Interview with Calvin "Rawhide" Papritz on 22 July 1984, by Bev Buckner for the Smokejumpers Oral History Project. OH# 133-84.

BB This is Bev Buckner interviewing Rawhide Papritz on July 22, 1984 for the Oral History Smokejumper Project.

RP Now one interesting episode that I didn't mention the other day, was when D. B. Cooper the first American skyjacker highjacked a plane over Washington State, an old friend of mine, a fellow by the name of Jules Bergman, who's the science editor for ABC News in New York, gave me a call in about four hours of the happening. And I was really surprised, and Jules said, "Rawhide," he said, "I remember... I remember you, you're a jumper." He said: "And this is a parachuting operation." And he started asking me all sorts of questions: Did I think that D. B. Cooper could have done it... could have pulled it off? Because at that time they still didn't know whether he had made it with the money. And I answered some of the questions as it relates to my knowledge of smokejumping and a bit of sky diving. And he said, "Well, great! I'll get back to you." So, a day later he gives me another call and he says: "I've come up with this wild idea. Would you duplicate D. B. Cooper's jump if I can get the plane?" And I hesitated for about thirty seconds and I said: "Possibly, if I can talk with the Boeing engineers about the aerodynamics around the aircraft; if I can get ten or twelve practice jumps with the equipment that I'd be using; and if we can jump over the Puyallup area near Tacoma, which is a very open area away from power lines et cetera; I would consider it." And he was very excited about that, he said he had the tentative approval of his boss. And so, things were operating very fast, because he wanted because he wanted it... this is, in essence, what he wanted me to do. In the, I think it was a 727 jet, they would open up the stair well as they figured D. B. Cooper did and I'd walk down the stair well, exit the aircraft with chaser planes following. They would film it from inside, they would film it from the ground, and they would film it from the chaser plane and have a scoop over all the other networks. This is how D. B. Cooper did it and how, possibly, could have been successful, because here is Rawhide Papritz, ex-smokejumper going out the tail end of a 727.

And I called my folks and told my Dad... I didn't tell my Mother at that time... and told my wife. Well, the wife had trepidations, Dad said, "Go for it." And I had no... I had a little qualms, as long as I knew all the parameters of the air flow, in particular. And the next day he called up and... I must say I thought about it that night, I'd wake up and think about it. I wasn't so apprehensive as just, "Hey, could it really be done?" [I] wasn't convinced yet. [LAUGH] And Jules Bergman then after what seemed like a very long time in my life history, which was a relatively short time, called up around 10:30 the following morning and said, "Damn! Can't do it Rawhide. Boeing will not give me an aircraft. They don't want the public to know how it was done, and our coverage would show just how it was done." And so, there was a great deal of relief, but a bit of exhilaration.
Still. Then, a few years later...

BB What year was this, that they were gonna do that?

RP I can't give you the date. We'd have to back-track and see when the Cooper... you know, it was like '72? Something like that, I believe. I'm not good on date. I'm not a historian type. And a few years later, about... I think about six years later I went to a reunion, a class reunion in Everett, Washington and someone asked me, did I hear about Pete Rovick? And I said, "No, I haven't heard from Pete Rovick in a long time." Pete Rovick was a young fellow that I had grown up with. We spent probably our early years from, maybe eight years old on up into high school knowing each other, up to eighteen, so quite a long period of time. And I said, "No, what about Pete?" He said: "Well, there's some talk about he being possibly D. B. Cooper." "Ah!" I said, "You're kidding! And he started explaining why. He went into the Green Berets and did some work in Viet Nam, so he had that commando ability... low elevation jumping and pulling open. And he came back from 'Nam and was back for awhile and within shortly after the D. B. Cooper skyjacking he was known to have purchased an expensive aircraft and was flying in Alaska. And they didn't know where he got the money. So, apparently the FBI and the military intelligence had put things together and were looking for people with an M. O. [modus operandi] of having that jumping experience and have, I suppose, the gutsiness to pull something off like that. So, I got touched twice by D. B. Cooper. It was kind of a surprising thing.

BB Where did they get the name: D. B. Cooper from in the first place?

RP That's a good question. Oh! I think the airline registration, when you buy your ticket, it was there and that was... no body knows... actually, it was an alias. No, it was not.

BB So, was Pete Rovick actually D. B. Cooper?

RP Nobody knows.

BB Still don't know.

RP No, because then Pete Rovick disappeared and they weren't able to track him down.

BB How do you feel about that jump? Do you think that was... was it possible jump? What would the shock be like coming out of a 727?

RP Well, what I was going to do is... I don't do a lot of sky diving. As a matter of fact, I wanted to put him in touch with some sky divers more experienced so... it was very, very possible. If they were high enough. See, D. B. Cooper jumped at night and my understanding now, through an FBI contact, was that
they gave him one good chute and one bad chute. He asked for two chutes. Now, if he jumped with a good chute, he could have made it. If he jumped with a bad chute, he may... he's buried... his bones are some place. I think it very possible. You'd go out the back end with a great deal of turbulence, I would imagine, even if they slowed the aircraft down, and then you fall away from that turbulence, probably six or eight seconds, stabilize, open, and you're home free. Little doubt in my mind that he could do it. Even if they dropped it to 250 knots, or so, yeah.

BB How long did you think from the time that they realized that somebody bailed out, radioing in to a station, you know, air traffic controller or whatever, would it take to get somebody out there to the location?

RP Well, it's in a very isolated part of Washington State and it's a plantation forest... very large acreages.... They were out there the next day but if he had had a radio trans-mitter and had someone on the ground with him... but they found no evidence. They found no chute. They did, something like ten or eleven years later, they did find a cache of money in the mud along the Columbia River. And it was the money that was given to D. B. Cooper as part of the ransom money. Now, whether he hid it, hoping to come back for it, or whether it fell with him... and he... some people have suggested that he may have drowned in the Columbia.

BB Well, what do you feel really happened?

RP I suspect a person that clever, and I think it's really clever. That was very imaginative. He pulled off the first one... pretty high intelligence. I don't think he would bury money next to a river that could be flood prone and lose the money. I suspect he either was knocked out or he drowned in the Columbia. The money got lose, drift on shore, was covered by silt, and found later.

BB Do you feel that Pete Rovick is D. B. Cooper?

RP No. I think there was just some coincidence. I found it curious because it touched me and I had almost duplicated D. B. Cooper's jump. That was the curiosity there.

BB That's quite a story. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

RP No, that's it. I just thought that might interest others, and especially other jumpers who might read this at a later time.

BB OK, thank you.

RP You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW