

1

00:00:00,560 --> 00:00:10,563

During the weaning hours of Thanksgiving Eve 1971, a Boeing 727 leaves Portland bound for Seattle.

2

00:00:10,563 --> 00:00:17,564

This plane and its passengers will become the most infamous skyjacking in American history.

3

00:00:17,564 --> 00:00:29,568

A man called D.B. Cooper by the news media jumped from the plane over dense forests carrying four parachutes and \$200,000.

4

00:00:29,568 --> 00:00:38,570

Why is the crime still unsolved? Who is Cooper? Where is the money today?

5

00:00:45,572 --> 00:00:55,574

The day before Thanksgiving 1971 was busy as usual for air traffic. The air corridor between Portland and Seattle was crowded.

6

00:00:55,574 --> 00:01:03,576

By mid-afternoon, the bulk of departing passengers had left Portland International Airport.

7

00:01:03,576 --> 00:01:13,579

At approximately 2 o'clock, a man calling himself Dan Cooper arrived at one of the seven entrances to the terminal.

8

00:01:13,579 --> 00:01:27,583

As recreated for in search of, he passed anonymously through the 2,500 people who still remained.

9

00:01:27,583 --> 00:01:37,585

Flight 305, a milk run originating in Washington, D.C., was on schedule for its quick stopover in Portland.

10

00:01:37,585 --> 00:01:52,589

Dan Cooper purchased the ticket with cash for the last leg of the flight, Portland to Seattle.

11

00:01:52,589 --> 00:01:58,591

The airline clerk who sold him his ticket did not take any special notice of Cooper.

12

00:01:59,591 --> 00:02:14,595

Later, through an error in newspaper reporting, he was incorrectly identified as D.B. Cooper, not Dan Cooper, a mistake which often continues to this day.

13

00:02:15,595 --> 00:02:27,598

At 2.30, boarding began for flight 305. Cooper was the 36th passenger to board the plane.

14

00:02:31,599 --> 00:02:36,601

Loading of both cargo and passengers was complete by 2.45.

15

00:02:37,601 --> 00:02:45,603

The 727 carrying Cooper and his fellow passengers swung out onto the airport runways in the early twilight.

16

00:02:45,603 --> 00:02:51,604

Portland Tower cleared flight 305 for takeoff at 2.58 p.m.

17

00:02:51,604 --> 00:02:56,606

The plane was lifting off when Cooper approached the stewardess and gave her a note.

18

00:02:56,606 --> 00:03:02,607

It demanded \$200,000 in \$20 bills and four parishes.

19

00:03:03,608 --> 00:03:09,609

Everything was to be delivered to him when the plane landed in Seattle.

20

00:03:09,609 --> 00:03:17,611

The Skyjacker, calling himself Cooper, was the first American to hold a plane and its passengers for ransom.

21

00:03:17,611 --> 00:03:26,614

He established the dangerous precedent of air piracy for financial extortion, which is still copied by many terrorists today.

22

00:03:26,614 --> 00:03:36,616

But in Cooper's case, it was an act of pure greed. It was not a social protest, not an outcry for political justice.

23

00:03:36,616 --> 00:03:40,617

Cooper's only motivation was the money.

24

00:03:43,618 --> 00:03:47,619

The way in which he carried out his crime was coldly calculated.

25

00:03:47,619 --> 00:03:54,621

He reinforced his demands by opening a briefcase and showing the stewardess what appeared to be a bomb.

26

00:03:54,621 --> 00:04:04,623

The stewardess reported directly to the captain, who then communicated the Skyjacker's demands to the airlines and the FAA.

27

00:04:04,623 --> 00:04:14,626

Ralph Himmelsbach, an FBI veteran with 29 years service, was notified of a skyjacking in progress.

28

00:04:15,626 --> 00:04:25,629

Flight 305 from Portland to Seattle normally takes 36 minutes. This day, it would last more than two hours.

29

00:04:25,629 --> 00:04:30,630

Two of the passengers on that flight were Richard and Barbara Simmons.

30

00:04:30,630 --> 00:04:41,633

They had asked us to remain in our seats. And of course, after two hours in the air, I felt an urge to go back to the men's restroom and got up and walked down the aisle.

31

00:04:41,633 --> 00:04:46,634

And noticed the expression of the stewardess was rather horrified.

32

00:04:46,634 --> 00:04:55,637

She glanced first at me walking up the aisle and then at B.B. Cooper and at the handbag by his side.

33

00:04:55,637 --> 00:05:00,638

And then back at me again as if, why are you doing what you're doing?

34

00:05:00,638 --> 00:05:08,640

But as I walked past her into the men's room, he turned around and looked very intently at me.

35

00:05:08,640 --> 00:05:13,641

And I got a pretty good look. I thought it rather strange that he was that interested in me.

36

00:05:13,641 --> 00:05:21,643

And so I got a pretty good impression of him. He was very alert and very much in command of the situation.

37

00:05:21,643 --> 00:05:27,645

He knew what was going on and he was watching carefully every move of every passenger.

38

00:05:29,645 --> 00:05:35,647

Meanwhile, law enforcement officers and airline officials were now preparing to meet Cooper's demands.

39

00:05:38,648 --> 00:05:48,650

General Kossi, a parachutist with 16 years experience and 3,200 jumps to his credit, was asked to supply the four parachutes Cooper wanted.

40

00:05:51,651 --> 00:06:03,654

By 3.34, Captain Robert Scott was circling the Seattle Tacoma International Airport while airline officials collected the \$200,000 from a group of Seattle banks.

41

00:06:04,655 --> 00:06:09,656

Kossi was quickly preparing the parachutes to be delivered to Cooper.

42

00:06:09,656 --> 00:06:17,658

By mistake, one was a ground training shoot with his panel sewn shut, thus making it defective.

43

00:06:21,659 --> 00:06:32,662

At FBI headquarters, a furious effort was being made to record each serial number on the \$10,020 bills that would comprise a ransom demanded by Cooper.

44

00:06:34,662 --> 00:06:42,664

A plane finally landed in Seattle at 5.46 p.m. It was brought to a remote area of the runway.

45

00:06:42,664 --> 00:06:59,669

When we finally did land, we landed way off in the forest into the field, which I felt was just a way that showed that he had engineered things so that there was just no possible thing that could have gotten in his way.

46

00:07:00,669 --> 00:07:08,671

He allowed the passengers to be unloaded but kept them grouped out on the airport for close to 45 minutes in the wind, in the cold, in the rain.

47

00:07:08,671 --> 00:07:16,673

And a car met the airplane with the parachute and the money and we were rumored that that was there.

48

00:07:16,673 --> 00:07:25,676

But none of us were allowed to leave until that had all taken place and then we were allowed slowly to walk across the airfield.

49

00:07:25,676 --> 00:07:30,677

The flight crew and Cooper remained aboard the aircraft.

50

00:07:31,677 --> 00:07:40,680

At 7.36 p.m., the plane, refueled and prepared for flight, headed south in low clouds, wind and showers.

51

00:07:41,680 --> 00:07:47,681

Cooper demanded that the landing gear be kept down and displaying basic flight knowledge.

52

00:07:47,681 --> 00:07:52,683

He also ordered the wing flaps set at 15 degrees to slow the jet speed.

53

00:07:56,684 --> 00:08:06,686

The Air Force scrambled jet fighters from McCord Air Force Base near Tacoma to follow the plane from a safe distance.

54

00:08:06,686 --> 00:08:31,693

Trying to find and follow a low-flying 727, even with radar vectors, is like trying to find the proverbial needle in a haystack.

55

00:08:37,694 --> 00:08:43,696

About 20 minutes later, Cooper ordered the entire crew to stay locked in the front of the plane.

56

00:08:54,699 --> 00:08:59,700

At 8.11 p.m., the crew felt a sudden change in the pressure throughout the plane.

57

00:09:00,700 --> 00:09:11,703

Because of the inclement weather, no one, including the Air Force jets, ever saw Cooper jump or a chute open.

58

00:09:12,703 --> 00:09:19,705

The territory in which Cooper jumped was to be searched by planes, helicopters and trackers on foot.

59

00:09:20,706 --> 00:09:26,707

Both Washington and Oregon possessed some of the most impenetrable forests in the country.

60

00:09:27,707 --> 00:09:31,708

That Cooper would pick these areas may provide clues to his identity.

61

00:09:32,709 --> 00:09:37,710

For the present, all we have is an artist's rendering of his face.

62

00:09:39,710 --> 00:09:41,711

Who was Cooper?

63

00:09:46,712 --> 00:09:50,713

Why has this sky-jacking been deviled investigators for so long?

64

00:09:50,713 --> 00:09:59,716

We will have to retrace the crime and analyze the incredibly complex strategy Cooper might have plotted.

65

00:10:00,716 --> 00:10:06,717

Meteorologists, expert parachutists and the crew of Flight 305 were all questioned.

66

00:10:07,718 --> 00:10:11,719

That data and flight-law information were fed into FBI computers.

67

00:10:12,719 --> 00:10:18,721

The FBI concluded that Cooper jumped in a 4x6 mile area near Merwin Dam.

68

00:10:18,721 --> 00:10:25,722

Merwin Dam, 313 feet high and 1,250 feet wide.

69

00:10:26,723 --> 00:10:30,724

It holds back the Lewis River in order to create Lake Merwin.

70

00:10:31,724 --> 00:10:36,725

When Cooper jumped, the dam was crowned with a series of brilliant lights.

71

00:10:37,726 --> 00:10:44,727

If Cooper could have caught some glimpse through the cloud layers, he would have been provided with an unmistakable landmark.

72

00:10:44,727 --> 00:10:48,728

He would have known exactly where he was.

73

00:10:50,729 --> 00:10:55,730

Les Nelson, sheriff of Cowlitz County, the supposed Cooper landing site,

74

00:10:56,730 --> 00:11:04,733

assisted FBI agents in coordinating the search by procuring a helicopter from Warehouse Paper Company in Longview, Washington.

75

00:11:05,733 --> 00:11:11,734

We searched the area up the Lewis River to the south into Clark County,

76

00:11:11,734 --> 00:11:17,736

and north side into Cowlitz County and made several passes.

77

00:11:18,736 --> 00:11:26,738

We ran for several days there with an intensified search initially with patrol cars and some foot patrol,

78

00:11:27,739 --> 00:11:33,740

but basically just the overflight of both fixed wing and helicopters.

79

00:11:33,740 --> 00:11:40,742

We have had experience in the past with downed aircraft, searching for different individuals,

80

00:11:41,742 --> 00:11:50,745

and we have had comparatively good success at spotting people from the air who were lost or incidents where we've had plane crashes.

81

00:11:51,745 --> 00:12:02,748

It's my belief that had this man made a safe jump and had pulled the ripcord on that chute and it had blossomed out,

82

00:12:03,748 --> 00:12:06,749

we would have easily have spotted it from the air.

83

00:12:07,749 --> 00:12:13,750

But if the chute caught in the trees and hung vertically, the chances for finding Cooper would have been minuscule.

84

00:12:14,751 --> 00:12:21,753

Searchers would have been looking for a one square foot white splotch in the more than 24 square miles they were searching.

85

00:12:25,754 --> 00:12:32,755

Cooper could not have landed in a more inhospitable place. The landscape is laced with bogs and thickets.

86

00:12:33,756 --> 00:12:38,757

Is it possible that just such a setting helped Cooper instead of hindering him?

87

00:12:40,758 --> 00:12:45,759

Frank Heil is a survival school expert who trains men working on the Alaskan Pipeline.

88

00:12:46,759 --> 00:12:52,761

He is convinced that given the proper background, Cooper could easily survive in the wilderness.

89

00:12:53,761 --> 00:12:59,762

I like to feel that with the clothing that I have on my back and the tools of survival that I carry in my pocket,

90

00:12:59,762 --> 00:13:01,763

that I could live indefinitely out here.

91

00:13:02,763 --> 00:13:07,765

Now these tools of survival can be of course concealed in your pockets.

92

00:13:08,765 --> 00:13:12,766

No one would even know that you had them and maybe this is what Cooper did.

93

00:13:13,766 --> 00:13:23,769

This area that supposedly Cooper came down in would be in my way of thinking an ideal area. I'd selected myself.

94

00:13:24,769 --> 00:13:33,771

La Center, Washington, population 420, a tiny farming community nestled in a pine forest.

95

00:13:34,772 --> 00:13:39,773

It and another town, Ariel, were the closest to the supposed drop site.

96

00:13:40,773 --> 00:13:46,775

On the night of November 24, 1971, Cooper could have passed through the town unnoticed

97

00:13:46,775 --> 00:13:54,777

because everyone had crammed into the evangelical free church to attend the wedding of their popular high school music teacher.

98

00:13:55,777 --> 00:14:03,779

While it is most likely that Cooper was not from southwestern Washington, it is possible that he

knew the area and that he knew about the wedding.

99

00:14:04,779 --> 00:14:10,781

There is more. One highly questionable report concerns a light plane.

100

00:14:10,781 --> 00:14:26,785

People in this area claim that a small plane intermittently crisscrossed the skies over lonely farm fields near Ariel and La Center for a week preceding Cooper's jump, sometimes rendezvousing with a car.

101

00:14:27,785 --> 00:14:36,788

A mystery of who Cooper is may be unlocked by the man totally dedicated to finding the skyjacker.

102

00:14:36,788 --> 00:14:42,789

Ralph Himmelsbach, the FBI agent, still searches the area in his own plane.

103

00:14:43,789 --> 00:14:48,791

He believes Cooper was incapable of the intricate planning needed for the skyjacking.

104

00:14:49,791 --> 00:14:59,794

He was a desperate man, possibly had a criminal background. He was probably not very well educated.

105

00:14:59,794 --> 00:15:09,796

He may have been in a service capacity. He was wearing the type of clothing that would be worn by perhaps a bartender or a waiter.

106

00:15:10,796 --> 00:15:14,798

We don't know who he was, where he came from, or where he went.

107

00:15:17,798 --> 00:15:20,799

We may learn more about Cooper from the type of shoot he chose.

108

00:15:21,799 --> 00:15:25,800

Earl Kossy, demonstrating the normal freestyle parachute, explains.

109

00:15:25,800 --> 00:15:33,802

The type of parachute that the FBI used was a 28-foot parachute in a military type container.

110

00:15:34,803 --> 00:15:42,805

And this type of container in harness would be very, very difficult as far as finding the ripcord goes.

111

00:15:43,805 --> 00:15:48,806

In selecting this type of parachute, it would seem that he had some military background.

112

00:15:48,806 --> 00:16:07,811

He would encounter numerous problems. Number one, as he exited the airplane, he's likely to go unstable, which would also cause him some problems in reaching and locating and finding his ripcord.

113

00:16:08,812 --> 00:16:17,814

Aside from the fact that it was a night, since it's rainy and windy, if he got the parachute open, then the problems of the parachute would be very difficult.

114

00:16:18,814 --> 00:16:23,815

His landing would come up. I'm just sure if he pulled the ripcord, he made it.

115

00:16:34,818 --> 00:16:39,820

The sketchy evidence leads us to a peculiar but quite plausible conclusion.

116

00:16:39,820 --> 00:16:50,822

During the Vietnam War, 727s were extensively used. They turned up at both civilian and military terminals, carrying supplies and personnel.

117

00:16:51,823 --> 00:16:59,825

The 727 pilots were drawn from both Air Force and civilian sources. Cooper could have been any one of these pilots.

118

00:17:00,825 --> 00:17:05,826

If so, he would have had a familiarity with military parachutes and survival techniques.

119

00:17:09,827 --> 00:17:20,830

Who was Cooper? Dr. David Hubbard, a psychiatrist and leading authority on the psychology of skyjackers, has interviewed most of the individuals who've been apprehended for skyjacking.

120

00:17:21,831 --> 00:17:26,832

Hubbard has drawn a personality portrait of who he thinks Cooper is.

121

00:17:26,832 --> 00:17:34,834

As an individual, it was a personal failure who had lost the capability of earning a living in our society.

122

00:17:35,834 --> 00:17:42,836

In actual fact, Cooper was an early, middle-aged, mentally deteriorated ex-aircraft pilot.

123

00:17:43,836 --> 00:17:54,839

He had flown clearly in the Vietnamese War and had undoubtedly taken part in the air drops in which the tailgate of a 727 was used for dropping material.

124

00:17:56,840 --> 00:18:02,841

The evidence suggests that Cooper must have had military experience to be able to plan and successfully execute such a crime.

125

00:18:03,841 --> 00:18:09,843

Some experts consider this theory irrelevant, insisting that Cooper never even survived his jump.

126

00:18:10,843 --> 00:18:17,845

Seven years after Cooper committed the first American skyjacking, a scrap of evidence of his possible survival was found.

127

00:18:20,846 --> 00:18:22,846

Carol Hicks is a hunter and woodsman.

128

00:18:23,847 --> 00:18:27,848

While hunting with my hunting partner, I took off chasing a herd of elk.

129

00:18:28,848 --> 00:18:44,852

As I was going through the woods, chasing these elk, which I never saw, of course, I was going through the brush and lo and behold, there this piece of plastic was with some writing on it.

130

00:18:45,852 --> 00:18:48,853

I noticed that it was an emergency exit plaque.

131

00:18:49,853 --> 00:18:53,854

Of course, we collect the trash and stuff that we find in the woods, so I folded it up and put it in my pocket.

132

00:18:54,855 --> 00:19:00,856

The thought wasn't there about Cooper's plane, but I knew it was off an emergency exit off of the plane.

133

00:19:01,857 --> 00:19:06,858

I returned to where we started while emptying my pockets into a trash container there.

134

00:19:06,858 --> 00:19:11,859

I remember this was in my uppermost pocket and I showed it to my hunting partner.

135

00:19:12,859 --> 00:19:16,860

We decided that we should turn it over to the Sheriff's Department.

136

00:19:17,861 --> 00:19:31,864

My personal thoughts are that when Mr. Cooper opened the door on the back of that jet, that he was sucked out and fell to a very, very cold death somewhere up in the mountains there.

137

00:19:32,865 --> 00:19:38,866

For an instant in February 1979, the police and FBI thought they had their man.

138

00:19:39,866 --> 00:19:47,868

35-year-old Robert Wesley Rackstraw, arrested by the police on unrelated charges, was at first connected with the skyjacking.

139

00:19:48,869 --> 00:19:54,870

A few days later, law enforcement officers admitted he was completely cleared of the crime.

140

00:19:54,870 --> 00:20:01,872

To this day, Cooper, who he is, where he is, and where the \$200,000 are, remain a mystery.

141

00:20:04,873 --> 00:20:10,874

The FBI's Ralph Himmelsbach admits that Cooper's true identity is still unknown.

142

00:20:11,875 --> 00:20:17,876

He had to have been someone, he had to have had friends, family, associations, perhaps a job.

143

00:20:17,876 --> 00:20:23,878

He's missing. We don't know any more about him really now than we knew at that time.

144

00:20:24,878 --> 00:20:30,880

I expect that we'll keep looking from now on until we find him or find out what happened.

145

00:20:31,880 --> 00:20:35,881

We have a long memory. We build our reputation on perseverance.

146

00:20:36,881 --> 00:20:42,883

I can see no reason that would stop us from continuing the investigation to its conclusion.

147

00:20:42,883 --> 00:20:49,885

A federal indictment has been handed down in Portland against Dan Cooper, John Doe, for air piracy

and extortion.

148

00:20:50,885 --> 00:20:58,887

So far, not one dollar of the ransom has ever been found, nor the existence of a Dan Cooper ever been proven.

149

00:21:12,891 --> 00:21:21,893

Coming up next in Search of continues with a probe into the disappearance of mob connected union leader Jimmy Hoffa.

150

00:21:22,893 --> 00:21:27,894

Then agents investigating the murder of radio DJ Alan Berg uncover a white supremacist conspiracy.

151

00:21:28,895 --> 00:21:33,896

On FBI, the Untold Stories, and later tonight, Histories Mysteries investigates the case of Ted Hall,

152

00:21:34,896 --> 00:21:41,898

the teenager who gave away the atom bomb secret to the Soviets, at 8 here on the History Channel, where the past comes alive.

153

00:21:42,898 --> 00:21:44,899

