out the moral tale learned, or not, by the unsuspecting participants. Although

security reminder about unattended bags or unknown persons and packages. Not one passenger endured the modern, mandatory security check where all pleasantries and privacy ended, picked up again once through the defensive maze: The waiting. The summons by the security agent. Confirmation of identity versus the name on the ticket. The doffing of most clothing. Placing every loose item into shallow containers upon a conveyor belt more appropriate in a factory production line than an airport. All then x-rayed and or physical combed. Any hint of ambiguity or doubt bringing further inspection. Despite a string of hijackings around the world and within the States, no such security existed. The events of this day set into motion the stringent, if not indignant pre-flight measures endured today, culminating after the events of 9/11.

University of Oregon student William “Bill” Mitchell walked the airport that day. One of a many unaware of their impending, unplanned journey, and one of a few whose story would not end that night. Wearing a large parka, the twenty-something sophomore traveled from Eugene courtesy of a friend, determined to fly home for the holiday. Bill called his parents before boarding. He told them of his impending arrival and since he had all his luggage with him, once in Seattle “just meet me in the no parking zone at the terminal.” It would only be a thirty some odd minute flight anyhow. Attorney Larry Finegold —equally bent on spending the holiday with family— spent the last few weeks in Vancouver, Washington. As attorney general to the State of Washington, he assisted the US Attorney’s office in a corruption trial currently underway there. Barbara and Richard Simmons were on their way home too. He a Presbyterian minister headed Job Therapy, a prison rehabilitation program in Seattle. His wife was active in the endeavor as well. Part owner and VP of a Seattle based paint company, Robert Gregory also awaited his flight, if not a trip unknowingly into history.³

remade several times, the original stands out.

Northwest Orient (NWO) employee Dennis Lysne stood behind the ticketing counter. A line of customers stretched before him.* Around 2 p.m., a number of flights were scheduled to depart within the hour: one to Minneapolis–St. Paul and another to Spokane at 2:25, Washington–Dulles 2:35, Seattle–Tacoma 2:45 to name a few.⁴ Just the middle of another long day. One unassuming man stepped up after waiting his turn. Dennis took no particular note of the customer, save his dark overcoat. He was just one of many that day and one of many more to come. In a soft voice, the would–be passenger asked if he could get on the flight to Seattle. Dennis went about checking. More than enough room. Northwest Orient Flight 305 to Seattle was a 727. This particular plane was a Boeing 727–100 model aircraft (specifically, Boeing 727–51) and could seat around 100 passengers in its first class and coach areas.⁵ Only thirty–five people bought tickets for the thirty–minute flight. The dark–clad man made thirty–six.[†] Dennis asked if he wanted one–way coach. “Yes,” came the reply. Next, he prepared his boarding pass, asking for a name to write on the coupon. “Cooper. Dan Cooper,” the man said. During the uneventful exchange, “Cooper” appeared neither nervous nor anxious.⁶

Eighteen dollars, fifty–two cents (\$18.52) plus one–dollar, forty–eight cents (\$1.48) tax brought the price Dennis collected to a nice round twenty dollars.⁷ Cooper paid in cash. Such a bargain price was a sign of the times. Prior to 1978, the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) heavily regulated domestic airlines. This federal agency controlled routes, number of flights and number of seats between each destination and of course, the price. Oil at this time sold at around three–

* There has been confusion over the years as to who “sold” the ticket to Cooper. Researching this, Hal Williams came up at times. Dennis himself and FBI records show him as ticket agent did so. Williams was the NWO gate agent. In addition, there is credible evidence to show Cooper did not write his own name on the boarding pass. As was the procedure at that time, Lysne did this.

[†]Thirty–six names (minus Dan Cooper’s) appear on the passenger list submitted to the FBI by Northwest Orient (WSHS–Harrison Papers). A “Mr. McPhearson” in addition to “Mr. S. McPhearson (Son)” and “Mr. Scott McPhearson” all appear. Un–redacted FBI documents provided to and reproduced by Geoffrey Gray list thirty names minus Robert Gregory, Nancy House, George Labissoniere, William Mitchell and Cord H. Z. Spreckel. There

dollars (\$3.00) a barrel. Gas ran about thirty–cents a gallon.* These were the days before the OPEC oil embargoes and hyperinflation ravaged the US economy. Wages much less as well. Given current economics —and politics from both sides of the spectrum— such low prices are vestiges of a bygone age. They will never return.⁸

Those leaving for Seattle aboard Flight 305 made their way to Concourse L, one of two on the south side of the terminal. None passed through a Department of Homeland security checkpoint. That 21st Century hodgepodge of bureaucratic agencies smelted into one would not exist for another thirty years. No body scanners or explosive detection devices stood in their path. No disrobing to the point of discomfort waylaid them. Among the several gates used by Northwest, Gate 52 held a small group milling about nearby. Hal Williams stood ready to check passengers onto Flight 305 scheduled to leave at 2:45 pm. He noted how some of those waiting grouched or joked about the rain falling outside. Due to construction, the Portland passengers left this gate and ventured onto the tarmac to board the plane, enduring whatever elements the ever–changing Northwest weather presented at any given moment. One passenger stood out, not because of his interaction or comments about getting wet, but his aloofness. “No, I didn’t suspect anything bad while observing him,” Hal recalled years later. “He looked like a sharp looking businessman to me. But I noticed him quite a bit.” He did not mix with the others, but stood alone, looking out the window. The odd man wore a black raincoat matching his dark, wavy hair, a sharp contrast Hal noted in an era of “polyesters and plaids.”⁹

Although things appeared simpler, these were not simple times. Around 200,000 U.S. troops remained in Vietnam. In the summer, a military court found Lieutenant William Calley guilty of murdering twenty–two civilians back in 1968 in the village of My Lai. The *New York*

in only a Scott and William “Mac Pherson” appear, bringing the total (minus Dan Cooper) to thirty–five. This is the number used here.

Times published the first of many articles from a secret Defense Department report entitled *Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force*. It detailed the decision-making history of our descent into that war by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. These later bore the name *Pentagon Papers*. All this and the death of six college students and both Kent and Jackson State universities in 1970 lay fresh in the American conscience.¹⁰ Closer to Portland, the Seattle based aerospace giant Boeing laid off 35,000 workers in 1970. 15,000 more in 1971. Seven thousand got the pink slip on March 24th alone. The employment massacres led to sardonic humor among the Boeing employees: An optimist takes his lunch; a pessimist leaves his car motor running in the parking lot.¹¹ Indeed, much of the optimism, hope and sense of accomplishment Americans once held were gone. The shadow of victorious grandeur from the Second World War and post-war boom drowned in the agony of another cast by Vietnam and a diminished manufacturing job base. Worse was yet to come. Wage and price controls did nothing to abate rising inflation. In a few months, amid the 1972 Presidential campaign Nixon was certain to win, five men found themselves arrested breaking into the Democratic headquarters within the Watergate complex in Washington DC. In a few years, Americans watched as the last of our countrymen and hundreds of Vietnamese made an inglorious exit from the roof of the US Embassy in Saigon. More salt poured into our deep, national wounds.

Upon the tarmac, Flight 305 awaited passengers for its final leg of the day. Having left Washington Dulles around 8 a.m. Eastern Time that morning, the crew of six crossed the length of the United States. By 2 p.m. Pacific Time, stops at Northwest's hub in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Great Falls and Missoula, Montana, Spokane were all behind them. Only the jaunt to Seattle remained.¹² The passengers already aboard awaited the final human cargo to enplane. By coincidence, another "Cooper" sat within. Michael Cooper boarded in Missoula, Montana. The

* In approximate, constant 2015–2016 US Dollars: plane ticket—\$119.00, oil \$21.00 and gas \$1.70.

high school social studies teacher from there headed to his parents in Sequim, Washington. The self-described “ordinary schoolteacher” sat with the others, unaware as everyone else of the extraordinary events about to unfold.¹³

Those leaving Gate 51 trudged towards the 727. Its distinct, large red t-shaped tail fin loomed over the rear stairs leading into the aircraft. Emblazoned in large, simple, white lettering beneath was the word NORTHWEST. Beneath this sat the crafts innocuous and soon infamous FAA registration number: N467US.* One of three Pratt & Whitney engines hovered above the unique passenger entrance, the only aircraft possessing such an access and egress point: a narrow stairs angled from the rear of the plane onto the ground.¹⁴ A cold wind swept across the tarmac with temperatures hovering in the 40s.

Atop the stairs stood Florence “Flo” Schaffner. The young twenty-something stewardess from Arkansas went about her job, duly smiling, greeting each passenger as they arrived, checking their boarding pass. A brunette, pixie style wig covers her long, straight black hair.¹⁵ By all accounts, seat numbers were not assigned. Each passenger strode down the narrow path between the powder blue, white lined seats. Adorned with a simple white cloth over the headrest, passengers choose their own. Larry Finegold walked past them towards the front of the aircraft taking a seat just behind the first class area. The Simons did the same on the other side of the craft a bit farther back. Billy Mitchell took a seat on the very last row of the plane, left side. With homework to do, he spread himself and large coat across the three seats for the short flight. Flo thought nothing of Dan Cooper as he came on. He aroused neither suspicion nor attention. Robert Gregory, running late, boarded last. He sat just in front of Mitchell.¹⁶

* This particular aircraft remained in service with various airlines under different registration numbers for the next two decades, scrapped only in 1996. Bryan R Swopes “Boeing 727-51 Archives.” *This Day in Aviation*, 24 Nov. 2016, www.thisdayinaviation.com/tag/boeing-727-51/.

Around two–thirty, with the aft stairway secured, Flo began her other pre–flight duties. Serving passengers refreshments before takeoff was the norm in those days, and as the plane sat upon the tarmac, she went about doing this. Her first query was to an unassuming man seated in the last row, right side, row 18. He sat alone in the middle of the three seats.¹⁷ “Care for anything to drink?” she asked. Cooper looked up and gently spoke. “I’d like a bourbon and seven–up.”¹⁸

As a sign of the bygone times, the man already had a cigarette lit. In the seat next to the window sat an equally unassuming briefcase. Throughout the events unfolding one after the other that night, his mundane appearance stuck out, searing itself into the minds of the few interacting with him: dark wraparound sunglasses, suit, shoes and thin tie held to his chest by a mother of pearl clip, all contrasting against his white shirt and medium, olive complexion below dark hair. The forty–something man bore no beard, mustache, scars, tattoos, jewelry or perceptible accent. His low voice, with few exceptions, held no hint of anger, strength or mystery. A man who before tonight cast no shadow, left no trace, easily passing through history without so much as a footnote denoting his existence. The anonymity would change shortly.*

Forward, Tina Mucklow performed similar duties for the passenger in her section. She too donned the same red, Christian Dior designed outfit each of the three flight attendants wore. This included the matching, duck–billed hat.¹⁹ It could be worse, spared as they were the more impractical, overtly sexualized uniforms pioneered around the time. Southwest Airlines introduced their dull gold and mat red attire complete with hot pants and go–go boots the same year. Pacific Southwest Airlines (PSA) did the same minus the high–heeled footwear.[†]

* Despite FBI statements from others on board relaying differences in clothing and hairstyle, the author bases this description primarily upon those provided by Florence Schaffner and Tina Mucklow.

† For a good look at the various uniforms worn around the time, Cliff Muskiet’s www.uniformfreak.com is an excellent source. The period Southwest Airlines uniforms (among others) come from www.racked.com *The Best Flight Attendant Uniforms In American History*.

By this time, she had only been at this job a few years. Like many in her profession, she was in her early twenties, enduring and maintaining the near uber-human standard for a stewardess at the time: “Be no younger than 20 and no older than 27; to be no shorter than five feet two inches or taller than five feet nine inches; to have a slender, “well-proportioned” figure (as a United recruiter once explained, “We are not looking for the Jayne Mansfield type”); to not, in any case, weigh more than 140 pounds; to agree to retire at the age of 32; to not currently be married (though it was permissible to be widowed or divorced); to not have children; and to absolutely, positively not be pregnant. In short, you needed to be both desirable and, at least in theory, available.”²⁰ Despite these standards, Tina had that woman-next-door look. Her long, light brown hair dangled behind her head in a ponytail. A simple ribbon kept it off her oval face and trim shoulders.*

Back aft, Flo brought Cooper his drink. He produced a \$20 bill. It was still early and, used to such instances, she asked if he had anything smaller. In a remorseful voice, he answered no, and apologized. Flo took it in stride. With no change on her, he would have to wait until she finished serving the rest of her coach section.* Not riled, Cooper said that would be all right.

Forward the flight crew moved the aircraft away from the terminal. Like Alice, Tina and Flo, the three men in the cockpit went about their tasks, going over the various dutiful checklists. This ensured their craft completed their continental journey just as safely as it began.

Captain William Scott, “Scotty” to those who knew him, sat in command. Behind the fifty-one year old pilot’s stern jaw, square face, thin smile and silent demeanor was a man who no doubt saw more than he spoke of. Like many flying for the various airlines of the day, Scotty got his start in World War 2, serving in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater. Many like

* Such marital and personal standards for flight attendants were not long for the industry. By the mid-1970’s, court rulings, public and union pressures ended the blatantly sexist job requirements.

himself flew the C-46s and more numerous C-47s in the India China Division of the gigantic, global Air Transportation Command (ATC). From numerous airbases lining the upper Brahmaputra River in Assam, India, personnel in this forgotten theater of war ferried tones of supplies to our Chinese allies fighting the Imperial Japanese Army.[†] Not as glamorous as the menacing, shark tooth painted P-40 Warhawk of the Flying Tigers or the P-51 Mustang and P-38 Lightning single seat fighters, but no less dangerous. “The Hump” flyers (as the southern part of the Himalayas separating India/Burma from China proper was called) faced two adversaries. “The main enemies were the Japanese,” radio operator Douglas F. Devaux said, “but an equal and constant secondary enemy was the weather.”²¹ Marauding Japanese Zeros flying the same skies, ready to shoot down anything painted green and bearing a large, white star was one thing; the weather another. Another veteran flying the identical routes as Scott, Lt. John W. Russell, put it bluntly: “Their daily flights across the highest mountains in the world in the worst weather in the world have been well documented. Their losses in planes and air crews exceeded those lost in Europe (850 aircrews).”²² Compared to that, the PDX to Seattle-Tacoma (airport code SEA) flight was a boring “milk run.”²³

William Rataczak was First Officer for the flight. Bill is a tall, lean man with sideburns reaching the bottom of his ears. The son of a NWA crew chief, his career with the airlines began not in a plane, but a kitchen: “A tough job” washing dishes part time for Northwest’s food service. He went up from there. Although other opportunities awaited him at the airlines, he wanted to fly.²⁴ His activities were not limited to piloting. A year earlier, he and many other

* Contemporary FBI documents refer to it as “tourist” section.

[†] For an exceptional web site about the CBI Theater see www.cbi-theater.com *Remembering the Forgotten Theater of World War II* and “Dedicated to the men and women of the CBI Theater.” The color photographs by William Vandivert are very poignant, giving us an idea of what Captain Scott and men like him saw flying over the dangerous routes. Equally moving is the “Walkout Diary” kept by Sgt Nicolas M. Sanchez, detailing his 17 day journey to safety after bailing out of the aircraft he served on.

pilots nearly went on strike in support of one by NWA ground crews begun in July. A court order the day before they planned joining and not cross the existing picket lines stopped the threatening shutdown of the airlines.* As local vice chairman of the Airlines Pilots Association (ALPA) Bill made clear it was the union's objective to disobey such a ruling.²⁵ Being in such a spotlight, however small, was a harbinger of things to come.

Flight engineer and Second Officer Harold Anderson hovered over the two-part instrument panel sat behind Rataczak and Scott.† Tall and stocky, he sat within arm's reach of both within the cramped cockpit. A myriad of knobs, buttons, switches and round, analog gages loomed over him. Imbedded within the aft wall to his right lay more. In the days before significant automation, his job was just as manually oriented as those flying the jet, ensuring all three engines, their fuel, associated electric, hydraulic and pneumatic systems—as well as those throughout the rest of the craft—functioned in unison. Added to this: keeping the lights on, the fuel flowing and the heat blowing.²⁶

Flight 305 taxied towards its departure runway as Tina, Flo and the first class attendant Alice Hancock finished doling out the drink orders.‡ Tina returned to Cooper with the proper change. Thanking her, she then set about giving the perfunctory pre-flight safety demonstration. Alice's voice rings through the cabin. She is a young, petite woman with dark hair done up in a

* The then Brotherhood of Railway, Airline and Steamship Clerks (BRAC)—now merged with the Transportation Communications International Union—initiated the strike representing the NWA various ground employees. Arbitration averted a shutdown. For background see *Northwest Airlines, Inc., Appellant, v. the Air Line Pilots Association, International, Appellee*, 442 F.2d 246 (US Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit December 3, 1970) and Doreen Clark's "A tribute to the Pilots of Northwest Airlines." *Air Line Pilot Magazine*, January 2009, 13–14. www.alpa.org/portals/alpa/deptpages/communications/.../Jan2009_NWATribute.pdf.

† Despite numerous efforts by the author and those more intimate with the case, virtually nothing solid is known about Harold Anderson before or after the events of November 1971, save he went on to become a Northwest Captain.

‡ Unless otherwise stated, the events involving the flight crew and attendants come from their FBI statements. Overall, they concur on all major points. In some cases, there are inconsistencies in the exact sequence of events

bob.²⁷ Then, as now, the flight attendants went through the motions of donning and doffing the oxygen mask and pointing at the various exists. Unlike today, there were no terse, but polite pronouncements about turning off electronic equipment and cell phones, or placing the later into airplane mode. The concept of “airplane mode” was as alien then as carrying a mini computer on one’s person.

The takeoff announcement meant one final check of all passengers in her section, and Flo went about the task. There were no overhead bins on this craft, just a deep shelf running above the seats. Spared having to ensure each door was closed, like those on modern craft, she passed by each row, taking in the dry cabin air tinged with the smell of old and new cigarette smoke. Satisfied all belts were fastened properly, she took her seat, or more accurately, half the seat. Tina would join her shortly and occupy the other half. The fold down seat embedded within the rear door of the cabin was lowered only for takeoff and landing for the exclusive use of flight attendants. As the craft heaved and swayed, taxiing down the tarmac, a full view of the cabin area stretched before her. It was then the unassuming man in row 18, peeked from round the aisle seat. He reached back, small envelope in hand.

Flo took it, but left it unopened. Having notes slipped to her by male passengers was routine, adding to the more overt request from them. A routine job hazard by some standards, they contained phone numbers, or like those made without shame to the attendant’s face, contained requests ranging from the innocent to the bizarre.* Awaiting Tina to come aft, Flo kept her peace. However, the man turned back several times, never uttering a single word.²⁸ She got the hints. He wanted her to open it. Whether she did so with any hint of enthusiasm is pointless.

given by each individual. Where this occurs, the initial FBI statements are used. They are the first documentation of the incident, still fresh in their albeit shocked minds.

* Read Trudy Baker and Rachel Jones, *Coffee, Tea or Me: The Uninhibited Memoirs of Two Airline Stewardesses* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1968), to get an idea of what flight attendants endure— then as now.

Reading the note changed everything. The first word “Miss” was printed. The rest sprang out in neat, legible handwriting: “I have a bomb. I would like you to sit by me.”*

She read the note written on plain white unlined paper again. Looking up and directly at Cooper, Flo asked if he was kidding. His voice, serious but calm, overcame the whine of the engines: “No Miss, this is for real.”

Arriving aft ready to strap in for takeoff, Tina saw Flo stand. The expression upon her face stuck out. Oddly, she stepped forward and sat in the aisle seat, next to the only passenger in that row on that side. Flo’s lips seemed to move, grasping to form coherent words, but only “Tina” came across clear. Between Flo getting up and sitting next to Cooper, Tina acquired and read the same note.† A moment later, she stepped towards the interphone upon the bulkhead, between the portside lavatory and the rear door.

Now seated next to Cooper, Flo once again stared at him. To be sure, she asked again if he was kidding. “No Miss,” was his unruffled, repeated answer. She then watched as he took up the plain briefcase from the window seat. Placing it upon his lap, he opened the lid. Flo looked on as he lifted it far enough to reveal the contents. Therein sat a number of red sticks, each somewhere between six to eight inches long, bundled together as though taped. Her mind fumbling through the event, she saw no writing on the sticks. Regardless, her assumption was it was dynamite. A wire leading from this collection shot through Cooper’s right hand. He held the bare end close to another. Amid the array sat a battery. Not a small one, perhaps six inches long and two wide. As to the exact type, she paid no mind, transfixed as she was on the other,

* Mucklow, reading the note moments later, stated it said: “Miss, I am hijacking this plane. I have a bomb. Sit next to me.”

† There is a difference between the statements made by Schaffner and Mucklow on how the note was passed. Mucklow states Schaffner dropped it and she picked it up. Schaffner claims she handed it to Mucklow. Either way, Mucklow got and read the note.

apparently real, deadly content. The wires to and from the sticks and terminals of the battery seemed to form a circuit. That was enough for her.*

“What should I do,” she asked. Cooper began: “Take this down...”

* Save for some minor details, Schaffner and Mucklow’s description of the contents do not differ much. Combinations of their descriptions are used here to illustrate the contents.

A FLIGHT

Flight 305 took off just before 3 pm, its three engines boosting the fifty ton aircraft towards infamy. Through the patchy clouds and fading light, passengers with a window seat looked over the ground below. To the north, the wide Columbia River separating Washington from Oregon stretched into the distance. South, the various neighborhoods of Portland covered the land at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette rivers. Had poor weather and continued rain not prevented it, those on the starboard side would have seen Mt. St. Helens in the distance as Flight 305 headed north, then at a snow capped height of 9,600 feet. Today's flyers see the decapitated summit of 8,300.¹

These vistas went unnoticed by those otherwise occupied.* Forward, the flight crew took the aircraft to their cursing altitude flight path. Via ARINC, the crew radioed the home base of Northwest Orient in Minneapolis their departure and estimated time of arrival in Seattle: 3:36 pm.[†] At the rear intercom, Tina lifted up the dark colored handset. Using the button designated for summoning the cockpit, she pushed out a sequence of chimes. In the cockpit, the flight crew listened to the series of bells spring from their intercom. The prearranged signal designated before the flight overcame the noise on the flight deck. There was trouble. Upon answering, Tina's voice shot through: "We're being hijacked. He's got a bomb and this is no joke." Done with her terse warning, she hung up and stepped back towards row 18.

* Again, the events involving the flight crew and attendants come from their FBI statements. Overall, they concur on all major points. In some cases, there are inconsistencies in the exact sequence of events given by each individual.

[†] Unless otherwise noted conversation between Flight 305, NWO flight ops at Minn-St Paul, Seattle Approach and Seattle-Tacoma Airport Tower comes from the transcripts provided to Washington State Historical Society from the estate of the late George E. Harrison. ARINC is an acronym for Aeronautical Radio, Incorporated, an air to ground radiotelephone, which is different from Air Traffic Control communications. In addition, the transcripts (as released) do not specify which of the crew did the talking at any given time.

Flo fished out a pen from her purse. She dutifully wrote down his words on the back of the very envelope Cooper handed her.² He spelled out the demands: “I want \$200,000 by 5:00 p.m. in cash. Put it in a knapsack. I want two back parachutes and two front parachutes. When we land, I want a fuel truck ready to refuel. No funny stuff, or I’ll do the job.”^{*} Once he fell silent, she looked at him. “No fuss,” he added calmly. Unsure whether or not the last statement was part of the ultimatum, Flo turned back to the notes and wrote down his composed conclusion to the demands. “Okay,” she then said. Cooper added that afterward “they’ll take a little trip.”

Tina looked on as Flo glanced back at Cooper, telling him she would have to take these to the cockpit. “Alright,” Cooper said, “go ahead.” She then asked if Flo wanted her to perform the task. She said no.

“Sir,” Flo politely asked as she stood, “is this all you want?” Cooper answered yes. Fighting the inertia her body felt against the climbing aircraft, Flo took his first note from Tina and went forward.

“Do you want me to stay here?” Tina asked, now alone with the hijacker. He said yes. Once in the same narrow, blue seat as Flo moments before, Cooper greeted her with the contents of the carry-on luggage. To her, it appeared nothing more than a cheap, black, imitation leather attaché case. Seeing the red sticks within, the same bare wire that held Flo’s attention within his hand, dangled ever so close to one of the exposed battery terminals, Cooper added a few more caveats: all he has to do is complete the connection to the battery to detonate the bomb, and suggested that since this was an electronic device, the aircraft radio be used as little as possible. He “didn’t think” such transmissions or other electrical currents would trigger the device but “wanted to let the crew know.”

^{*} Contrary to other accounts, Cooper did not specify the types of chutes —military or civilian— nor the specific denominations of the bills.

The thoughts shooting across Tina's mind came one right after the other. Years later, she relayed those few, interminable seconds: "Bomb. Depressurization. What is gonna to happen in the cabin? What are the people going to have to deal with? What I'm gonna have to do to take care of the people? All the sudden, it donned on me that I was sitting next to him, and that if there was an explosion, I was gonna be pulled out with him. I wanted to run. But on a 727, there isn't any place to run. At that point I really just prayed for the safety of the passengers and for the hijacker as well."³ Fear did not deter her from duty. She buried it. Without really leaving her seat, she stretched and reached over to the interphone on the wall.

Seated in her own fold down chair between forward exit and the cockpit door, Alice watched Flo stride up and enter the flight deck. Her fellow stewardess closed the door behind her. Curious, Alice leaned forward and peered down the aisle into the cabin. Looking through then past the first class seats, nothing appeared amiss save Tina sitting in the last row's aisle seat.

One inside Flo stepped up behind Anderson, handing Cooper's note and envelope to Captain Scott. He pours over the note as the other three await his next words within the confined flight deck. Scott makes two decisions. First, he told Flo to stay in the cockpit. Two, he calls Northwest operations at Minneapolis–St. Paul. It was 3:13 pm.* Over the scratchy radiophone link, his words are straightforward once in contact: Passenger advised is hijacking reroute to Seattle. Stewardess has been handed a note requesting two hundred thousand and knapsack by 5 pm Seattle this afternoon. Wants two back parachutes. Wants money in negotiable American currency. Denominations of bills not important. Has bomb in briefcase and will use it if anything is done to block his request reroute to Seattle.†

* All times listed are Pacific Standard Time (PST). Transcripts of communications, hand written notes, etc., use Zulu (Greenwich Mean) time as a standard, which is eight hours earlier than PST.

† Other than this initial transmission and the handwritten notes taken by Schaffner, there is no other evidence to show Cooper made any demand the money be in "negotiable American currency." Mucklow in her 12/3/71

As instructed, Flo remains, sitting in one of the narrow, yet more comfortable than the fold down seats provided for attendants in the cabin. Whether instructed to do so, or on her own accord, she begins taking notes. Ultimately, she would turn over the thirteen small pages of scrawled observations to the FBI.

Tina called back again. She relayed Cooper's missive about the electrical nature of the bomb and reiterated the fact he wanted no funny stuff. In addition, everything he wanted must be at the airport when they landed, no one's to meet or approach the craft, no FBI agents, no equipment and they will park in an area other than the gate. More instructions will come later. He also made one more request: He wanted his note and those Flo took returned. She did so and returned to the cockpit.*

The flight crew didn't alert the passengers nor, given Cooper's, warning activate the emergency transponder code. Then, as now, aircraft carry a device emitting a code once it detects ground radar. The crew sets the four-digit code for each flight, which in turn identifies the aircraft and other pertinent information for air traffic control. "Squawk" is the aviation parlance used when controllers instruct pilots to enter certain a code as needed. The converse is done in the event of an emergency.

Nor did they relay to Seattle air terminal approach the fact a hijacking was taking place. So far, their communications with Seattle Approach air traffic controller included the normal

statement "learned that the note which (Shaffner) carried to the pilot contained a list of demands. (Cooper) later told (her) that he wanted \$200,000 in *circulated U. S. currency.*" (italics added). Why this was relayed this remains a mystery. On a curious note, the ARINC transcripts between Flight 305 and NWO flight ops in Minn-St. Paul (MSP) make no mention of the demand for two front chutes as well. However, at 3:57 pm MSP advises the chest packs would be ready soon. Undocumented between 3:13 and 3:57 pm, this demand must have been relayed.

* In her FBI statement, Schaffner states "after she delivered the demand notes to the Captain, and had been seated in the cockpit for a ten minutes (Mucklow) advised by telephone that the hijacker stated both the note he had written and the note (she) had written at his direction returned to him." Afterwards "she took both notes back to him." Mucklow in her second FBI interview of 12/3/71 states this did not happen until later in the flight. Rataczak makes mention of it in his, but not the specific time it happened.

altitude, heading and speed reports to and from Flight 305. * These brought the craft into the area for a landing at Seattle–Tacoma International Airport (Sea–Tac) amidst all the other flight coming and going. Nearing the metropolis, Scott notified Seattle Approach that “we’ve got a bit of a problem up here. We’d like to have you give us some holding instructions or something where we can go out in a holding pattern where we’re not going to be involved in your traffic.”

Without asking for a reason, the controller gives Scott a heading to an area some 30 miles northwest of Sea–Tac, over an area called Lofall. Small communities surrounded by wooded areas dot the area adjacent the Hood Canal. Above them, around 3:30 p.m., Flight 305 arrived to await Cooper’s money and chutes. So far, only the crew and Northwest operations in Minneapolis knew that one of the great crimes of the Twentieth Century was in progress.

* These are separate communications from those the crew relayed to Minn-St. Paul flight ops. See WSHS *Transcript of radio communication between Northwest Orient Airlines flight 305 and Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, Reno International Airport* from 3:15 PST (2315 Zulu) and 5:40 PST (0140 Zulu).

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¹⁷ FBI document SE 164-81 11/26/71: Schaffner states Cooper was sitting "in the middle seat of three seats on the right-hand side."

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²³ Grey *Skyjack*, 22. Grey also gives more detail on Scotts experience at that time pages 23–24.

²⁴ Bob Johnson, "Hijacked! D. B. Cooper Revisited," *Reflections: Dedicated to preserving the history of a great airlines* Volume 10 Issue 4 (Fall 2012), pg 10.

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²⁷ Grey *Skyjack*, 21.

²⁸ Schaffner, in her initial FBI statement given in Reno, NV, (True Ink's FBI File# SE 164–81, 11/26/71) states: "the man turned around and looked at her several times, and she felt that he was indicating that he wanted her to open the envelope immediately." Years later, in 1988 for an interview with *Unsolved Mysteries: D. B. Cooper*, Flo states she ignored Cooper until he said 'I want you to read the note.' Whereupon, she did.

A FLIGHT

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³ *D.B. Cooper: Case Closed? Season 1*. Directed by Ted Skillman. Produced by LMNO Cable Group, Inc. History Channel, July 2016. History Channel Special. Executive Producers Matthew Ginsburg & Tim Healy. A&E Television Networks, LLC.