

WILLIAM GOSSETT:

THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY



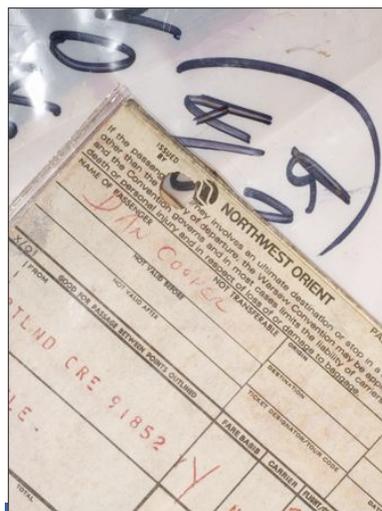
Earliest FBI sketch of D.B. Cooper (right), age-progressed FBI sketch (middle), and leading suspect William "Bill" "Wolfgang" Gossett (left), my great uncle.

The Story of D.B. Cooper

By Alex Stout

November 24th, 1971, a man buys a Northwest Orient airline ticket from Portland, Oregon to Seattle, Washington for \$18.72 under the name of Dan Cooper. The man takes his seat on the plane among thirty-eight other passengers. Cooper, in his forties, five feet and eleven inches tall, 180 pounds, brown hair, and brown eyes was also said to be quite “gentlemanlike” to the flight attendants with whom he joked on the flight.

Shortly after the plane steadied out at 30,000 feet, Cooper ordered a bourbon from the flight



The airline ticket bearing the passenger's name "DAN COOPER" in all caps.

attendant and lit a Raleigh cigarette. When Cooper finished his bourbon he asked the flight attendant for her attention. When the flight attendant came to Cooper's side he opened his briefcase displaying an array of wires bound to a sheaf of dynamite telling her "I have a bomb." Cooper lays out his demands requesting \$200,000 and four parachutes to be brought onto the plane when it lands in Seattle.

Later, the plane flies a pattern over Seattle as they await the feds to meet his demands. The FBI gets 10,000 \$20 bills—mostly printed in 1969, run photo scans to record the serial numbers, and retrieve civilian parachutes with "manually operated ripcords"⁽¹⁾ instead of military parachutes. The FBI contacts the pilot stating they've met the demands. They land at the Seattle airport and release the passengers leaving the crew onboard. They receive the loot, refuel, and take off in the dark, stormy night due southeast toward Mexico City per the Skyjacker's demands. The crew says he wasn't hostile and was still rather congenial on the second flight. The attendants say he had a few more cigarettes and bourbons to loosen up, removed his JC Penny clip-on tie, then headed to the cargo deck.

Since then, there haven't been too many leads. But there have been over a thousand cases of people claiming either they or someone they know was the celebrity skyjacker.

One of those suspects is very special to me, and it just so happens that he remains one of the leading suspects. The suspect named William Gossett is my mother's uncle who passed away in 2003.



Deteriorated \$20 bills, found by 8 year old Bryan Ingram along the Columbia River; Vancouver, Washington, 1980.

In Search of D.B. Cooper



Map of Cooper's Landing Area

There, Cooper straps the money bags to his body using ropes from one of the reserve chutes and secures his parachute. Cooper steps down to the aft, the plane still over Washington, flying at a slower 200 miles per hour at an altitude of only 10,000 feet, doesn't look back and jumps. The storm allows his body to fall through the sky undetected by the Air Force jets that followed. The plane landed in Reno, Nevada with no trace of Cooper. Feds collected two parachutes, his airline ticket, fingerprints from his glass of bourbon, and his clip-on tie with a pearl tie clip. The next morning, they scanned the forests of southwest Washington and found nothing.

1980, an eight year old Bryan Ingram finds \$5,800 in deteriorated \$20 bills along the Columbia River (the border between Oregon and Washington) in Vancouver Washington. The serial numbers match the numbers given to Dan Cooper by the FBI.



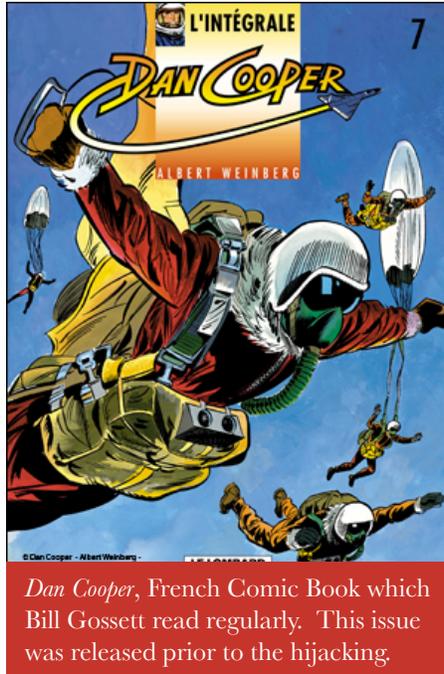
William Gossett. Retired from Army with Parachuting and Cargo experience.

William Gossett: The Leading Suspect

William, also Bill, was in the Air Force, transferred to the Marines for ten years, then transferred to the Army where he served in Korea, Vietnam, and a tour at the U.S. Embassy in France for nineteen months. There, he built an interest in French comic books.

Bill learned fluent French in elite Armed Forces schools enabling him to read the French texts. The comic book in which he took a particular interest was titled *Dan Cooper*. The cover of the latest release of the comic book before the hijacking displayed main character, Dan Cooper, a Canadian fighter pilot, parachuting with his team. This is a piece of evidence now in Bill's case as the D.B. Cooper suspect.

Bill retired a well-decorated veteran from the Army at Ft. Lewis in Washington in 1973, a short two years after the



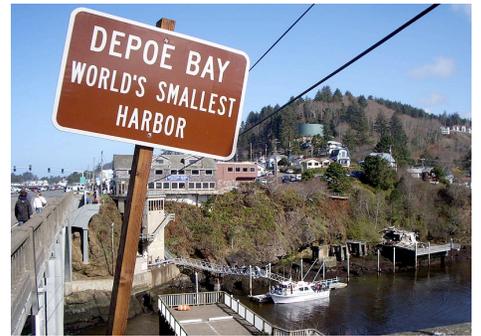
Dan Cooper, French Comic Book which Bill Gossett read regularly. This issue was released prior to the hijacking.



Wolfgang Gossett in his late life, sporting jogging clothes in Depoe Bay, Oregon.

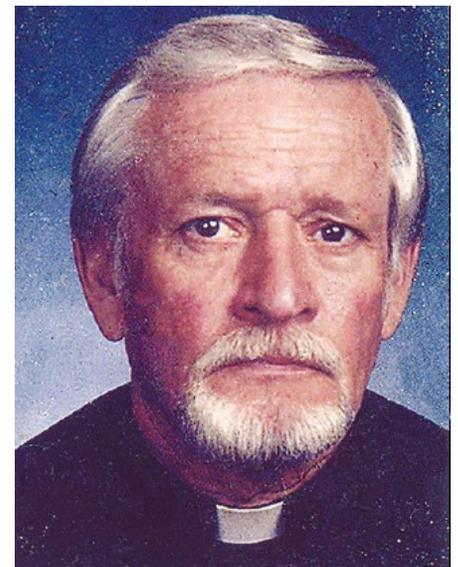
hijacking. Bill moved to Ogden, Utah where he introduced the ROTC program to Weber State University. He, then, became an FBI investigator where he specialized in money fraud, missing persons, and cults. The D.B. Cooper case could be categorized as a missing persons and money fraud case. This could suggest that Bill was educated enough to replace the original bills with counterfeits. His most successful FBI bust was on the Bagwhan

Rajneesh cult in Oregon where he was credited with saving a woman's life. Bill, went on to answer what he suggests was his calling; changing his name to Wolfgang and becoming a priest of the Old Catholic Church in Salt Lake City. In 1994, he moved



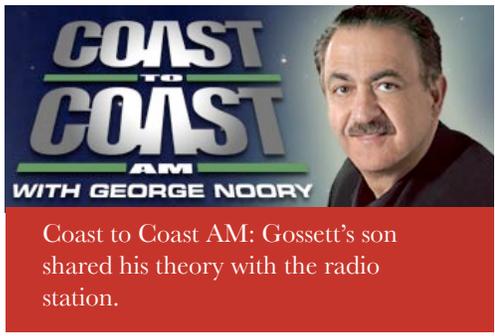
Depoe Bay, Oregon. Where Gossett dwelled in his latter years and his final resting place

to Newport, Oregon later retiring in Depoe Bay located on the sea shore. He became a public speaker at City Council meetings. He was often seen jogging the the Depoe Bay area bearing his military parachute badge on his headband.



Father Wolfgang Gossett of the Catholic Church Salt Lake City Diocese.

The FBI took a tip from Bill's son Greg Gossett in 2007 when he called into the radio show *Coast to Coast AM*. Greg said his father confessed to him "In 1971, I hijacked a plane. I'm known as D.B. Cooper." Greg never said anything to anyone in protection of his father. Greg and his father weren't



asked his father "Where's the money, then?" Bill replied by "grabbing a set of keys from a filing cabinet, and telling [him] they're the keys to a safety deposit box in Vancouver, Canada." So, questions remain. Did the hijacker survive the risky, stormy jump that night? Is there a safety deposit box with Bill's name on it in Canada? If

too close because of William's busy life. They got back in touch when Bill moved back to Utah.

Marilyn Smith, my aunt, was married to Bill for 25 years and was astonished when she saw the FBI sketch of D.B. Cooper in late 2007. She married him 10 years

after the incident and he never bluntly stated that he was D.B. Cooper, but would often refer to him "in the third person. He said things like 'D.B. Cooper would have hiked out this way' or 'he would have done this.'" Marilyn stated that "[h]e told a lot of stories...he would embellish stories. But, the D.B. Cooper story never changed."



Marilyn Smith, Gossett's most recent wife.

Greg said one time in discussion about D.B. Cooper, he

Special Thanks To Marilyn Smith.

