

Psyching the skyjacker

Police tactics may be useful in deterring airplane hijackings but psychological controls might be more effective

by Robert J. Trotter

America's newest folk hero is D. B. Cooper, the parachuting skyjacker who bailed out of a commercial jet with a \$200,000 ransom from the airline. T-shirts caricature the successful bandit with parachutes, money and slogans ("D. B. Cooper—Where are you?" and "Skyjacking, the only way to fly"). A pop record makes a profitable joke of the exploit and proclaims Cooper (probably a phony name) a modern-day Robin Hood. Young children are beginning to idolize him the way previous generations idolized Bonnie and Clyde.

Children, however, are not Cooper's only fans. In the two months following his Thanksgiving eve jump he had six distinct imitators, says Donald G. Hubbard, a practicing Dallas psychiatrist and a consultant to the Department of Transportation's Federal Aviation Administration.

The parachute gambit adds a new dimension to the skyjacking game—a game the airlines have been losing. But it could have been predicted, says Hubbard. In 1969, as a consultant to the Bureau of Prisons, he began psychiatric interviews of captured skyjackers. He found that ten percent of them were parachutists and an above normal percentage of them were interested in parachuting. Knowledge of this trait could have been used to predict the parachuting hijacker, but more important, says Hubbard, such information could have been used, to stop hijacking before parachuting became a part of it. Skyjacking is not a fixed phenomenon, he says. "As long as it is allowed to dribble along it will be open to innovative additions."

Hubbard bases his beliefs on inter-



Psychiatrist Hubbard has interviewed 40 skyjackers, including one Jan. 29 while the skyjacking was in progress. The mentally ill criminal was later wounded and captured by an FBI agent.

views with 40 of the 128 captured skyjackers. The number of subjects is relatively small but "it is a strange thing," he notes, "that in any one crime as many as a quarter of those who have ever committed it have been studied." As a result he believes he has been able to draw an accurate composite picture of the skyjacker.

Paranoid schizophrenia is the general diagnostic label he gives to this particular type of criminal. In more than half the cases studied the skyjackers had previous hospitalization with that diagnosis. This, however, could apply to 8 million Americans. Hubbard says there are specifics that could apply to the typical skyjacker.

Most are men. They are generally from the lower end of a middle-sized family. In many cases there is a younger sister in whom they have an inordinate sexual interest. The father is generally a violent alcoholic and the mother a religious fanatic. Between them is an unbridgeable chasm that the child learns early on to run back and forth across, just as he subsequently runs back and forth across state and country boundaries. "There is a replication of his childhood behavior in his adult crime," says Hubbard.

This flight may take the form of skyjacking because these men have a preoccupation with flying. Ten of the first twenty skyjackers interviewed by Hubbard were subject to extensive and protracted dreams of unaided flight—the same dreams many young children have at about five years of age. This is a phenomenon that would be expected in about one out of 1,000 men at the age of 35.

The flight dreams may be due to a faulty sense of balance, Hubbard speculates. Extensive tests to prove this theory were not allowed in the prison setting, but Hubbard says behavioral responses were indisputable in one-fourth of the cases, strong in half the cases and present to some extent in every instance. For example, when asked to stand on a point and rotate, the skyjackers were not able to do so without losing their balance. Instead, they tried to walk slowly around a three- or four-foot circle. Even this, says Hubbard, they could not do more than a few times.

This reaction may be due to a faulty otolith (the inner-ear organ essential for balance). Hubbard cites the work of Lawrence C. Erway (SN: 1/2/71, p. 15). Autopsies by Erway showed that albino mice with a faulty sense of balance had faulty otoliths.

This faulty sense of balance also shows up in the skyjacker's childhood. Not infrequently, says Hubbard, he is as old as three before he learns to stand up and walk. This difficulty leads to a kind of childhood incoordination in which the child has trouble playing marbles, skating and riding a bicycle—inabilities that cause him to be rejected by his masculine peers.

The skyjacker's schoolwork is generally poor. He usually does not join in school activities, and most drop out by the 10th grade. In what would be highschool and college years the future skyjacker does not date. Hubbard says most of them are shy and timid in the sexual sphere, given to great fantasies but no action. Almost every one of them said to him in the same words: "I never dated. I didn't know how to ask."



FBI marksmen zero in on a skyjacker at Kennedy. Hubbard says medication, not assassination, is the answer.

The skyjacker continues to limp through life with a little bit of military service, a number of unimportant jobs and no friends. By the 29th year he has become separated from the world around him. Personal incompetence begins to show dramatically. He experiences sharp interpersonal failures. If he marries it is usually to an aggressive woman who insults his sexuality and eventually leaves him for another man. "All the forces in life converge in one moment in which there is an impulsive act," says Hubbard.

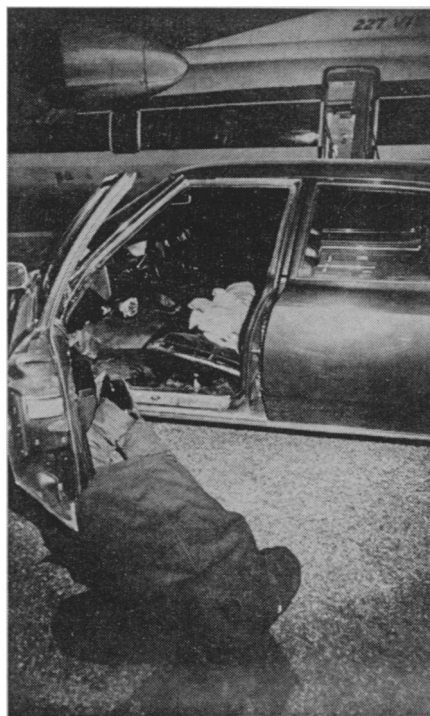
Almost every skyjacking has been an impulsive act. Some are planned only two minutes ahead of time, some while on the plane and some while in the ticket line. Very few, says Hubbard, were planned more than 12 hours ahead.

This picture contains the elements of paranoid schizophrenia, but there may also be a new psychiatric syndrome involved, says Hubbard. Knowledge of it could and should have been used to put a stop to skyjacking, he feels.

But the Government has relied on police tactics: controls in the airport (searching passengers and luggage), on the plane (sky marshals) and after capture (imposing up to 50-year sentences for the crime). A new tactic, having a sharp-shooter pick off the skyjacker, has also been tried.

The extensive searches have been effective to some extent (screening for firearms and weapons produced 350 arrests in 1971) but skyjackings have taken place even after these precautions. Also, airlines are not always willing to make passengers put up with the inconvenience posed by searches. A survey

of passenger attitudes toward airline security was conducted by Michael R. Cooper, Victoria E. Fein, Paul V. Washburn and Charles E. Boltwood of the Organizational Research Service at Ohio State University in Columbus. Most passengers feel that a thorough inspection of all luggage would be the most effective security procedure. These same passengers, however, think it would be inconvenient and say they are not willing to pay a five percent increase in fare for the extra security measures.



Wide World Photo

Skyjacker slain at Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

The sky marshal program, headed by Benjamin O. Davis, has also been effective, but at least one skyjacking has been successful with a sky marshal on board. Davis denies that the program is being discarded because it has been ineffective. But, in fact, he announced last month that his force will be cut from the present 1,500 to 750.

The strict penalty deterrent and the shooting of hijackers may also be effective, but Hubbard doubts it. He says most skyjackers have an obsessive death wish anyway and are subconsciously looking for a means of death at the hands of another person. On Jan. 27, a skyjacker was slain at Poughkeepsie, N.Y., by an FBI shotgun blast after an abortive attempt to imitate the Cooper caper. Instead of deterring potential skyjackers the shooting probably helped to trigger yet another (more violent) attempt only 18 hours later at Kennedy airport in New York City. "This," says Hubbard, "refutes the FBI position that killing decreases the phenomena. Medication, not assassination, is needed."

The only true deterrent, he believes, must take effect before the potential skyjacker even goes to the airport. Every skyjacker interviewed by Hubbard stated he would not have attempted the act had he known he would be returned immediately to the country from which he escaped. International agreements to this effect could therefore have put a stop to many hijackings. This, of course, presumes that agreements could be reached with countries the United States does not recognize. One of these, Cuba, has been a prime target for skyjackers.

Hubbard admits that it may be too late for this tactic. "The game has changed as of Thanksgiving eve," he says, "and diplomacy won't work as long as skyjackers are parachuting out over our own country. Now we have two kinds of cats." Different psychological deterrents must be put into play.

Here the media could be helpful. "It is perfectly damned obvious," says Hubbard, "that the media have helped to keep this game going by making it seem exciting." Skyjackers are prone to idolization and imitation. "They are like small boys," he says, "acting out a play for which they have read the script."

Instead of dramatizing skyjackings, Hubbard suggests that the media emphasize the sexual inadequacy of skyjackers. Perhaps potential skyjackers would then see the crime as humiliating rather than exciting.

The Airline Pilots Association, a group much interested in skyjacking, agrees with Hubbard's call for a psychiatric evaluation of the crime. In

November ALPA asked the FAA to start a study by an independent group of qualified psychiatrists of all current and future hijackers in custody. In a letter to Davis, ALPA president John J. O'Donnell wrote that his association "believes that when developing and evaluating a system to deter hijackings, prime consideration should be given to the motives and reactions of the criminal." In addition to deterring hijackings, this information could be useful to flight crews by providing the basis for making more valid decisions when confronted by a hijacker.

"I agree that such type research is needed," replied Richard F. Lally, director of transportation security at DOT. He said in January that FAA's Office of Aviation Medicine "has such a project under consideration and will implement it subsequent to the resolution of funding and other problems."

The resolution of funding and other problems could take months or even years because of bureaucratic red tape, but Congress may do something to



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FAA

Will searches stop the skyjacker?

speed up the process. In response to the Jan. 27 skyjacking attempt, Sen. Clifford Case (R-N.J.) suggested in a telegram to FAA administrator John H. Shaffer that "immediate and mandatory use of the so-called behavioral profile method of detecting hijackers on the ground would be a useful step" in the effort to stop highjackings.

The behavioral profile method is similar to Hubbard's suggestion. It consists of a composite list of possible characteristics of potential skyjackers. The list is secret but is available to all airlines. Ticket agents, baggage handlers and airport employees can use it to help spot suspicious persons. All airlines, however, do not make use of the list. They are probably afraid of insulting and therefore losing passengers, says Gar Kaganowich, an aide to Case. "This escalation of hijacking with the move away from the Cuba milk run to the extortionist, escaping felon," says Kaganowich, makes it imperative that something be done, "and if the FAA needs more power or more money Sen. Case will do everything he can."

One week later, on Feb. 5, the FAA ordered the nation's airlines to screen all passengers before boarding. The screening consists of the behavioral profile method and magnetometers to detect metal or explosive devices. The magnetometers, however, will not be required at every gate of every airport and the rule does not apply to foreign airlines using airports in the United States.

If something more is not done, warns Hubbard, skyjacking will increase in 1972. He had predicted an increase because of the election year. "These men are not political," he says, "in the sense that it has always been claimed, but they are disturbed by electoral rhetoric. Add to this the parachuting and the game will go wild." □

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