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Copter Jailbreak Puzzle Deepens

By Keith Power

Police in Mexico City announced yesterday that Joel David Kaplan, the mysterious American fugitive from the great Mexican jailbreak, has a sister in San Francisco and she tried to contact him on "urgent business" four days before his escape.

Kaplan, according to Mexican authorities, headed for Sausalito after he was taken by helicopter from behind the high stone walls of Marta Acatala Prison last Wednesday.

Local law-enforcers, however, said they have not been contacted officially to be on the lookout for the 42-year-old former New Yorker, said by his attorney to be a CIA agent when he was arrested for murder ten years ago.

In a statement issued by the district attorney general's office in Mexico City, in-

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AP Wirephoto

JOEL DAVID KAPLAN
A sister in S.F.

investigators identified the fugitive's sister as Judith Kaplan and said she lived in San Francisco.

The Mexican authorities said the sister telephoned Kaplan's wife, Irma, last Sunday, in Mexico City and asked her to meet a "Mr. Dodge" at the Holiday Inn near Mexico City Airport.

Kaplan's wife was to take the man to the prison so that he "could speak to David to fix up an urgent business matter," authorities said.

The statement did not say whether the meeting was accomplished and officials refused to elaborate on it.

Thus the intrigue surrounding Kaplan's escape—with its implication of complicity by the CIA—appeared to deepen. The FBI headquarters

here would say only: "We are aware of the case."

Kaplan and a convict-accomplice took flight from the prison yard in a blue-and-white helicopter under the gaze of guards in four towers.

An inmate who attempted to join the escape at the last minute was booted away by the American and the aircraft whirled off into the Mexican dusk.

The Mexico City press, already calling it the most daring and embarrassing escape in Mexico prison annals, said the watching guards were so seville they almost saluted the helicopter, which was decked in the colors of the attorney general's office.

Mexican police officials investigating the escape said

they suspected cooperation from inside since they estimated it would have taken the helicopter six minutes to land, while the guards reported it all happened in seconds.

The attorney general's office said the four-seater aircraft flew 100 miles north to Actopan, where the fugitives switched to a Cessna 210 and flew on to Brownsville, Texas.

From there, both of them flew to Sausalito, the Mexican authorities said. First reports had the accomplice, a counterfeiter named Carlos Antonio Contretas Castro, taking a second plane for his native Venezuela.

The Chronicle contacted the attorney general's office in Mexico City and asked for

the source of the Sausalito destination.

A spokesman said "the report that the plane was flown to Sausalito, California, was part of the information gathered by the Mexican Secret Service and investigators of the judicial police in cooperation with other police forces."

Although he wouldn't say it directly, the spokesman indicated the "other" police forces were American.

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Kaplan, the mystery man in the case, is the nephew of the president of J. M. Kaplan Fund, a foundation which was described as being a conduit for CIA funds in testimony before a congressional subcommittee in 1964.

Kaplan's attorney, Victor Velazquez, said in Mexico City it was a "well known fact" that Kaplan was a CIA agent. This statement gave rise to lively speculation in the press and other quarters that Kaplan was the goal of a CIA rescue mission.

Velazquez said Kaplan was in Mexico on a secret mission in 1961 when he was arrested for the murder of Luis Melchior, a Puerto Rico-born American businessman who allegedly was involved in a gun-running operation for a group of Caribbean insurgents.

Sentenced to 28 years for murder, Kaplan was lodged in the sprawling prison in the south section of Mexico City on the dry bed of Lake Texcoco.

Five years ago he married Irma, whom he apparently met when she came to the prison to visit another inmate. A year ago, his wife, who under Mexican law is allowed conjugal visits to the prison, had a baby.