

FBI fugitive "nailed" at 33,000 feet



By William P. "Bill" Kelly
(FBI Agent 1952-1980)

In 1975 I had to travel from my office in Miami to Los Angeles in connection with a long-since-forgotten obscenity prosecution. Taking one of the aisle seats in the "cheapo" section of the plane, I settled down for the five-hour nonstop flight.

Shortly thereafter a middle-aged, dark-haired, heavy-set male came down the aisle and stopped three rows in front of me. He was clad in a denim leisure suit and was weighted down with several gold necklaces, pendants, bracelets and rings. To myself I said, "This guy is the spitting image of the typical pornographer."

As the object of my attention started to sit, he looked in my direction and observed me staring at him. When our eyes met, he had an expression of surprise, if not plain shock. This just about convinced me he was not "right" and that he had pegged me for a lawman.

Somewhere over Texas one of the flight attendants stopped to talk to the "suspect," remaining there for several minutes. When she finally left him, my curiosity compelled me to follow her to the rear of the plane, where I identified myself as a federal agent. I asked her about her conversation with the suspect. She told me it was a coincidence that I should ask because he had told her he was a producer of pornographic homosexual magazines in Canada.

Bells went off - Bingo! I asked her if she knew his name. She said she did not, but that she would ask, and she did so, but she returned immediately, telling me he was asleep and policy did not permit waking someone for conversation purposes.

Naturally, I felt a bit deflated; however, within only a few minutes a call of nature turned to my advantage when the suspect got up and went to the lavatory. Remembering that

he was carrying a briefcase when he boarded, I walked to his empty seat and read his name off the briefcase ID tag.

I re-contacted the flight attendant and asked her to request the pilot to radio Los Angeles to determine if there was a "want" on this guy. Soon thereafter one of the pilots came to me to report that the FBI in Los Angeles held a fugitive warrant for this individual, who they reported had been living in Canada for eight years after fleeing the United States on a federal charge.

Once again - Bingo! I asked the pilot to request FBI agents to meet the plane and tell them I would "finger" the fugitive at the departure area, although no one else on the plane was even close in description to this showboat.

When the plane arrived, I got directly behind the fugitive. At the gate I saw two agents waiting for their gift from the Miami division. Also present was a woman whom I took to be the fugitive's wife.

The very last I saw of the group, the fugitive was being led away in handcuffs with the woman dejectedly

following. No one ever informed me of the case's outcome; however, I believe that in the annals of FBI history that was the very first time a Bureau fugitive was nailed at 33,000 feet.

— from *The Grapevine* (a monthly magazine of the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI in Quantico)

Bill Kelly retired from the FBI in 1980 after 29 years as a federal agent, most of the time spent in Miami. Fluent in Spanish, he was assigned to South Florida, shortly after Fidel Castro took over Cuba, to deal with the influx of Batista devotees and pro-Castro activists.

Most of his FBI career was spent defending public morality by battling the spread of obscene materials. He handled more than 1,000 obscenity investigations, including "Deep Throat" and the "MIPORN" series of national obscenity violators. Immediately following his retirement he volunteered his services as an adviser to the Organized Crime Strike Force of the U.S. Justice Department. He was later brought to the

Organized Crime Division of the Broward County Sheriff's Office by Major Nick Navarro (later Sheriff), who was nationally prominent for his strong anti-obscenity position.


Kelly is now eagerly sought as a speaker throughout the nation, not just because of his expertise in the area of pornography, but also because he knows how to reach people, how to get them fired up. He firmly believes Americans need to know just how depraved obscene material has become. He is also an invaluable resource for law enforcement

officers about obscenity and child pornography.

Married for 50 years to his very supportive wife, Virginia, Kelly is a unique blend of tough undercover agent and sensitive, thoughtful human being who never fails to bolster the flagging spirits of fighters who get discouraged along the way. He can summarize in one word the most important quality needed to win the war against obscenity: tenacity. Our nation owes him a profound debt of gratitude.

Look for an upcoming book by Peter Pavia early next year about Kelly's role in *The Cuba Project*.

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