



Rackstraw Talks From County Jail

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"You want me to say I'm not D.B. Cooper? — OK, I'm not D.B. Cooper."

His eyes twinkling above a full, reddish beard, the man in the red jumpsuit of a "high security risk" grins through the glass of the San Joaquin County Jail visiting room. FEB 6, 1979

With the tongue-in-cheek denial, it is obvious that Robert Wesley Rackstraw delights in tantalizing reporters and authorities alike with another obscure hint in the case that has perplexed the FBI for eight years.

His October disappearance in what proved to be a bogus plane crash only added to the image of a man who could pull off a crime as audacious as the D.B. Cooper skyjacking.

Rackstraw likes to mix political pronouncements with name-dropping across a wide spectrum of people, places and events. They include:

- Two months as a combat helicopter flight instructor in Iran in late 1977.
- A close flying relationship with three-star General Robert M. Shoemaker, whose plane Rackstraw says he

piloted during "Nixon's big push" into Cambodia.

- His days as a scuba diver and underwater instructor in Florida shortly after he left the service in 1971.
- His temporary "death" on the list of soldiers thought killed in Vietnam fighting, and his subsequent surprise reunion with an army buddy who put him to work in a Bay area petrochemical plant.
- The 35-year-old pilot, ex-Green Boret and sometime building contractor met with reporters Monday at the San Joaquin County Jail.

Though he denied any connection to the D.B. Cooper skyjack case, the man whose physical description roughly matches that of the elusive Cooper clearly enjoyed his role as the focal point of speculation about the case.

The discovery of explosives early last year in a Stockton warehouse leased by Rackstraw, his background as a pilot, and extensive military parachute training, first sparked the interest of authorities in a possible connection to the D.B. Cooper skyjacking Nov. 25, 1971, over Southwest Washington.

The man who signed on the Northwest Airlines flight

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Rackstraw

from Portland to Seattle as "D.B. Cooper" is thought to have bailed out the rear exit of the Boeing 727 jetliner somewhere over the rugged foothills of the Cascade Mountains with \$200,000 strapped to his body.

He had shown members of the flight crew what proved later to be a simulated dynamite bomb carried in a briefcase.

When Rackstraw first contacted the Record by telephone to arrange for the interview, he asked a reporter to bring some cigarettes.

First he asked for a package of Kools. Then, he added: "Now don't laugh, you son of a gun," and re-

quested a package of Raleigh filter-tips.

The report that D.B. Cooper had chain-smoked Raleigh filters during the skyjacking episode was one of the few details of the case reported in the local press.

Monday marked Rackstraw's first interview since his murder trial last summer in Calaveras County. He was acquitted then of murder charges in the death of his stepfather, Phillip Rackstraw.

"I am a political prisoner," he declared, charging the district attorney's office with persecution and jail authorities with unnecessary use

of solitary confinement.

Rackstraw, who says he left the Army early in 1971, won't say where he was around the time of the notorious Cooper escape.

His denial that he is D.B. Cooper comes flippantly, with a smirk. Yet in nearly the same breath Rackstraw suggests that actor Robert Redford has a movie script called *Delayed Reaction* "about flying and parachuting." Rackstraw says the script is laced with errors.

"You get ahold of Bob and tell him I said the script has problems," Rackstraw said, his mouth crinkling with amusement.

He claims he read the script about a year ago in Stockton. It was written, he said, by a man named "Robert Randolph."

Attempts to contact Redford or

anyone connected to his production company were unsuccessful.

The Cooper case has been the subject of several hoaxes in the publishing world since the 1971 crime.

Two Bremerton, Wash., men, one claiming to be Cooper, were convicted on fraud charges five years ago after they persuaded a Los Angeles publisher to print what purported to be a first-person account of the skyjacking. In another case, a national magazine paid several thousand dollars for an alleged story of the crime.

Rackstraw had just been returned to the jail after his arraignment in Superior Court on charges related to his disappearance last October in a rented airplane. Bail was set at \$200,000.

In that court session, Judge James

P. Darragh recalled the two bench warrants issued when Rackstraw allegedly faked a plane crash Oct. 11, just days before he was to appear on charges related to an alleged \$75,000 in bad checks and illegal possession of explosives.

Rackstraw says he hopes any notion that he is D.B. Cooper will be "put to rest" in his trial on the array of charges facing him. He also hinted that new information could emerge about the death of his stepfather.

Rackstraw weaves a litany of grievances against what he calls the "political-legal system."

He says "they" are "zeroing in" on him, but dances away from a question of who "they" are.

He is full of praise for the police and sheriff's deputies who have pursued him during his escapes, but harsh in his opinion of the district

attorney's office.

Sounding at times more like a political candidate than a man charged with several felonies, Rackstraw holds forth on the sorry state of education, taxation and the economy.

"Older people are being kicked out on the streets and being fed dog food, for crying out loud," he declares.

He identifies for a moment with the spirit of D.B. Cooper, a person he says "challenged the legal system and beat it."

"I think I stand for the American people, I really do," he said.