

COPTER PRISON ESCAPER

TRACED TO S.F. BAY AREA

Mexico Prison Escaper May Have Landed in Sausalito

Joel David Kaplan, a 45-year-old New Yorker who escaped by helicopter from a Mexico City jail, is believed to have flown to Sausalito, the district attorney's office said last night in Mexico.

The district attorney said one of the two escapers, presumably Kaplan, was flown to Brownsville, Tex., and Sausalito after transferring from the helicopter to a Cessna single-engine plane Wednesday night at La Pesca, a Gulf Coast fishing village about 300 miles northeast of Mexico City.

Victor Velazquez, Kaplan's lawyer and an associate of Louis Nizer, said Kaplan was an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

"I don't know who helped him escape," Velazquez said. "I was open-mouthed when I learned the news. But it was a well-known fact that he was a CIA agent. He didn't try to hide it."

Velasquez told UPI that Kaplan's uncle, J. M. Kaplan, was one of the CIA's chief clandestine financiers. A few years ago a group of U.S. con-

gressmen charged that the J.M. Kaplan Fund of New York was a CIA conduit.

He said Joel Kaplan openly acknowledged he had done work for the CIA. "I often wondered what might have motivated him and a member of his family told me it was his spirit of adventure."

The FBI office in San Francisco said it was investigating the report.

Sausalito police said they had heard nothing about such

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a flight, and the Marin County sheriff's office also said it had nothing on the report.

A check of an airport at San Rafael said no flight from Mexico had landed. The airport at Novato also nearby did not answer its phone.

The district attorney's office said it believed that Carlo Antonio Contreras, 24, a Venezuelan who escaped with Kaplan from the Santa Marta Acatitla prison, had flown in a second Cessna to Guatemala.

It said both Cessnas had been rented in Phoenix, Ariz., and that the helicopter had been rented from Natrola Service, Inc., of Casper, Wyo. The report said the helicopter was piloted by Roger Guy Herschnner, 29, of Glendora, Calif., and was found abandoned last night near La Pesca.

The district attorney's office said the helicopter left the McAllen, Tex., airport Tuesday piloted by Herschnner, who picked up a tourist card in Reynosa and said he wanted to visit Mexico City. But he filed a flight plan to La Pesca.

According to the district attorney's reconstruction of the escape, Herschnner landed Wednesday at Tamuin, 70 miles west of Tampico, refueled and then flew to Pachuca. There he refueled again and flew to Actopan, 100 miles north of Mexico City.

The helicopter landed about dusk in a patio behind the prison dormitory where Contreras and Kaplan were cellmates. They quickly boarded it, and the aircraft returned to Actopan.

A plane took Kaplan and Contreras from Actopan to La Pesca, and there one of the men, apparently Kaplan, boarded a Cessna 210 with registry number N9462-X and with one Victor E. Stadler as pilot. The Cessna left for ito.

Another Cessna with the Brownsville, Tex., and Sausalito numbers N9364-X, but whose pilot was not identified, took off about the same time and was believed to be headed for Guatemala with Contreras.

Kaplan was sentenced in 1963 to a 30-year term for the murder of Louis Vidal, a New York businessman. Contreras

was serving a shorter sentence for fraud and robbery.

The district attorney's office said Kaplan's conduct at the prison had been good and there had been no indication he planned to escape.

The chief of security at the prison, Maj. Juan Tovia Martinez, his assistant, Andres Duenas Sosa, and five of his subordinates, including three guards who were on duty at the time of the escape, are being held for investigation, the district attorney's office said. The report added that those found responsible for the escape would receive "the strongest punishment."

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