

...was possible. He was uncertain  
he told whether he had a duty as a citizen  
to call the FBI it was not one of the bet-  
ter days.

McCauley later wrote me that Thomas  
is "the kind of person we all remember  
in grade school—the type who trudges  
into the cloakroom, hangs up his mackin-  
aw, and then all the other kids rush in  
and stuff snowballs into his mackinaw  
hood and pockets."

One of the nagging problems about the  
story was the difficulty and near-im-  
possibility of verifying any of Cooper's  
statements. To go to anyone, the airline  
to Boeing, and certainly to the FBI to  
verify the story would not be intelligent.  
That would be blowing my story, and  
causing Cooper's arrest even before  
anything could be published.

If there was now a chance Thomas or  
someone else there might talk as seemed  
likely, then I would have to do something,  
quick. I telephoned Morgan in Atlanta,  
and he rapidly devised a plan.

He left instantly for Washington, went  
to the Justice Department, and re-  
ported that he had a client, unnamed,  
who had knowledge of a serious federal  
crime, that the client planned to pub-  
lish a story about it, and that the client  
would turn over the information he  
would print — 10 days before publica-  
tion—providing the client could get a  
promise of immunity. Here was the  
legal danger: were I to publish the  
story and Cooper take flight, then I might  
be liable for aiding and abetting a cri-  
minal to take flight to avoid prosecution,  
and other things. But if the FBI got the  
information 10 days ahead of publication,  
they'd have a fair shot at doing their  
jobs, and for that matter, possibly estab-  
lishing whether Cooper's story was true.  
The promise of immunity was made.

Meantime, Morgan urged me to hurry

...the alley. About the time of the  
Cambodian invasion they grew more  
populous and emboldened enough to  
appear by day, cutting under cars and  
running across the streets. Now at the  
end of the term, with John Connally  
heading up the Democrats for Republi-  
cans Committee, they're in parks, not  
running but standing still, contesting  
with the pigeons for dry bread crumbs.

In this city of predators the rats have  
no natural enemies. Yes, there's a rat  
abatement program, but like so much  
under the Nixon Administration it  
doesn't work. People don't realize that.  
They think these Republicans are effi-  
cient because they don't make big,  
dreamy, Democratic promises and then  
fail to carry them out.

You can break modest promises too,  
but that hasn't sunk in any more than  
the Watergate Scandal or the Milk Scan-  
dal or the Wheat Scandal or the You-  
Fill-in-the-Blank Scandal. Nor does  
the country, over which this capital  
presides know about another scandal:  
the almost nightly escape from Washing-  
ton's jails. Since January they have  
averaged one escape every four days.  
They make good their get-aways not  
only singularly, but in groups.

Fat City, Rat City, who's to blame?  
One test of an administration is how it  
runs Washington. Do we blame the low  
caliber of Nixon's appointees or are  
the crooks bribing their way out? That  
accusation has been made but not an-  
swered. No questions get answered in  
the rat kingdom where the rodents come  
out of their holes, and a faceless Presi-  
dent slips down and out of sight broad-  
casting modest radio messages in the  
Television Age from impenetrable  
places.

Many, many questions. There are  
questions to be asked about John Ales-

...as unauthorized... from the insti-  
tution... staying overnight. Mean-  
while, the prison officials who made  
all this possible were being entertained  
royally and treated favorably in busi-  
ness deals by members of the Alesalo  
family not in prison.

Do they have a rodent problem at Lom-  
poc too? The media mice might like to  
ask that question also, but they're kept  
on a starvation diet by Ron Ziegler, the  
humanoid keeper press secretary. The  
President has set over them to feed them  
occasional pellets of information and  
grains of news. With presidential press  
conferences abolished for all practical  
purposes, the mice must live off Ziegler  
briefings, and they only have half enough  
of them because he has the cut the daily  
briefings from two to one.

With their rations reduced to the level  
of pernicious anemia last week, they  
squeaked at their keeper as he stood in  
front of the blue curtain in the White  
House briefing room, but Ziegler  
squelched the weakened things, telling  
them that, "We're not going to have this  
type of chaos in future briefings... (and)  
as far as this briefing is concerned, I'm  
ending it, it's ended."

The questions pile up. Instead of an-  
swers there are diversions such as  
Marina Whitman, the most presentable  
member of the Council of Economic  
Advisors, who makes those monthly ad-  
missions that prices have gone up again.  
"Dahlings," the ZsaZsa Gabor of eco-  
nomics says in effect, "we have our good  
months and we have our bad months,  
and this was a bad one again, but not so  
bad if you know how to read the numbers  
like us experts. Sure, bread's up, rent's  
up, milk's up, but we've got GM to hold  
the line on Cadillac, and diamond prices  
are stable."

Fat city, Rat city, who's to blame?

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Features Syndicate

...was also a rumor that the brother  
Cooper had been located and the sa-  
Cooper did it because he was dying  
an incurable disease.

The fraud case was yet to be tried  
but strong evidence seemed to be ac-  
cumulating that Donald Sylvester Murph-  
my Cooper is not the real Cooper.

A private investigator checked again  
last week and says that Murphy had  
been employed at Boeing, and had  
military record of as a jumper. Neith-  
er fact, of course, is proof that Murphy  
did or did not hijack the airplane. In theory  
anybody smart enough to pull it off would  
be smart enough to concoct an elab-  
orately fictitious background for him-  
self. Or, anybody smart enough to do it would  
be smart enough to do it and tell the  
story for money, but tell it in such a way  
that it appeared to be a hear-see.

But in the end, or to this point, it seems  
appropriate to conclude that Murphy  
is not Cooper, which means I jumped high  
I fell hard.

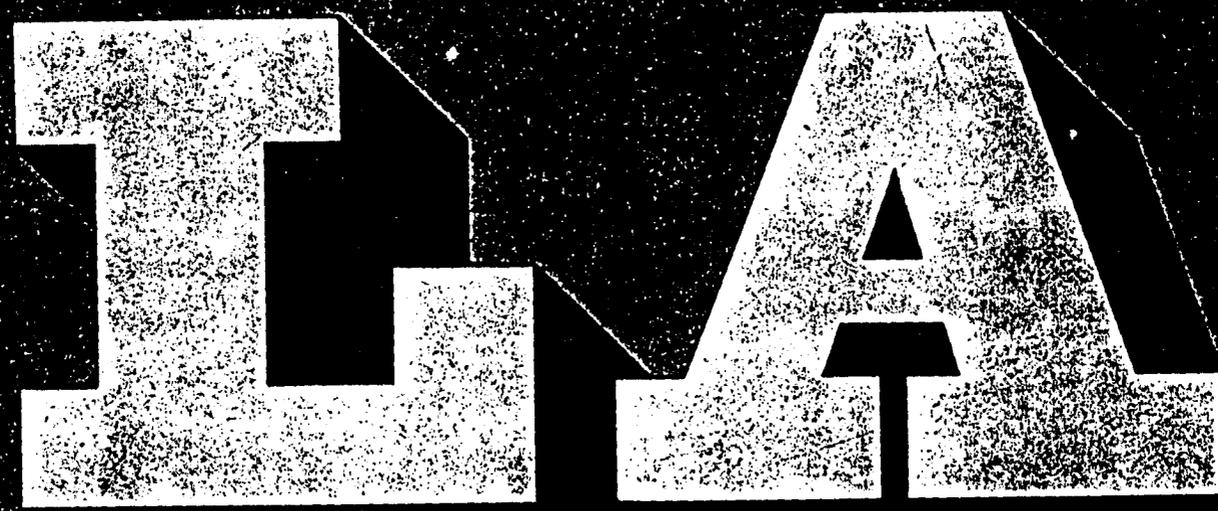
Long ago I played in a poker game with  
a bristly-browed old curmudgeon who  
had run whiskey for Capone in Phila-  
delphia. He was one tough old man. He  
would try to goad me into calling his  
bets, when my cards didn't indicate  
I should. "Go on. Take a chance," he taur-  
ed. "Columbus took a chance."

Yes. Columbus took a chance and dis-  
covered America. Now I had taken  
chance, everything on the line, and  
had discovered, what? A more than lik-  
ely impostor, an actor, a pretender  
herculean deeds.

Still there lingers a small gut feeling  
maybe self-serving, maybe not, that  
I had the right man all along. And if  
I didn't, well, so be it. It was a great  
taking story that didn't check out. And  
that is what a reporter is for.

# *THE D.B. COOPER SKYJACKING STORY*

## **Part II: 'Sex Is Better on Payday' (Page 18)**



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**Von Hoffman Lance Rentzel Politics  
Reporter Faces Jail Encounter Groups**

# D.B. COOPER

## WHY HE HIJACKED

## PLANE FOR \$200,000

By Karl Fleming

In last week's first installment, the man claiming to be D.B. Cooper told how he planned the hijacking for more than a year, how he did it alone, how he decided where to do it, how after he parachuted to earth with \$200,000, he walked to his car and drove home, how he

there that he would surface and expose himself to capture? If Cooper was smart enough to essay such a slickly pulled-off crime, he doubtless would be smart enough to know with what appetite agents of the law were seeking his capture. His getting away with it, after all, would only encourage others to mimic his deed, at God knows what cost to the airlines in hard dollars, and possibly in human life.

Advertise!

ground revolutionary bomber group to tell his story, advertising.

Accordingly, I placed a classified advertisement in several Pacific Northwest newspapers, addressed to Cooper, inviting him to contact me, and assuring him we could talk without exposing him to capture. An imprudent and wasted effort, probably I had not been one to shy away from risks. Not only was there but a tiny chance Cooper would respond, but a minefield of booby traps and pitfalls lay in wait. I would be

secret? Or would I be obligated, as a citizen with knowledge of a crime, to turn Cooper in?

Moreover, suppose in fact someone came forward representing himself as Cooper. How could I know he was the right man? After all, the Clifford Irving hoax was much in the press. How could I be sure someone wouldn't try the same scheme on me? There was one way, it seemed, to prove his identity: If Cooper responded to my ad, I could demand that he produce the money from his

## By Karl Fleming

*In last week's first installment, the man claiming to be D.B. Cooper, told how he planned the hijacking, for more than a year, how he did it alone, how he decided where to do it, how after he parachuted to earth with \$200,000, he walked to his car and drove home, how he discovered he couldn't spend the money. This week, he explains why he did it.*

THREE WEEKS AFTER D.B. COOPER skyjacked a Northwest Airline plane and got away with \$200,000, the following letter appeared in a Reno newspaper: "I didn't rob Northwest Orient (sic) because I thought it would be romantic, heroic or any of the other euphemisms that seem to attach themselves to situations of high risk. I am no modern-day Robin Hood. Unfortunately, I do have only 14 months to live. My life has been one of hate, turmoil, frustration and more hate. This seemed like the fastest and most profitable way to gain a few last rains of peace of mind. I am not holed up in some obscure backwoods town. Neither am I a psychopathic killer. As a matter of fact, I've never even received a speeding ticket."

Here, the long-trained reporter's instinct suggested, was a man who wanted to talk, to justify, to rationalize and to do verbal penance for his deed.

What he had done was to execute the most daring and ingenious airline hold-up in history—doing it all alone and diving out of the plane with \$200,000 booty—and to all appearances, getting away with it. Half the FBI agents in the country were looking for him. Hundreds of military troops fanned out on foot to search the countryside around Lake Merwin, Wash., where it was believed he landed after parachuting Northwest

there that he would surface and expose himself to capture? If Cooper was smart enough to essay such a slickly pulled-off crime, he doubtless would be smart enough to know with what appetite agents of the law were seeking his capture. His getting away with it, after all, would only encourage others to mimic his deed, at God knows what cost to the airlines in hard dollars, and possibly in human life.

### Advertise!

Still, there remained the fact of the letter. After several days of pondering, I decided to try a scheme I had successfully used once before: to lure from hiding a member of a secret under-

*The man who says he is D.B. Cooper.*



ground revolutionary bomber group to tell his story: advertising.

Accordingly, I placed a classified advertisement in several Pacific Northwest newspapers, addressed to Cooper, inviting him to contact me, and assuring him we could talk without exposing him to capture. An imprudent and wasted effort, probably. I had not been one to shy away from risks. No only was there but a tiny chance Cooper would respond, but a minefield of booby-traps and pitfalls lay in wait. I would be working alone and underground, outside the law, treading a delicate constitutional line. If I found Cooper, would I have constitutional privilege as a reporter to keep my source of information

secret? Or would I be obligated, as a citizen with knowledge of a crime, to turn Cooper in?

Moreover, suppose in fact someone came forward representing himself as Cooper. How could I know he was the right man? After all, the Clifford Irving hoax was much in the press. How could I be sure someone wouldn't try the same scheme on me? There was one way, it seemed, to prove his identity. If Cooper responded to my ad, I could demand that he produce the money from the skyjacking. That would be strong proof.

Preparing for such an eventuality, I obtained the 34-page FBI booklet containing the numbers of every one of the stolen bills. The FBI was circulating it to banks and other money institutions.

### Midnight Phone Call

Then an entire month passed. The few respondents to the ad were cranks. Nothing more. Then on the night of Jan. 31, precisely at midnight, my phone rang and when I answered a voice said: "This call is from the Pacific Northwest."

I was fully awake in an instant and said "Don't say a word more. Call me tomorrow night at 9 o'clock and I will have made arrangements for us to talk on a safe telephone."

As is many a reporter who has been involved in hairy, dangerous stories (I had covered Birmingham, Selma, Jackson, Watts, and four assassinations) I was careful almost to the point of paranoia about telephone tapping. Once down South, a reporter friend was dictating his integration story to his office by long-distance call when a voice, obviously white, probably cop, broke in and said "You goddamned nigger-loving son-of-a-bitch."

One learned to be careful about phones. By next morning, I had arranged an elaborate system involving four phones: my answering service was in

...no modern day  
...Unfortunately it got  
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...more hate. This seemed like the fastest  
...and most profitable way to gain a few  
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...away with it. Half the FBI agents in the  
...country were looking for him. Hundreds  
...of military troops fanned out on foot  
...to search the countryside around Lake  
...Merwin, Wash., where it was believed  
...he landed after parachuting. Northwest  
...posted a \$25,000 reward. So no matter  
...how urgently Cooper might have wanted  
...to talk, he would be laying extremely  
...low.

Nevertheless, I brooded, if a reporter  
...could somehow get to Cooper, what a  
...story there was to be had. Not only was  
...the crime daringly unique, but Cooper's  
...letter suggested an extremely uncommon  
...and thus potentially fascinating mo-  
...tive. If a reporter was good at his craft,  
...he looked for this extra dimension in a  
...story — a situation or an occurrence of  
...an extraordinary nature that instantly  
...crystalized some aspect of the human  
...spectacle.

Given the intensity of the search for  
...Cooper, however, what real hope was



...and when I...  
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**KARL FLEMING** was associated with  
...Newsweek magazine as correspondent,  
...Los Angeles bureau chief and contributing  
...editor for 11 years before resigning April  
...15 to found LA. While with Newsweek, he  
...covered virtually every significant civil  
...rights story of the turbulent '60s, including  
...Birmingham, Selma, Ole Miss, Little Rock  
...and Watts. He covered the assassinations  
...of President John F. Kennedy and his bro-  
...ther Robert and those of Martin Luther  
...King and Medgar Evers. He was assigned  
...to Richard Nixon during the last Presi-  
...dential campaign and has covered Lyndon  
...Johnson, George Wallace, Hubert Hum-  
...phrey, Barry Goldwater and Ronald Rea-  
...gan. He also reported on the Charles Man-  
...son and Jack Ruby trials for Newsweek  
...and the trial of Pueblo spy ship captain  
...Lloyd M. Bucher.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2

October 28, 1972

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# COOPER THOUGHT ABOUT SUICIDE BUT IN THE CHURCH IT'S A SIN

struck to take the call and refer it to another number, where a friend was standing by with instructions to take the call, refer the caller to yet another number—where I was waiting—and then get out of the house. In case the call was traced to that number, the friend would be absent if anyone came knocking.

At 9 p.m., I was waiting, and at 9:10, the phone rang. The caller identified himself as "Mr. Thomas" and said he was acting as an intermediary for Cooper. He said Cooper was interested in explaining to the American people the reason for the skyjacking, but Cooper was having a hard time financially. He wasn't able to spend the \$200,000, for the money was hot. The FBI had the numbers of the bills, therefore, he wanted to sell his story for \$45,000, to be paid in three segments: \$15,000 when I was sure I had the right man; \$15,000 when my interviews were completed (he suggested a filmed interview, with masks); and \$15,000 upon publication of the story.

## Seth Thomas Shows Up

Next week, the intermediary came to Los Angeles, and we met at the Airport Marina Hotel, where I had taken a room. "Seth Thomas" was a plodding, black-haired, spade-bearded, real estate broker and investment counselor, so he described himself—and he brought with him several Polaroid photographs of his client, pictures that looked

felt guilty even when stealing cookies from a jar when he was a child.

He had been married to the same woman for 25 years, had never cheated on her once, belonged to the country club, the PTA and had been so faithful an upward-aspiring engineer at Boeing that he carried two cheese sandwiches to lunch every day, and often toiled into the night at his job. He was a perfect Free enterprise specimen.

## Feathers His Neck

Item: "You don't laugh at motherhood. You don't laugh at tradition, at religion, at everything possible that a man could hold dear," he said.

Item: "When you're at the football game and somebody gets up and sings the 'Star-Spangled Banner,' it still makes the feathers come up on my neck when I hear it."

Item: "When I had my first sexual experience with a girl, I was 17 years old. This was an older woman. I was so dumb. I was drinking beer with her. I was away from home and it was Christmas Eve. We went to her apartment. She asked me if I wanted to play cards. So I said 'sure.' So we're playing strip poker. For real. So, the next thing, I had to go to the bathroom and when I came back, she was in bed. So I said 'Well, I guess I'll be going, Irene.' And she said 'Oh, it's cold in here. If you'd just come over and warm me up a bit.' Well, I'm a pretty cheap fellow. I just got in, she said

phase out everybody in their 40s because it would be cheaper, and better economics to keep the young blood coming in. If you can suck the last drop of gray matter from the ones you're going to dump and put it into the brains of the younger ones, then see how much more money you're ahead!"

The first shock passed, and Cooper realized that his situation—though he had a \$300 a month mortgage on a suburban home, two cars, a boat, a camper and two children to support—wasn't too bad. After all, this executive at Northwest, upon whom occasionally Cooper paid service calls, had "made a standing offer that any time I wanted to change companies...it would be great to have me on the Northwest team." The Northwest man had been buttering him up, courting him even.

So Cooper telephoned him. The secretary said he was on another line and would call back. When he didn't, Cooper phoned again. He was not in the office, the secretary said, but she would have him call. He didn't. Cooper telephoned again. He was in conference, the secretary said. Finally, another bolt of truth, his old pal at Northwest, his occasional golf partner, was avoiding him. There would be no job.

As the out-of-work days passed, Cooper began dipping into his savings, and thinking of what he would do with the rest of his life. His pride had been hurt. "Any man who gets up and goes to work

He said Cooper was interested in explaining to the American people the reason for the skyjacking, but Cooper was having a hard time financially. He wasn't able to spend the \$200,000, for the money was hot. The FBI had the numbers of the bills, therefore, he wanted to sell his story for \$45,000, to be paid in three segments: \$15,000 when I was sure I had the right man; \$15,000 when my interviews were completed (he suggested a filmed interview, with masks); and \$15,000 upon publication of the story.

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That, I told him, was hardly real proof, for nearly anyone could obtain the list and copy numbers out of it. How about the real bills?

As we dickered over the interview fee, he promised the real bills would be produced. We agreed on a price, \$30,000, and on Feb. 15, I nervously boarded a Western flight to Seattle, carrying cameras, two tape recorders, and \$30,000 in \$20 and \$50 bills, concealed in several envelopes and buried in my tennis equipment case.

Shortly after checking into The Swept Wing Motel near the Seattle airport Thomas arrived, and minutes later, Cooper himself appeared, entering my room furtively from the parking lot. He was a nervous, slightly-built, balding middle-aged man who wore a black raincoat, black shoes and black gloves. He kept the gloves on while he chain-smoked filter cigarettes. He spoke in a raspy voice that reminded me instantly of the Pueblo spy ship commander Pete Bucher. Cooper was anxious to have the money

Item: "You don't laugh at motherhood. You don't laugh at tradition, at religion, at everything possible that a man could hold dear," he said.

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Item: "A woman is different from a man. A woman comes from some other place. She comes from the land of Nod or something. If a man doesn't take the dominant role in the bedroom, there's something wrong with him. A man can go out into an alley or the back of a car or something. But a woman has to have some feeling of security in her lovemaking."

Item: "A man's feeling of manhood, his masculinity, is directly associated with his ability to provide for himself and to earn a good living. When all of sudden he is unable to do this, if he has been a red-blooded man who stood on his feet and worked all his life and asked no quarter from anyone, asked for nothing, then you in effect have emasculated this man. It means cut the balls off him."

Item: "I guess you would have to say that sex is better on payday."

Item: "You work hard for Dear Old Ironworks and do a good job and put in your years there and do the best you can and make money for them and get along well with everyone and you will be rewarded. Because besides your pay check and your annual leave and your

After all, this executive at Northwest, upon whom occasionally Cooper held service calls, had "made a standing offer that any time I wanted to change companies... it would be great to have me on the Northwest team." The Northwest man had been buttering him up, courting him even.

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As the out-of-work days passed, Cooper began dipping into his savings, and thinking of what he would do with the rest of his life. His pride had been hurt. "Any man who gets up and goes to work in the morning is a proud man," he said. He had been fired, so he suffered constant embarrassment.

"People look at you with a sympathetic eye, and this is the thing that kills you. Sympathy is the one thing I could never stand all my life."

### Abortive Business Attempts

He tried to get a construction company going, but couldn't raise the capital. He made an abortive attempt to go into the house trailer business, but he had no money.

Finally, he gritted his teeth and did something inimical to everything he stood for: he went to the unemployment office. A typically crisp, impersonal, juiceless woman bureaucrat, he said, coolly interrogated him about his qualifications, then suggested he take a job as an "aide." He left in a boiling rage. The humiliation of that experience, the anger at being fired and tossed on the junkheap, the betrayal of his friend, they all came together at once and washed over him in tear-scalding anger.

He couldn't get work. His pride was deteriorating. He began to contemplate suicide. Pills, he finally decided, would be the way. He tried, but he couldn't do it. The Catholic Church had instilled

two tape recorders, and \$30,000 in \$20 and \$50 bills concealed in several envelopes and buried in my tennis equipment case.

Shortly after checking into The Sweep Wing Motel near the Seattle airport, Thomas arrived and minutes later Cooper himself appeared, entering my room furtively from the parking lot. He was a nervous, slightly-built, balding middle-aged man who wore a black rain coat, black shoes and black gloves. He kept the gloves on while he chain-smoked filter cigarettes. He spoke in a raspy voice that reminded me instantly of the Pueblo spy ship commander Pete Bucher.

Cooper was anxious to have the money handed over. But I insisted on seeing the real money, whereupon Thomas extracted a wallet and produced three crisp \$20 bills. I checked their serial numbers against the FBI list. They matched.

Cooper asked if I would like to have the three \$20 bills. "And I have \$199,940 more of them buried in the ground that I will be happy to give you in exchange for other bills," he said. I told him I didn't think I wanted to have any stolen bills in my possession.

I continued to hesitate, prodding Cooper to yield up details of the hijacking—few of which had appeared in the press. He began hesitantly, but soon convinced me I had the right man. Subsequently I handed over the money, with the stipulation that it be held for Cooper's legal defense were he caught. What helped convince me was what Cooper said was his motive.

He was raised in an authoritarian Catholic household, Cooper said, and

his masculinity had been associated with his ability to provide for himself and to earn a good living. When all of a sudden he is unable to do this, if he has been a red-blooded man who stood on his feet and worked all his life and asked no quarter from anyone, asked for nothing, then you in effect have emasculated this man. It means cut the balls off him."

Item: "I guess you would have to say that sex is better on payday."

Item: "You work hard for Dear Old Ironworks and do a good job and put in your years there and do the best you can and make money for them and get along well with everyone and you will be rewarded. Because besides your pay check and your annual leave and your vacation, if you get a little higher up, you can look forward to a bonus and the pension and be well-fed and, of course, you'll get the gold watch or whatever."

That was D.B. Cooper, and that was the way he had lived his life, patiently hoeing out the row, obeying the rules, and waiting to cash in on the American Dream, as advertised.

### Bitter Payoff

His payoff, he related bitterly, came one day when he went to his Boeing desk and found a pink slip of dismissal. He was crushed.

"It made me feel just like the first time I jumped out of an airplane... just bereft of everything that's inside you, that's all," he said.

He was being replaced, he discovered, by a man 15 years his junior, a junior man he had carefully trained. He had been a believer, an unquestioning cog, but now a jolt of hard truth hit him: "You're dead wood. If they could, they'd

finally, he gritted his teeth and did something inimical to everything he stood for, he went to the unemployment office. A typically crisp, impersonal, juiceless woman bureaucrat, he said, coolly interrogated him about his qualifications, then suggested he take a job as an "aide." He left in a boiling rage. The humiliation of that experience—the anger at being fired and tossed on the junkheap, the betrayal of his friend, they all came together at once and washed over him in tear-scalding anger.

He couldn't get work. His pride was deteriorating. He began to contemplate suicide. Pills, he finally decided, would be the way. He tried, but he couldn't do it. The Catholic Church had instilled too strongly in him that suicide, like marital infidelity, is a sin.

At home every day, he read a lot of newspapers. They were full of hijacking stories, which he read after vainly searching the classified job section.

"So then, I started thinking about it," he said. "The more I thought about it, the more I thought how easy it would be. Because the security is very weak, very lax, almost non-existent. So I started to organize, mentally, to do this. I would go on with everyday living. But I would begin to think about this in earnest."

Then followed a period of moral wrestling. "There's the code: you can't take what's not yours. But wait a minute. Who says it's not mine? Where would this money come from? Either the stockholders or the company that insures them. Now, wait a minute. Insurance. Who has a strangle hold on the American economy? Insurance companies. And



Karl Fleming and D. B. Cooper

the insurance companies, they're trying to hide the money. They're buying land. They're loaning money. They're building skyscrapers. They're into everything. And then you get thoughts like: how many millionaires made \$1 last year and didn't pay taxes. And look at the oil companies. I could put the money I would steal down as a depletion allowance," Cooper said.

So he planned. "I didn't want to give anything I had up, and in order to even maintain what I had, I had to do something. And then I was, if you'll pardon the expression, very much pissed off right then. So more and more, I planned, for over a year, and still I was not sure I would go through with it. But my bitterness was changing to hard cynicism."

If he did it, how much money would he ask? Had he worked at Boeing to retirement, his annual income, with company





benefits and his few investments, would be about \$12,000. He went to "Seth Thomas," investment counselor, who had approached him several times previous about putting his money into land.

even all of it. I had more coming than that, I didn't do anything wrong," he said.

#### Wax in Ears

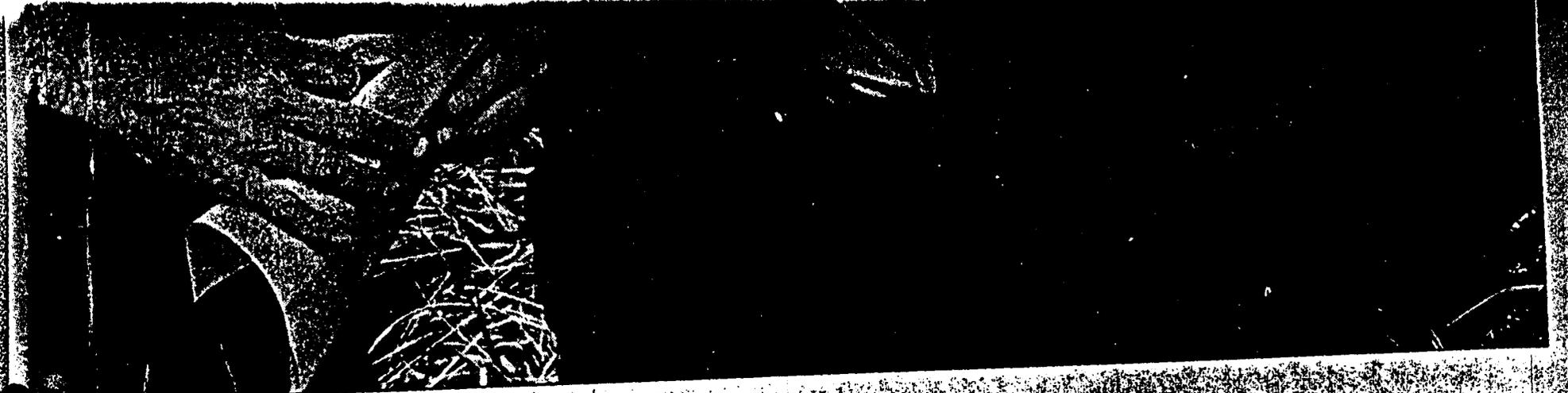
When we finished some eight hours

the rat race again? Or would be fulfill his fantasy and travel?

"If anything, I've done the people a favor," he said. "I've shown them that it can be done. You don't have to be the

and their escape through drugs. Well, I showed them. I'm not over the hill. I can make another jump tomorrow. I can make one 10 years from now, God willing. You bet."

And: "I proved to the Establishment



benefits and his few investments, would be about \$12,000. He went to "Seth Thomas," investment counselor, who had approached him several times previous about putting his money into land. How much of a capital sum, Cooper asked, would a man have to invest to yield an annual income of about \$12,000? Thomas took his pencil and worked it out: \$250,000. Cooper thought about it, but then decided his needs were modest, so he scaled down the figure to \$200,000. And that was how he decided to hijack the plane for \$200,000.

After relating how he hijacked the plane and drove home in his car with the money, he insisted he didn't feel guilty over the crime, or over the possibility that he might encourage others to stage hijackings, until someone got killed.

"I took what I figured was mine, not

even all of it. I had more coming than that, I didn't do anything wrong," he said.

#### Wax in Ears

When we finished some eight hours of taped interviews, he put on make-up and a wool cap and allowed himself to be filmed by a freelance cameraman and soundman I had brought up after instructing them to hear nothing, see nothing, ask no questions. I made them stick wads of wax into their ears while I interviewed Cooper, and made them turn their backs from the camera when he raised the photostats of the stolen bills to be filmed.

That afternoon, we rode along with Seth Thomas, whose name I now knew to be Jack Lewis—down Interstate 5, and he showed me all the key spots in the hijacking. As we drove, he talked about his future. Would he get back in

the rat race again? Or would he fulfill his fantasy and travel?

"If anything, I've done the people a favor," he said. "I've shown them that it can be done. You don't have to be the stereotyped individual that hijacks planes. You don't have to even raise your voice. You don't have to use any violence. You don't have to use any threats, and you can still tell that plane where to go and not jeopardize all those people. I showed them their screening system doesn't work."

He "never dreamed I would be saying anything against the Establishment" but here he had hijacked this plane in a cold vengeful rage. Now he had a message "to the younger generation that wants to shoot everybody over 30. They've botched every single one they've ever done, with all their bombings and all their riots and cold-blooded murders

and their escape through drugs. Well, I showed them. I'm not over the hill. I can make another jump tomorrow. I can make one 10 years from now, God willing. You bet."

And: "I proved to the Establishment that I'm not just a faceless number. I'm a person. I'm a human being. I proved that Old Dad can still do it."

Jubilantly, I packed my film, my tapes, my copies of the bills and headed home.

I was still euphoric when the plane reached Los Angeles. I felt that if I never wrote another story, I had justified my existence, by creating something worthwhile, something that would stand. I presumed to imagine—as a classic commentary on American society.

NEXT WEEK: a gift, a book publisher's betrayal of trust, some indictments, and the growing suspicion that it was all a hoax.

LA

October 28, 1972

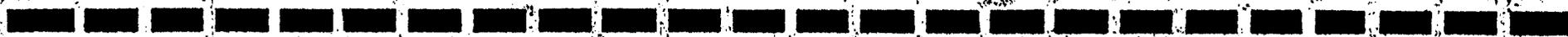
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Will This Happen to the Man Who Says He Is  
D.B. Cooper? **NEXT WEEK: THE AFTERMATH**



(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

# D. B. COOPER' GOT \$30,000 Weekly's Hijacking Story Turns Into Tall Tale--Later

BY ALEXANDER AUERBACH  
Times Staff Writer

What happens to people is news. It happens to reporters isn't," a leading Boston city editor shout at reporters who in first-person accounts of they had witnessed.

What happens if the reporter the sleuth who solved one of the most publicized crimes in recent years (B) the victim of the clever hoax since Clifford Irving's autobiography of Howard Hughes, or (C) both?

As a new weekly newspaper in the Los Angeles area, just started a three-installment series about the "solution" of the successful \$200,000 hijacking of a Northwest Orient Airlines jet last Nov. 24.

Only at the end of the series did it tell its readers that the whole account was an apparent hoax that cost the paper's backers \$30,000. Karl Fleming, LA's editor, says he wrote the story in a way that the readers found misleading in order to let them vicariously undergo the same experience he did. Without realizing it, they were reading a story about Fleming, not simply by him.

The first installment told of D.B. Cooper ("an ordinary, God-fearing, patriotic, country club-oriented, upward-climbing WASP engineer") leaving his suburban Seattle home with a briefcase stuffed with two wigs, an altimeter and compass, a makeup kit, gloves and three red flares wired to look like a dynamite bomb.

Fleming, a respected veteran newsman (formerly bureau chief

and contributing editor with Newsweek for 11 years) went on to describe every detail of Cooper's hijacking, in an article that ran some 4,000 words and took five pages of the tabloid, not counting a cover photo and a last-page teaser for the next installment.

One illustration showed Xerox copies of three \$20 bills given to Fleming as proof of Cooper's identity; their serial numbers matched those on the FBI's list of bills that made up the ransom paid by the airline. The second piece described how Fleming got the story. While still on Newsweek's staff, he put a classified

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

I-10 Los Angeles Times  
Los Angeles, Calif.

Date: 11/8/72  
Edition: Wednesday  
Author: Alexander Auerbach  
Editor: William F. Thomas  
Title: Norjak

Character:  
or  
Classification: 164-2975  
Submitting Office: Los Angeles  
 Being Investigated

164-2111-804

Continued from 10th Page  
ad in newspapers around  
Oregon and Washington,  
asking Cooper to contact  
him.

Later, while Fleming and  
millionaire Max Palevsky  
were organizing LA, an in-  
termediary offered to put  
the news man in contact  
with Cooper—for \$30,000.  
Palevsky put up the money  
and Fleming flew up to  
meet Cooper, dragging  
along two tape recorders, a  
motion picture camera,  
two cameramen and \$30,-  
000 in cash.

The headline on the  
third and final instalment  
read: "Is D. B. Cooper the  
real D. B. Cooper?" There  
is considerable reason for  
doubt, since the men who  
police say talked to Flem-  
ing — and who allegedly  
took his \$30,000 — have  
been arrested by the FBI  
on charges of defrauding  
Fleming of his money.

#### Arrested Before Story

The arrest took place on  
May 2, long before Flem-  
ing wrote his story for LA.

Why did Fleming pub-  
lish the story in a manner  
that led some readers, un-  
aware of the fraud arrest,  
to believe that the early  
installments were the real  
thing?

Fleming doesn't feel that  
the initial installment was  
deceptive, noting that  
"there were disclaimers in  
it," referring to two lines  
near the end: "The fore-  
going narrative was relat-  
ed to me by the man I be-  
lieved to be Cooper . . ."  
and, "Doubts about wheth-  
er I had the right man  
would arise later. . ."

"I wanted the reader to  
experience it just exactly

as I did," Fleming says.  
"It's an adventure story,  
as much about me as  
about D. B. Cooper, and I  
wanted to put the reader  
in my shoes. If the reader  
was reasonably alert, he  
would have seen in the  
press that these guys had  
been busted by the FBI."

If the man Fleming in-  
terviewed was not D. B.  
Cooper — and Fleming  
isn't totally sure he was  
not the hijacker—then he  
was a masterful con man,  
to hear Fleming tell it.

#### Paid at First Meeting

"I gave him the whole  
\$30,000 at our first meet-  
ing, after I was convinced  
that this was D. B. Coop-  
er," Fleming says. "At that  
point a con man would  
have taken the money and  
run like hell, but this guy,  
Cooper, came back and  
submitted himself to eight  
hours of taped interviews,  
30 minutes of filmed inter-  
views and still photo-  
graphs. His intermediary  
signed a contract (saying  
the \$30,000 would be used  
for Cooper's legal defense)  
with his real name and left  
his fingerprints all over  
the contract."

The story was to have  
been in the opening issue  
of LA. To avoid charges of  
aiding a fugitive from jus-  
tice, Fleming turned his  
material over to the FBI  
10 days before publication  
(he had told Cooper not to  
tell him anything he  
didn't want the police to  
know.) Included were Xe-  
rox copies of the \$20 bills  
Fleming had been shown  
as proof of Cooper's identi-  
ty. The serial numbers  
matched those on the list  
of ransom bills but FBI  
documents experts said  
that the photocopies indi-  
cated that the bills were  
counterfeit.

With all the information  
Fleming's subjects had  
supplied, the FBI had no

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trouble rounding them up.

With their trial scheduled to begin Nov. 27, Fleming says he still finds it "difficult to accept" the possibility that he was duped. "I asked that guy questions no con man could have prepared for," he says. "I went over him like a vacuum cleaner."

Fleming notes that "Cooper" went into detail on matters of air navigation and parachute procedure—unaware that Fleming is a licensed private pilot with some 700 hours in the air.

Because of the magnitude of the story and because of its intended role as the kickoff piece for his new newspaper, Fleming says, he was extremely careful in his questioning. "At the risk of sounding immodest," he adds, "I wouldn't want to do anything to damage my own very good reputation as a reporter."

He has an ingenious, mirror-within-a-mirror theory of his own.

"I'm not saying that the FBI was wrong, and I would never suggest that they would deliberately distort the facts—though if I, one lonely reporter, could get the story when 8,000 FBI agents couldn't, then that's not the kind of publicity that J. Edgar Hoover, then alive, would want for the FBI."

Noting that "Cooper" was aware the information would be published and get to the police, Fleming says, "It is very, very difficult for me to accept the fact that a mind brilliant enough to concoct a story

as sophisticated as the one this guy told me, would be stupid enough to turn around and expose himself to capture this way.

"I don't exclude the possibility that he was both smart enough to pull off the hijacking, sell me the story and spread enough false clues in the story so it would not look right and the FBI would say he isn't the hijacker. So, if he does do any time, it's for fraud, not for hijacking. And when he comes out, the \$200,000 is still there."

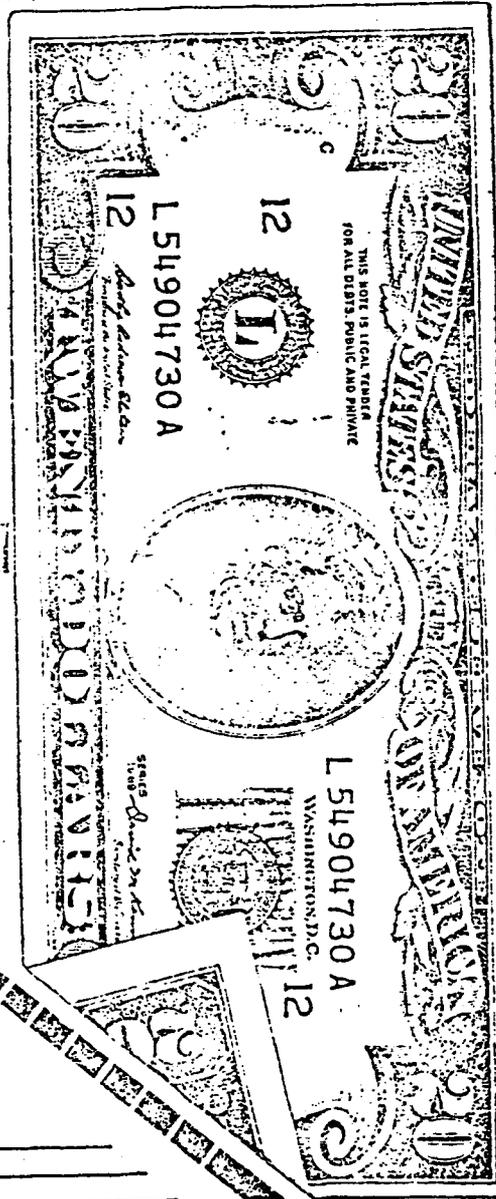
In that case, of course, Fleming's serics would be a true account of the hijacking, as readers of Part One might have thought, not the account of how a reporter got duped, as Part Three indicates, or perhaps it would be both. In any event, Fleming has no regrets about the adventure. "I've always been a reporter who takes risks. You don't get the plums at the top of the tree unless you jump high."

Fleming may have some lingering doubts about the man he interviewed, but Platypus Publications, publisher of LA, appears to have none. It has filed a \$30,000 civil suit against the men arrested by the FBI, claiming it was defrauded because the men were not the people they claimed to be.

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**NEXT WEEK:**

Why  
D.B.  
Cooper  
Did It,  
And  
Why He  
Demanded  
Only  
\$200,000.



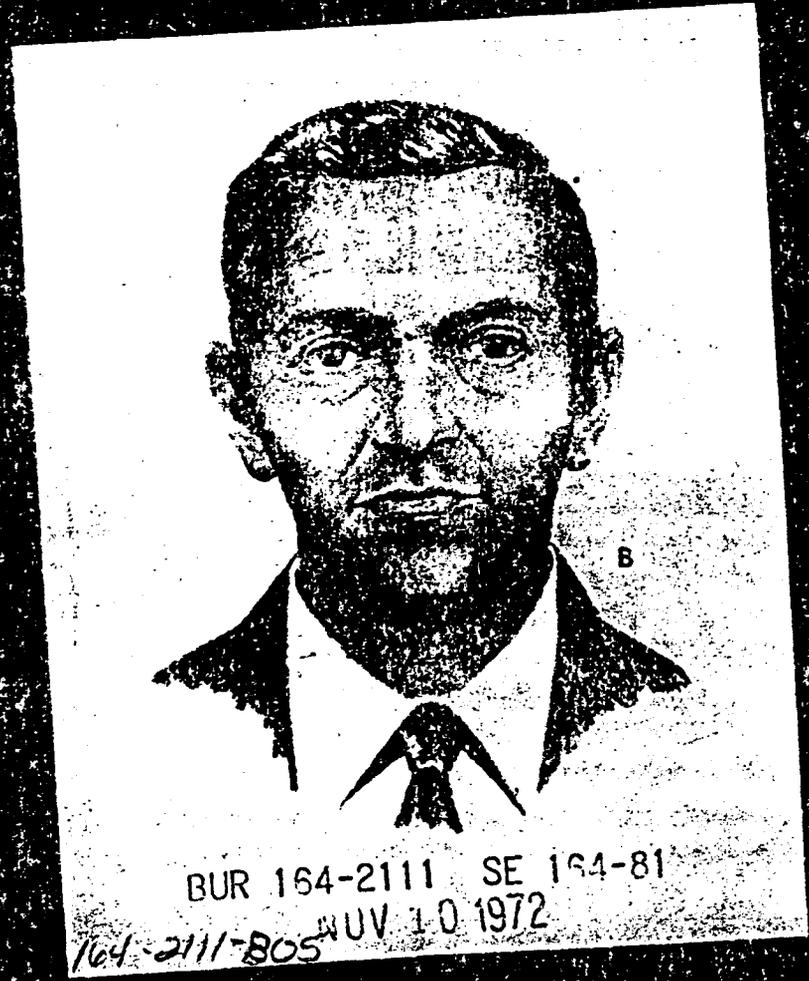
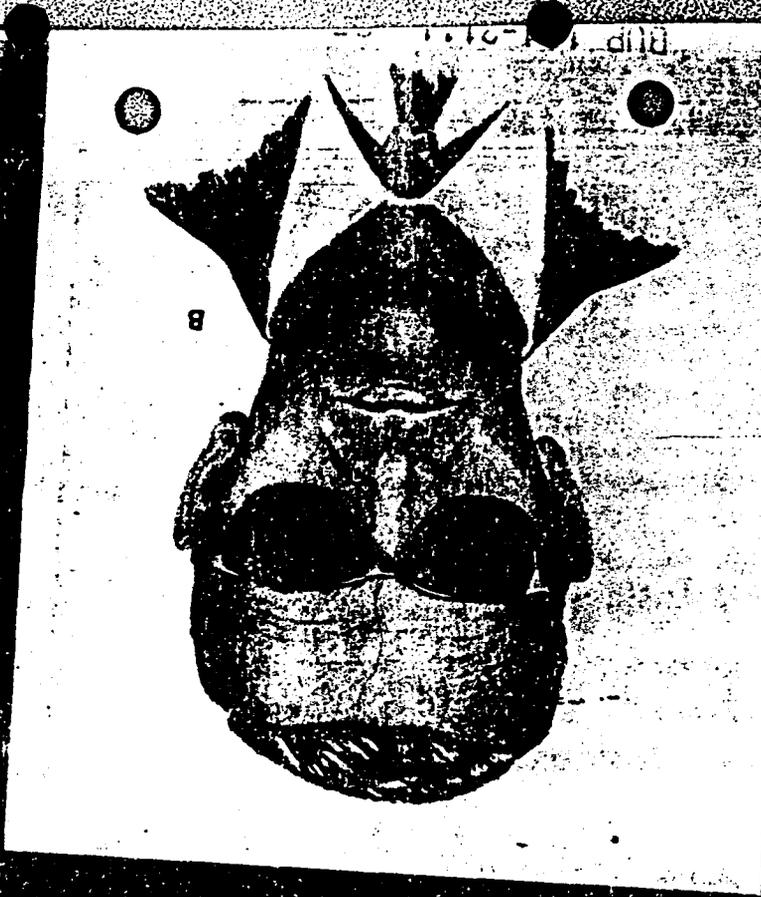
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**A NON-STORY**—When L.A. began this series it knew—but didn't tell its readers—that its "D. B. Cooper" was not an airplane hijacker but, according to FBI charges, only a con man.



BUR 164-2111 SE 164-81  
NOV 10 1972  
164-2111-805

1 STAN PITKI  
2 United States Attorney  
3 1012 United States Courthouse  
4 Seattle, Washington 98104  
5  
6 (206) 442-7970

7 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
8 WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON  
9 AT SEATTLE

10 168-720

11 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

12 Plaintiff,

13 NO.

14 v.

15 WILLIAM JOHN LEWIS, a/k/a,  
16 JACK LEWIS, and DONALD SYLVESTER  
17 MURPHY,

18 INFORMATION

19 Defendants.

20 The United States Attorney Charges that:

21 COUNT I

22 1. Beginning on or about February 1, 1972 and  
23 continuing thereafter through or about May 2, 1972, within  
24 the Western District of Washington, defendants WILLIAM JOHN  
25 LEWIS (also known as Jack Lewis) and DONALD SYLVESTER  
26 MURPHY devised and intended to devise a scheme and artifice  
27 to defraud Karl Payne Fleming, Newsweek Magazine, Platypus  
28 Publications, and other persons, businesses and corporations,  
29 by means of the following false and fraudulent pretenses,  
30 representations and promises, well knowing the same would  
31 be and were false when made, for the purpose of obtaining  
32 money in excess of \$5,000 by means thereof.

33 164-2111-833

1 2. was a part of said scheme and artifice to  
2 defraud that on or about February 1, 1972, WILLIAM JOHN  
3 LEWIS phoned Karl Fleming in Los Angeles, California; that  
4 defendant LEWIS identified himself as "Seth Thomas" and  
5 told Fleming that he could arrange an interview between  
6 Fleming and "D. B. Cooper."

7 3. It was further a part of said scheme and artifice  
8 to defraud that on or about February 13, 1972, defendant  
9 WILLIAM JOHN LEWIS made a reservation for Karl Fleming at  
10 the Swept Wing Inn, Seattle, Washington.

11 4. It was further a part of said scheme and artifice  
12 to defraud that on or about February 16, 1972, defendant  
13 WILLIAM JOHN LEWIS met with Fleming at the Swept Wing Inn,  
14 Seattle, Washington, and informed Fleming that an interview  
15 with "D. B. Cooper" would be arranged by WILLIAM JOHN LEWIS  
16 for the sum of \$45,000, payable in three installments; and  
17 that defendant WILLIAM JOHN LEWIS knew said representation  
18 and promise would be and was false when made.

19 5. It was further a part of said scheme and artifice  
20 to defraud that on or about February 23, 1972, defendants  
21 WILLIAM JOHN LEWIS and DONALD SYLVESTER MURPHY met with Karl  
22 Fleming at the Edgewater Inn, Seattle, Washington, and  
23 represented that defendant MURPHY was "D. B. Cooper," well  
24 knowing said representation would be and was false when  
25 made.

26 6. It was further a part of said scheme and artifice  
27 to defraud that on or about February 23, 1972, defendants  
28 WILLIAM JOHN LEWIS and DONALD SYLVESTER MURPHY took the sum  
29 of \$30,000 from Karl Fleming as payment for an interview  
30 with "D. B. Cooper."