



DB Cooper and the FBI: A Case Study of America's Only Unsolved Skyjacking

Bruce A Smith

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The DB Cooper skyjacking is a stunning true-crime mystery. In 1971, a man known as DB Cooper hijacked a Northwest Orient airliner and after exchanging the passengers for \$200,000, he parachuted into the night skies north of Portland, Oregon. He has never been seen since.

Additionally, we don't know who Cooper was or if he survived, and nothing has ever been found of the skyjacking—no parachutes, no body or clothes, nor any of the money except for \$5,800 that a kid found eight years later buried on a Columbia River beach.

Adding to the intrigue, no one knows how the money got there or when.

The DB Cooper case remains the only unsolved skyjacking in the history of the United States. Nevertheless, hundreds of FBI agents hunted for Cooper along with scores of local police. This investigation has been termed “Norjak” by the FBI, an acronym of Northwest Orient Airlines hijacking.

Besides being a whodunit, the Norjak investigation also gives us a view into the workings of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and shows us that the FBI is a closed shop. The Bureau only tells us what they want us to know, and only when they want us to know it.

Thus, determining the facts beyond the headlines and cursory press releases has been difficult. Currently the FBI has clammed-up on Norjak, which makes the federal investigation a mystery as well.

This dynamic is troubling since it is increasingly evident from the work of open-sourced sleuths that the Norjak investigation is flawed. Arguably, it has been compromised or even corrupted, possibly sabotaged by political pressures.

Most damning is the FBI's loss of its most valuable piece of evidence: the eight cigarettes butts Cooper left on the plane, which contains his dried saliva and is the ideal substance to reveal the skyjacker's DNA.

Worse, the butts were not secured in the evidence locker at the FBI's Seattle office, which is the “Office of Origin” for Norjak and should have been the repository for such important artifacts. Rather, they were stored in Las Vegas due to a bureaucratic turf battle.

Worst though, the cigarette butts went missing only after their true value was realized. Adding to this disaster, the documentation of the saliva findings is also missing.

Similarly, a Norjak FBI agent, Jeremy Blauser, vanished shortly after his assignment to the case in 2008.

But perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the investigation is the murder of Norjak's parachute expert, Earl Cossey.

Cossey was a key figure in assessing Cooper's skydiving abilities for the FBI, but over the years Cossey told

plenty of lies and half-truths to the public. Now many wonder if he was killed because his deceitfulness puts the FBI in a critical light.

In addition, the red warning flags flying over the FBI's investigation are many. Besides a missing cop and a dead consultant, they include seemingly minor aspects of the case, such as the Bureau's inability to pinpoint Cooper's exact landing area, or why they delayed their major ground search for five months.

Yet, to evaluate the actions of the FBI it is necessary to fully understand the skyjacking.

Cooper's actions were straightforward.

The day before Thanksgiving, DB Cooper commandeered Flight 305, a NWO 727 inbound to Seattle. He used a bomb in a briefcase for persuasion, and at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport he released the thirty-six passengers in exchange for \$200,000 and four parachutes. After refueling Cooper ordered the pilots to fly to Mexico, and forty-five minutes later he jumped into the chilly November rains of southwestern Washington with his money in a sack tied around his waist.

Since nothing substantive of the crime has ever been found and the skyjacker's identity is still unknown, it is as if DB Cooper came from nowhere and returned there when he jumped.

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