

Ex-SC Man?

D.B. Cooper Search *2/4/79* Continues

Who is D.B. Cooper?

Law enforcement officials still don't know the answer to that question, but a former Santa Cruz man was once investigated in connection with the famous air piracy case.

Robert Rackstraw, a 35-year-old pilot who staged a fake airplane crash into the Monterey Bay in October, 1978, was investigated in connection with the nation's only unsolved air piracy case, according to sources contacted by The Sentinel and the Associated Press.

But, he has apparently been ruled out as a suspect in the case.

The hijacking occurred in 1971 when a man calling himself D.B. Cooper commanded a Northwest Airlines 727

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and parachuted from the plane with \$200,000.

He disappeared without a trace in the rugged terrain of southwest Washington state. His parachute and the money were never recovered.

In an article in the Seattle Times, law enforcement sources were quoted as saying that Rackstraw was one of more than 1,000 persons who were considered and rejected as suspects in the case.

"He was just considered a suspect," the newspaper quoted an unidentified source as saying. "I think the Seattle FBI office has already resolved that it wasn't him."

A Sentinel check revealed the FBI had considered Rackstraw a suspect because of his background as an expert pilot, parachutist and explosives handler.

However, he was not considered a prime suspect by the FBI.

Rackstraw attracted attention last October when he allegedly staged a fake airplane crash into the Monterey Bay.

His frantic "mayday" call and the report that the cockpit of his small Cessna was filling with smoke brought Coast

Guard searchers to the area where he reportedly ditched his plane.

But later, Coast Guard officials said they believed the crash was a hoax.

They found no wreckage in the area of the reported crash site. They also revealed that Rackstraw was facing felony charges of possession of explosives and writing bad checks that totalled \$75,000.

Last week Rackstraw was arrested in Southern California for allegedly attempting to duplicate a pilot's license at a Fullerton printing shop.

He has since been returned to Stockton to face charges of grand theft of an airplane, possession of explosives and check forgery according to the wire service.

At the time of his disappearance in October, he faced charges in San Joaquin County in connection with 150 pounds of explosives found in a Stockton warehouse, the Associated Press said.

Rackstraw was a former Santa Cruz man and a decorated Vietnam war veteran. FBI officials and local authorities said he was also an expert pilot, trained in scuba diving, parachuting and explosives.



(AP Laserphoto)

Artist sketches of hijacker D.B. Cooper.