

# History's Mysteries:

Research, Discuss and Solve Some of  
History's Biggest Puzzles



**TOP SECRET**

DB Cooper: World's Most  
Famous Hijacker

<https://bit.ly/histmyst>

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GENERAL T. J. BURNS  
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Dear Agent.

Congratulations, If you're reading this you have been chosen for the most prestigious of assignments, to work for the Historical Secret Agents! (HSA)

As an HSA member, you will have access to highly secretive information covering thousands of years of human history. Each mission will task you with studying the past carefully to find new solutions to old problems! This is not an easy job and each mission will place you into difficult situations.

For each mission you will have to be resourceful and come up with an effective plan to change - or protect - history for the better!

To say this is an important job is a severe understatement. As the quote says above, understanding our past is essential for the preservation and improvement of our history.

Sincerely,

*T. J. Burns*

General T.J. Burns, Director HSA

"THOSE WHO FAIL TO LEARN FROM HISTORY ARE CONDEMNED TO REPEAT IT"

## D. B. Cooper, Skyjacker



*Police Sketches of DB Cooper. FBI.*

### **Before You Read**

1. Read this quote from the man commonly known as D. B. Cooper: "Miss, you'd better look at that note. I have a bomb."
  - a. What kind of person would say a quote like this? In what situation?
  - b. What would you do if a person said this to you?
  - c. What do you think this person wants?
2. Are there any famous criminals in your country's history? What made them famous?
3. Why do people sometimes root for criminals?
4. What makes some crimes interesting?
5. Do you know any famous crimes that have never been solved?
6. Is there a "perfect crime"?

## Vocabulary Definitions

Write the letter of the definition next to the matching word

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. hijack (v.) ____        | a. a device that allows you to safely jump from an airplane                                   |
| 2. ransom (n/v) ____       | b. to illegally take control of a vehicle by force or intimidation                            |
| 3. parachute (n/v) ____    | c. a place, like a forest, that is empty of people and very wild                              |
| 4. police sketch (n.) ____ | d. a drawing made from the memories of people who saw a criminal                              |
| 5. wilderness (n.) ____    | e. to demand you get something, usually money, before you release something/someone to safety |
| 6. sniper (n.) ____        | f. a person trained to shoot people from a long distance                                      |

**Answers at the end of the book**

## Vocabulary Questions

Discuss with a partner.

1. Would you ever jump out of an airplane wearing a **parachute**? Why or why not?
2. What if you were asked to describe someone for a **police sketch**? Do you think you would be good at remembering the details? Think of a stranger you saw recently (at the store, on the street, etc.) and describe them to your partner to draw. Compare their work with your memory!
3. How long do you think you could survive in the **wilderness** by yourself? What supplies would you want to have?

## Your Briefing

676 words - 1010L - 1200L

**Place:** 10,000 ft (3,000 m) in the air above Southwestern Washington State - USA

**Time:** November 24, 1971

It's the night before Thanksgiving, 1971, at Portland International Airport in Oregon. A man in his mid-40's wearing a black business suit, white shirt, and black tie pays \$20 in cash for a one-way ticket to Seattle, Washington. Northwest Orient Airlines flight 305 takes off on time for its 30-minute flight, climbing into the afternoon sky over the Columbia River and dense, dark forest to the north. The Boeing 727-100 levels off, and the man in seat 18C hands a note to the head flight attendant, Florence Schaffner, who puts it away in her purse, thinking the man with sharp, brown eyes is trying to give her his phone number.

Before she could walk away the man, who gave his name as "Dan Cooper" on his ticket, leaned in and whispered, "Miss, you'd better look at that note. I have a bomb." Cooper opened his dark briefcase, which contained eight red cylinders and



a battery. The man, who remained calm, polite, even pleasant, throughout the flight, demanded \$200,000 in US dollars (\$1.3 million in 2020 dollars), four *parachutes*, and a fuel truck to be ready in Seattle: he had *hijacked* the airplane.

The pilots radioed the demands to the airline, which agreed to pay the *ransom* immediately, and to the FBI. All the while, the other passengers were unaware; they were told that a “minor mechanical difficulty” was causing their delay as they circled above the Puget Sound just west of Seattle for almost two hours. During this time, the company rushed to get the cash, and the FBI found acceptable parachutes at a local skydiving school. All the while, Cooper, now wearing dark sunglasses, sat in his seat quietly smoking cigarettes and sipping his second whiskey and soda. The flight finally landed at 5:39 p.m., and Cooper ordered that all the window shades be closed, to avoid the possibility of the FBI *snipers* shooting him while the plane was parked. After the parachutes and 10,000 unmarked \$20 bills were delivered in a plain backpack, Cooper released the 36 other passengers, leaving only him, Schaffner, and the pilots. The silver jet was now full of fuel. At 7:40 p.m. Cooper told the crew to take off and head toward Mexico City.



Money recovered from the DB Cooper heist

Behind Cooper's plane, above and below, out of sight, two F-106 fighter jets

followed the plane through the black night as it headed south, back over the vast *wilderness* below. Cooper had told the pilots to fly as slow as possible and also very low. Suddenly, the pilot saw a red warning light which told him that the rear airstairs had been opened. A few minutes later, at 8:13 p.m., the crew felt a bump: Cooper had jumped into the freezing rainstorm above the empty pine and fir forests southwest of Mt. St. Helens. He was never seen, dead or alive, again.

Many say that Cooper couldn't have opened his parachute in time from that altitude, and that he died as soon as he hit the ground that night. Even if he did, the remote location, bad weather that night, and Cooper's lack of proper clothing or supplies all would have made it difficult for him to survive for long in the forest. On the other hand, there have been people over the years who have claimed to be D.B. Cooper, or to know who he was. So far, though, none of these have proven true, and the FBI closed the case in 2016. Some of the most convincing theories about the skyjacker's identity have included army veterans with parachuting experience, lifelong criminals, and people who worked for the airlines.

Nine years after the crime, a boy was digging in the sand on a beach just down the river from Portland when he discovered three packets of the ransom money totaling \$5,800. The money was badly damaged, but the serial numbers matched. The rest of the money has never been found. Did D. B. Cooper survive the jump? How did the money get there and what happened to the rest? Who was D. B. Cooper?

## Your Mission

Find out the true identity of D. B. Cooper, and what really happened to him. Determine if you should stop the hijacking before it begins.

## D. B. Cooper History Quiz

1. D. B. Cooper's flight started in \_\_\_\_ .
  - a. Seattle
  - b. Portland
  - c. Vancouver
  - d. Washington
2. Cooper said that he had a \_\_\_\_ .
  - a. gun
  - b. parachute
  - c. parachute
  - d. bomb
3. Cooper's escape was notable because
  - a. he hijacked a jet fighter
  - b. he hid in a fuel tanker
  - c. he parachuted from the plane
  - d. he disguised himself as a flight attendant
4. What did Cooper NOT demand as part of his ransom?
  - a. money
  - b. parachutes
  - c. guns
  - d. fuel
5. None of the ransom money was ever found.
  - a. true
  - b. false

**Answers at the end of the book**

## Discussion Questions

1. What do you think actually happened to Cooper? Why do you think this?
2. Is there ever a good reason to commit a crime such as skyjacking? Give examples to support your opinion.
3. Look up the song "D. B. Cooper" by Todd Snider. Do you agree with the interpretation in the lyrics? How does it compare with the facts of the story? (See "Supplement 8: Opinions vs. Facts".)



## Projects

1. **Be a Part of History to Complete the Mission:** Travel back to November 1971 at the departure gate at Portland International Airport. D.B. Cooper is about to board the plane. What do you do?
2. Write a first-person story about what you think happened on November 24, 1971, from the perspective of Cooper. What is he thinking? Why is he doing this? What is his story?
3. Many people see D. B. Cooper as a folk hero, a person who is liked a lot by people for something they did that was illegal or controversial. Do you agree? Like in the song, do you hope that Cooper is never caught? Why or why not?
4. Interview your classmates or friends and family:

Interview Question: : Do you think D. B. Cooper is a folk hero? Why or why not?		
Name	Answer	Reason
Andrew	No	Because he was a criminal

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40 units include an investigation of mysteries, some well-known, others obscure, such as:

- What happened to the colony of Roanoke Island?
- Who wrote Shakespeare's plays?
- Was there a way to keep Korea unified?
- Do aliens make crop circles or are they hoaxes?
- Was Genghis Khan a bloodthirsty barbarian or a wise and just ruler?
- Who robbed the Isabelle Stewart Museum?
- Who killed Tupac? Or is he still alive?
- What caused the hysteria around the Salem Witch trials?



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