

SEP 6 1971
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By ANTHONY RIPLEY

Special to The New York Times

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It is a world populated by part-time private investigators, by restless former members of the United States Army Special Forces, by ex-convicts and by citizens who hold respectable jobs and occasionally disappear for a few weeks.

It was a man known in this world, Victor E. Stadter, a 50-year-old Californian, who was at the controls of a small rented airplane that landed at Brownsville, Tex., shortly before midnight on Aug. 18 to add the last touch to an extraordinary prison escape.

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international intrigue and who, relatives feared, might die in a Mexican prison if forced to serve out a 28-year sentence for murder. Kaplan maintains that the murder charge is false.

Earlier that night while prison guards were watching a movie in the Santa María Acatitla Penitentiary near Mexico City, a helicopter dropped inside the walls, picked up Kaplan and another prisoner and disappeared.

Kaplan had been in prison nine years, and relatives say it was necessary to bring him into the United States legally so that he could claim an inheritance held in a trust fund in New York City.

So Mr. Stadter and Kaplan notified the United States

Customs at Brownsville that they were arriving and they were met, searched and then cleared. Kaplan is now said to be in the United States in hiding.

Sources in the paramilitary underground said the original estimate of the cost of the rescue was \$50,000. Whether that figure includes full payment for his rescuers is not known.

Mr. Stadter, who apparently masterminded the escape, was reached by telephone at his home in Glendora, Calif.

"Not another person alive knows this story but me," he said. "We were very careful so that no one person would know everything."

He added with a dash of cockiness that the rescue was "just a day's work, I've been doing this for 20 years."

Of Kaplan, he said that "Joel needs help" and that he would be kept in hiding until things quieted down.

In Sausalito, Calif., where

Continued on Page 2, Column 1

Kaplan's sister, Mrs. Judith Dowis, lives in a big Spanish mission-style house, there was an air of relief last week.

"I couldn't be happier," said Mrs. Dowis, a 40-year-old divorcee.

She said her understanding was that her brother could not claim his inheritance, held at the United States Trust Company in New York, unless he was legally in the United States.

The administrator of the trust, Barry Waldorf, contacted by telephone in New York, said only: "I am not free to give you any kind of a comment on anything to do with his affairs."

Not Sought by F.B.I.

A spokesman for the United States Department of Justice said that Kaplan is not sought by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Little formal interest has been shown by the Mexican Government in obtaining the return of Kaplan.

And in Mexico City, his attorney, Victor Velazquez, 74, said that no Mexican law had been broken in the escape.

He explained that there is a gap in Mexican law re-

garding escapes from prison. It is only a crime to break out of prison if violence is used.

"No violence was used," Mr. Stadter said. "There was nothing extra legal."

Mr. Velazquez said he was very happy that Kaplan had been freed because he was convinced he was innocent. He added, with a touch of humor, that it "is in keeping with the age of Apollo to escape upwards."

Served in War

Those who knew Kaplan before his conviction said he was intrigued by what one man called "the swamp of Caribbean politics" when he began working in his late father's sugar and molasses business after serving in the Navy in World War II. Kaplan grew up in Ridgefield, Conn., and attended the New Mexico Military Institute.

"His only interest was politics," said one source who has known him many years.

The same source said he was fond of intrigue and disguises and that he had used false glasses and a British seaman's identity when he entered Mexico in 1961. He was with three other men, one of them a business associate, Luis M. Vidal Jr., whom Mr. Valazquez described as a gun-runner.

Strange Business Connections
 Kaplan at the time was president of the American Sucrose Company and Mr. Vidal was the company's treasurer.

It was one of several unusual business connections Kaplan had. Another was Afratronics Incorporated, which was designed to assist the electronic and industrial development of new African nations. Afratronics had no assets or physical facilities, just a New York mailing address, and it listed four African leaders as "management consultants."

The body of a man said to be Mr. Vidal was found shot four times in the head and buried in a shallow grave in Mexico in November, 1961.

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28-Year Murder Sentence
 Mexican authorities thought



Associated Press

Joel David Kaplan

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Over the years, several plans to free Kaplan from prison were tried unsuccessfully. A source close to the family said that hundreds of thousands of dollars had been spent in escape attempts.

One plan involved hiding Kaplan in a laundry truck. Another involved attempting to bribe the prison warden to drive him out in the warden's personal car to meet a waiting jet airplane.

Another man carried 150,000 pesos—about \$120,000—into the jail in an attempt to buy Kaplan's release.

Health Reported Failing

Meanwhile Kaplan's health was reported to be failing in jail, and members of his family were increasingly concerned. His sister said he was suffering from emphysema, liver trouble and other ailments.

"He may be a vegetable by the end of his time there," wrote one of those who arranged escape attempts after his visit to Kaplan in the prison. "He goes through periods of deep depression, is at times desperate in mind, thought and actions—sort of grasps for straws to try and get out. As a result he is an easy mark for some fast-talking inmates with a sure plan."

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A Bell plastic-top helicopter was purchased from Natrona Services, Inc., a uranium-exploration company in Casper, Wyo., for an amount reported to have been \$25,000. It left an airport at McAllen, Tex., the morning before the escape, and, making several stops on the way, arrived in Mexico City on the evening of Aug. 18.

When it got to the jail, all but five prison guards were watching a motion picture, "The Altar of Blood," and the helicopter landed in the jail's large rear patio.

Kaplan and another prisoner, Carlos Antonio Contreras Castro, 36, ran to the helicopter. The pilot, identified by Mexican police as Roger Guy Hershner, 29, of Glendora, Calif., then lifted them out of the prison yard without a shot being fired or an alarm sounded.

Two hours before the helicopter arrived, Kaplan was visited by his Mexican-born wife, Mrs. Irma Vasquez Calderon de Kaplan, and a man identified as Harvey Orville Dayle.

Mrs. Kaplan, who was later arrested, told the police she had left her husband and Mr. Doyle alone while they "talked business."

Met by Stadter

Once out of the prison, the helicopter flew to Actopan, Mexico, where it was met by a light plane piloted by Mr. Stadter, according to Mexican authorities.

The three men then flew to La Pesca, Mexico, where Castro, who is a pilot and whom the Mexican police call an international swindler, flew off alone in a light plane, apparently for Guatemala.

Mr. Stadter and Kaplan then crossed the border. When they were outside Brownsville, they radioed that they were landing and identified themselves for United States Customs officials.

Since Mr. Stadter was once convicted in Federal District Court in Brooklyn for sale of narcotics, two customs men came out to meet the plane and gave it and its passengers an inch-by-inch search, Mr. Stadter said.

They were then released and flew off, reportedly headed for San Antonio, Texas.

Customs officials said the airplane was rented from McCreery Aviation in McAllen, Tex., but this was de-

nied by one of the company's officials.

"I wouldn't lease him an airplane to taxi across the airport," the official said in reference to Mr. Stadter.

Meanwhile Mr. Hershner flew the helicopter to a spot near the village of Lauro Villar, according to Mexican authorities. He caught a ride from a passing milk truck to Matamoros, Mexico, where he apparently crossed the border.

Prison Staff Arrested

After the escape, riot policemen surrounded the prison. The penitentiary director and 300 on the prison staff were arrested.

Mrs. Dowis, asked if she had anything to do with arranging or financing the escape, referred all questions to her attorney, Vasilios Choulos of San Francisco.

Kaplan's uncle, J. M. Kaplan of New York, in a telephone interview from his East Hampton, L. I., summer home, said, "Honestly I don't know anything about it." He added that he knew of the escape only from newspaper reports.

He said that F.B.I. agents had visited him at his home and that he told them his nephew was "an intelligent decent human being" who "always manifested innocence."

Kaplan's uncle said it appeared his nephew had been held in jail "just so he could be bled as a rich man's son."

He said his nephew had once said that he was an agent for the Central Intelligence Agency. He added that his own J. M. Kaplan Family Fund, a charitable trust, had been used some years ago to channel \$1.3-million in funds that he thought were from the State Department into a small school in Costa Rica.

Was C.I.A. 'Conduit'

He said that it was later revealed in Congress that the school was actually a C.I.A. "Conduit" and that he felt very badly about it.

He said the connection with the agency has been broken for some time. He added that any role his nephew might have had with the C.I.A. had nothing to do with his own philanthropic efforts.

Mr. Velazquez said he did not think the Central Intelligence Agency had been involved in the escape "because they would not have waited almost 10 years to get him out and they could probably have done so through official channels."

He said he personally did not believe Joe Kaplan was a C.I.A. agent, although he had no evidence either way.

The Kaplan family fortune is tied to sugar and molasses dealings, particularly in the Caribbean. In addition, J. M. Kaplan is the retired president of the Welch Grape Juice Company. His half-brother, the late Abrim I. Kaplan, who was Joel's father, also had lumber interests in New Mexico.

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Passages marked not included in version carried by STChronicle, same date.

Number in photo also omitted. Does "63" refer to year? Vidal's body found Nov 61 (column 3).

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