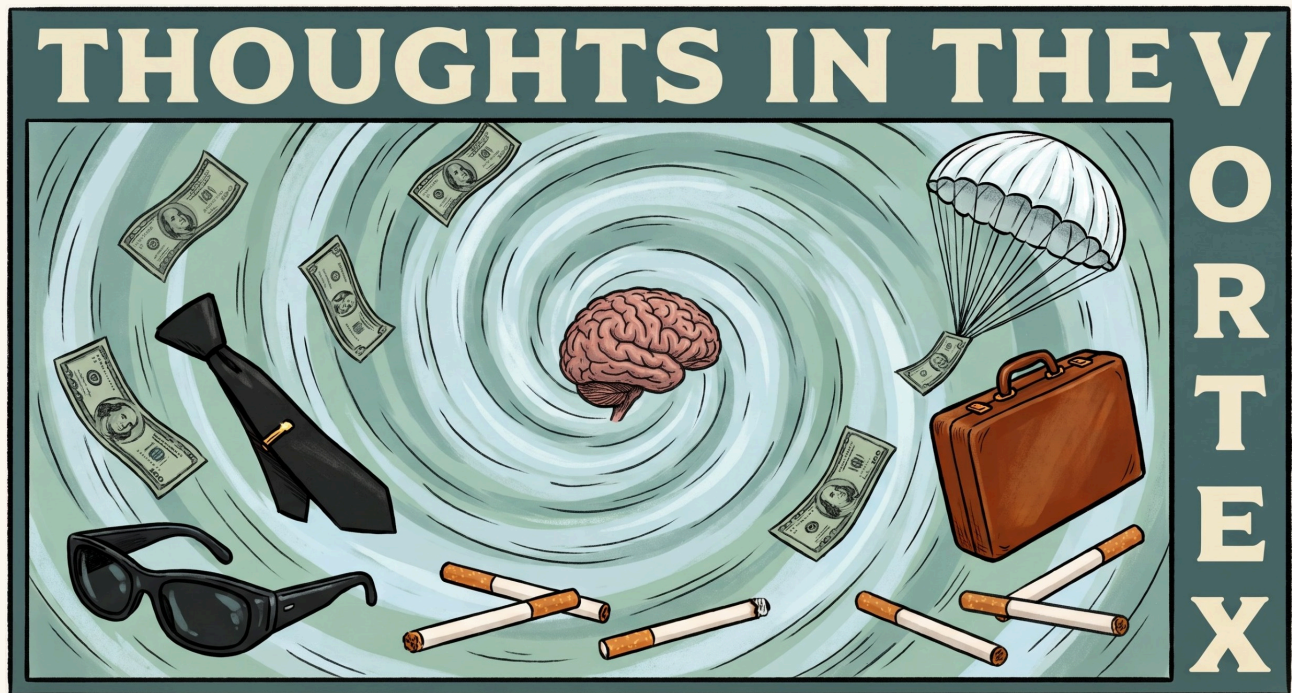




NORJAK · NORTHWEST ORIENT FLIGHT 305 · THE PARACHUTE LEFT BEHIND

Two Cards, One Chute

Reconciling the Cooper Packing Cards

The leftover back parachute from Flight 305 carried two packing cards, both signed by rigger E.J. Cossey on May 21, 1971. What the FBI recorded, what the 2011 inspection shows, and how the second card got there.

Card A · 26'

Pioneer Parachute Co. · 26' ripstop conical
Survives with the chute (photographed 2011)

Card B · 24'

Steinthal Mfg. Co. · 24' rip stop · 60-9707 · 7/60
Known only from FBI paperwork

Sources

FBI Vault, D.B. Cooper files, Parts 1-122

Bruce A. Smith, *The Mountain News* – WA, Oct. 25, 2011

October 2026

Citations: Vault part / PDF page / Bates no.

SUMMARY

Key findings

The short version of what the FBI files and the 2011 inspection show about the two packing cards. Each point is developed in the sections that follow.

1. **Two cards, both from 5/21/71.** The FBI's evidence inventory records two identification cards with the leftover chute. One is for a 26' Pioneer canopy and one for a 24' Steinthal canopy, and Cossey signed both on May 21, 1971.
2. **Both cards were already there in Reno.** The two Reno reports from the night of the hijacking each mention only "a card." But the details they give come from *both* cards: Pioneer and "Conacol" from Card A, 24 ft, 1960 and 60-9707 from Card B. So whatever put the second card in that pocket happened before the plane landed.
3. **The FBI read the form one line off.** The surviving Card A, photographed in 2011, shows that each printed field label sits *under* its entry. The FBI paired each entry with the label *above* it instead, which explains "type 226, SN 9/57." Applying the same correction to Card B gives Make: Steinthal · Type: 24' rip stop · Serial No. 60-9707 · Mfd. July 1960.
4. **Nothing on the leftover rig matches Card B.** The harness label reads Pioneer "Quick Fit," April 1957, and the canopy is a Pioneer from Sept 1957 per Card A. No Steinthal component and no 1960 date has been identified on the rig.
5. **Most likely explanation:** Card B belongs to an unrelated rig and was misfiled in the loft on 5/21/71. Section 4 ranks five explanations with the points for and against each.

SECTION I

The two counts: Reno (night one) vs. the evidence inventory

The FBI described the leftover chute's card pocket in two separate counts. The first came from Reno on the night of the hijacking, November 24, 1971: the aircraft search team and the Nevada Air National Guard each mention only *one* card. The second is the Seattle evidence inventory four weeks later, which lists *two* cards, a 26' Pioneer card and a 24' Steinthal card. The Reno reports name just one card, but the details they record come from both cards the inventory later describes. So the Reno examiners must have been reading both cards. In the excerpts below, highlights show which card each detail matches.

- ☐ Matches Card A (26' Pioneer) ☐ Matches only Card B (24' Steinthal) ☐ On both cards / same form
- ☐ Description of the *missing* rig

1A · Search of the aircraft at Reno, night of 11/24/71 (FD-302)

Part 17, p.125 · Bates 4955

On seat 18B, an unopened back type parachute was observed. A card in the pocket of this parachute reflected it to be a Conacol type parachute, number 60-9707 and made by the Pioneer Parachute Company. This card indicated it was last inspected on May 21, 1971.

1B · Nevada Air National Guard examination of the back chute (FD-302, 11/26/71)

Part 17, p.129 · Bates 4955

[redacted] Nevada State Air National Guard, Reno Airport, Reno, Nevada, advised that after examining a parachute which was found on the Northwest airplane, which was hi-jacked in Seattle, Washington on November 24, 1971, and landed in Reno, Nevada, that this parachute was a 1960 model, 24 feet in length, Conacol type commercial parachute, manufactured by the Pioneer Parachute Company. [redacted] stated that this parachute was in very good condition and capable of being operated at any time. [redacted] also found a white card located in a pocket on this parachute, which indicated that this parachute was inspected on May 21, 1971 by E.J. COSSEY, Riggers, license number 1579638. This card also listed the name of the Brown Engineering Company, Post Office Box 1436, Patterson, California, 95363.

b6
b7C

1C · Evidence inventory, FD-192 bulky exhibit, Seattle, 12/21/71

Part 64, p.130 · Bates 26940

Description of Property or Exhibit and Identity of Agent Submitting Same

One back parachute with a sage green nylon container Model NB6 (Navy back pack 6) with sage green nylon harness. This parachute which is white in color has a 26 foot nylon flat circular spread with padded cushion. The pilot chute is also white.

This chute is identified officially as Pioneer Parachute Company, 26 foot rip stop conical type 226, SN 9/57. This chute was inspected and repacked 5/21/71, Riggers License #1579638, bearing the signature "E.J. COSSEY, Issaquah, Wn." Also an integral part of this chute is a 24 foot rip stop made by Steinthal Mfg. Company, type 60-9707, SN 7/60. This also was packed by "E.J. COSSEY" on 5/21/71.

The identification cards for this chute are contained in a packet on the back of the chute pocket labelled "Inspection and Packing Data."

Detail by detail

DETAIL	RENO SEARCH (1A)	AIR GUARD (1B)	INVENTORY (1C)	SOURCE CARD
Maker	"Pioneer Parachute Company"	"Pioneer Parachute Company"	Pioneer (A) · Steintal (B)	Card A
Canopy shape	"Conacol type"	"Conacol type"	"26 foot rip stop conical"	Card A
Size	—	"24 feet in length"	26 ft (A) · 24 ft (B)	Card B
Year	—	"1960 model"	"SN 9/57" (A) · "SN 7/60" (B)	Card B
Number	"number 60-9707"	—	"type 60-9707" (B)	Card B
Rigger and date	"May 21, 1971"	"May 21, 1971 by E.J. COSSEY ... 1579638"	5/21/71, Cossey, on both	Both
Form printer	—	"Brown Engineering Company, Post Office Box 1436, Patterson, California"	—	Card A (B unknown)
Number of cards	"A card"	"a white card"	"The identification cards ... in a packet"	

Why this suggests the Reno examiners also handled two cards

Neither Reno report could have taken "24 feet," "1960" or "60-9707" from the 26' Pioneer card. Neither could have taken "Pioneer" from the 24' card, which the inventory credits to Steintal. Yet both reports put details from each card into a single description. No card in the record carries all of those details together. The simplest explanation is that two folded cards sat in the pocket, possibly one tucked inside the other, and each writer merged them into "a card."

That matters for every theory in Section 4. **Card B was in the pocket by the time the plane reached Reno**, so nothing that happened after landing can explain it.

The inventory blends the two rigs as well

The inventory's first paragraph (red highlight above) describes the leftover as a sage-green "Model NB6 (Navy back pack 6)" with a "2_ foot ... flat circular" canopy, with the second digit typed over. That matches Cossey's description of the missing rig, a Navy-surplus NB-6 with a 28' flat circular canopy (Part 64 pp.108-109, Bates 26910-11; Part 64 p.204, Bates 27046). The 2011 photos show a tan container with a Pioneer "Quick Fit" harness. The same paragraph also calls Card B's canopy "an integral part of this chute." Because the writer was already mixing up the two rigs, that phrase deserves only limited weight.

SECTION 2

The 2011 inspection (The Mountain News – WA)

On Oct. 24, 2011, Bruce A. Smith of *The Mountain News* – WA, with Bruce Thun (manager of Pierce County Airport / Thun Field), examined the leftover back chute at Norman Hayden's shop in Kent, Washington. He published the results the next day.

What the article reports

- **Ownership.** Hayden said both back chutes were his, that Northwest Orient paid him for them, and that he got the leftover back only after a drawn-out dispute. The FBI files record its return to the owner on 4/21/75 (Part 64 pp.82–83).
- **Container.** A tan pack that "looked more like a rugged duck-cloth fabric," which Smith thought looked WWII-vintage. He identified it as a Pioneer.
- **Canopy.** They did not pull it. A few inches showed white rip-stop nylon. Smith saw no "Steinthal" markings, although FBI agent Larry Carr had said online that it was a Steinthal.
- **Seal.** The lead seal was still in place, stamped "NWJ" / "IY3."
- **Card.** It reads "E.J. Cossey, certification number 1579638," dated May 21, 1971, followed by later repacks by Wes Jeppsen. The card shows Aug 17, 1982 and Mar 13, 1986; the article text says 1982 and 1984.
- **Only one card.** Only the 26' card is described or photographed; there is no mention of a 24' Steinthal card. So Card B left the pocket at some point after 1971. Either the FBI kept it when it returned the chute in 1975, or it was removed later, by Hayden or by Wes Jeppsen when he repacked the rig in 1982 or 1986. A rigger might well discard a card that doesn't match the canopy he is packing.
- **The "identical chutes" claim doesn't hold up.** In 2011 Hayden and Barry Halstad (Pacific Aviation) said Hayden's two back chutes were identical, and Halstad suggested two sets of back chutes might have been gathered that day. The 1971 record contradicts this. The owner's description on 11/25/71 gave two different rigs: #1 a tan civilian rig with a 26' canopy, and #2 an olive-drab military rig with a 28' canopy (Part 64 p.209). On 11/26/71 Cossey described the missing rig as a sage-green Navy NB-6 with a 28' canopy (Part 11 p.53). Both 1971 accounts describe two different chutes.
- **Cossey's position.** Cossey maintained the chutes were his. He said Cooper took a 28' military canopy in an NB-8 container (the FBI files say NB-6), and that the leftover was a Pioneer rig.

"Rigging card" and "identification card" are the same booklet

The article's two captions show two sides of one folded booklet, printed on white card stock with two folds. The outside has the "Parachute Identification" panel, a blank middle and a cover printed **Brown Engineering Co., P.O. Box 1436, Patterson, California 95363**. The inside spread is the repack log. That is the same printer and address the Air Guard copied down in Reno.



Harness label: "Pioneer Parachute 'Quick Fit' Harness · U.S. Patents 2,475,631 and 2,542,044 · Other Patents Pending in U.S.A. and Foreign Countries · Date of Mfg. APRIL 1957," with a boxed inspection stamp that appears to read "P120." No serial number is visible on the label. Photo: Bruce A. Smith, 2011.

What the rig itself is made of

PART	MAKER	DATE
Harness	Pioneer "Quick Fit"	April 1957
Canopy	Pioneer, 26' ripstop conical	Sept 1957
Container	Tan duck cloth (Smith: Pioneer)	—

The two Pioneer parts were made five months apart, which looks like an original factory set. A Pioneer Quick-Fit harness is also not the Navy NB-6 harness the inventory describes. Nothing seen on this rig is Steinthal or dated 1960.

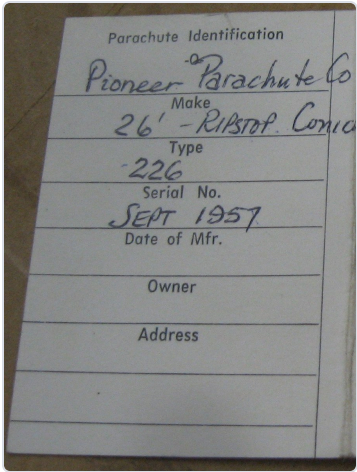
A new card in 1971

The canopy dates from 1957, but Card A's first entry is Cossey's on 5/21/71. Hayden said he acquired the chutes around 1968, yet the card has no earlier repacks. That fits Cossey's statement that he made the rig up "from component parts" (Part 64 p.108, Bates 26910) and started a fresh card that day.

SECTION 3

The FBI read the card one field off

The photographed card explains the strange wording in the inventory ("type 226, SN 9/57"). Applying the same correction to the 24' card changes what its numbers mean.



Card A, identification panel. Each printed label sits just below a ruled line, under the handwriting.

PRINTED LABEL	ENTRY JUST ABOVE IT	FBI INVENTORY READING
Make	Pioneer Parachute Co	"Pioneer Parachute Company,"
Type	26' - Ripstop Conical	"26 foot rip stop conical"
Serial No.	226	"type 226"
Date of Mfr.	Sept 1957	"SN 9/57"
Owner / Address	(blank)	—

The FBI instead paired each entry with the label *above* it, so every field slipped one line: the serial number became the "type" and the manufacture date became the "SN."

The rigger clearly meant the labels as captions under each entry. Read that way, every entry fits its field: a maker, a canopy description, a number and a date. The FBI's reading leaves the top entry unlabeled, puts a month and year under Serial No., and leaves Date of Mfr. blank. A Sept 1957 canopy also matches the April 1957 harness. Smith's 2011 article repeats the FBI's misreading ("a Pioneer, type 226").

Applying the correction to Card B (24')

FIELD	INVENTORY WORDING (12/21/71)	CORRECTED READING	NIGHT-ONE CROSS-CHECK (RENO)
Make	"made by Steinthal Mfg. Company"	Steinthal Mfg. Co.	Both Reno reports say Pioneer (from Card A)
Type	"24 foot rip stop"	24' rip stop	Air Guard: "24 feet in length"
Serial No.	"type 60-9707"	60-9707	Reno search: "number 60-9707"
Date of Mfr.	"SN 7/60"	July 1960	Air Guard: "1960 model"
Repack	"packed by E.J. COSSEY on 5/21/71"	Cossey, 5/21/71	Both: "May 21, 1971"

The Reno readers got Card B's fields right

The Reno examiners read 60-9707 as a *number* and 1960 as the model year, which is the corrected reading. Only the inventory writer used the shifted reading, and he used it for both cards. Corrected, Card B is a **Steinthal 24' rip-stop canopy, serial 60-9707, made July 1960**, last packed by Cossey on 5/21/71.

Caveat: Card B has never been photographed, and its current whereabouts are unknown. This correction assumes it was the same Brown Engineering form, which fits the matching shift in the inventory wording.

SECTION 4

How did Card B get into the pocket? Five explanations, ranked

Ranked from most to least likely. Every explanation must fit these established points:

- Both cards were in the pocket when the plane landed in Reno (Section 1).
- Cossey signed both cards on 5/21/71.
- The leftover rig is a Pioneer harness (Apr 1957) with a Pioneer 26' canopy (Sept 1957).
- Hayden (11/25/71) and Cossey (11/26/71 and 5/31/72) both described the *missing* canopy as **28'**.
- The "Inspection and Packing Data" pocket is on the back of the pack, outside the sealed closing, so moving a card would not disturb the lead seal.

1

A card from an unrelated rig, misfiled by Cossey on 5/21/71

Cossey packed another customer's 24' Steinthal rig the same day, and its card ended up in Hayden's Pioneer.

REQUIRES (struck through = not needed)

- ✓ A clerical slip by Cossey on 5/21/71
- ✓ Another customer's 24' Steinthal rig in Cossey's loft that day
- ~~Cooper's chute was the 24', so Hayden's and Cossey's 28' were both wrong~~
- ~~Someone deliberately moved the card after packing~~
- ~~Card B was an older card that had run out of room (pre-1971 entries)~~
- ~~The rig once held a 24' Steinthal canopy that has left no trace~~
- ~~Cossey signed a card for a canopy no longer in the pack~~

FOR

- Nobody has to be wrong about canopy sizes: Hayden's and Cossey's 28' for the missing chute both stand.
- Fits a working loft that handled several rigs and their cards in a day.
- Fits Card B's only known entry, Cossey on 5/21/71, which looks like a card in use that day.
- Fits the fact that nothing on the leftover rig is Steinthal or dated 1960.

AGAINST

- Depends on coincidence: the stray card had to land in one of the two rigs that went to a hijacking six months later.
- Cossey would have had to miss an extra card when he closed out the pack.
- No record of a second 24' Steinthal rig in Cossey's loft. His serial records never surfaced in the files.

2

A same-day mix-up between Hayden's two rigs (5/21/71)

Cossey packed both of Hayden's back chutes on 5/21/71 and put the second rig's card, Card B, into the leftover rig's pocket. In this scenario **Cooper's chute had the 24' Steinthal canopy.**

REQUIRES (struck through = not needed)

- ✓ A clerical slip by Cossey on 5/21/71
- Another customer's 24' Steinthal rig in Cossey's loft that day
- ✓ Cooper's chute was the 24', so Hayden's and Cossey's 28' were both wrong
- Someone deliberately moved the card after packing
- Card B was an older card that had run out of room (pre-1971 entries)
- The rig once held a 24' Steinthal canopy that has left no trace
- Cossey signed a card for a canopy no longer in the pack

FOR

- Mixing up cards between two rigs packed side by side is the most ordinary paperwork error.
- Explains why both cards carry the same rigger and the same date.
- A 1960 non-Pioneer canopy fits a Navy-surplus NB-6 (Cooper's rig, per Cossey) better than this civilian Pioneer rig.

AGAINST

- Hayden said 28' on night one (Part 64 p.209).
- Cossey said 28' on 11/26/71, and on 5/31/72, after examining the leftover chute, described a 28' flat circular canopy with 28 numbered panels (Part 64 p.108).
- Cossey still said 28' in 2011.

3

Hayden moved the card between May and November 1971

The owner pulled Card B from his olive-drab rig and put it in the tan rig's pocket. Here too, **Cooper's chute had the 24' canopy.**

REQUIRES (struck through = not needed)

- A clerical slip by Cossey on 5/21/71
- Another customer's 24' Steinthal rig in Cossey's loft that day
- ✓ Cooper's chute was the 24', so Hayden's and Cossey's 28' were both wrong
- ✓ Someone deliberately moved the card after packing
- Card B was an older card that had run out of room (pre-1971 entries)
- The rig once held a 24' Steinthal canopy that has left no trace
- Cossey signed a card for a canopy no longer in the pack

FOR

- Hayden had both rigs for six months.
- The pocket is outside the seal, so "lead seals unbroken" doesn't rule this out.

AGAINST

- No apparent reason to do it.
- Hayden kept the chutes only to meet the FAA aerobatic rules and never jumped.
- In 2011 he believed the two chutes were identical, with no sign he paid attention to the cards.
- Requires both witnesses to be wrong about 28'.

4

A card carried over from an earlier version of the same rig

Before 1971 this rig held a 24' Steinthal canopy, and Card B was its data card. When Cossey rebuilt the rig in May 1971 with the 26' Pioneer canopy, Card B had run out of room. He started a new card (Card A) and signed Card B one last time on 5/21/71 to bridge the rig's earlier history to the new card, leaving both cards in the pocket.

REQUIRES (struck through = not needed)

- ~~A clerical slip by Cossey on 5/21/71~~
- ~~Another customer's 24' Steinthal rig in Cossey's loft that day~~
- ~~Cooper's chute was the 24', so Hayden's and Cossey's 28' were both wrong~~
- ~~Someone deliberately moved the card after packing~~

FOR

- The card Smith photographed in 2011 has Cossey's 5/21/71 entry as its **first line**, so Card A was a brand-new card that day, as this scenario expects.
- The inventory calls the 24' canopy "an integral part of this chute," in all three copies.
- Hayden described chute #1 as having "a military chute inside of it" (Part 64 p.209, Bates 27054).
- Cossey said he made the rig up "from component parts" (Part 64 p.108).

- ✓ Card B was an older card that had run out of room (pre-1971 entries)
- ✓ The rig once held a 24' Steinthal canopy that has left no trace
- ✓ Cossey signed a card for a canopy no longer in the pack

AGAINST

- The harness is a Pioneer from April 1957, not a Steinthal from 1960, so Card B isn't the harness's original card.
- The card identifies a *canopy*. Logging a repack on a card for a canopy no longer in the pack is irregular.
- A card full enough to need replacing would carry pre-1971 entries, and the FBI records none.
- The inventory's "integral part" wording comes from the same paragraph that confuses the two rigs. The only part of the rig whose maker is still unknown is the container.

5

Cooper moved the card in flight, 11/24/71

Cooper pulled Card B from the rig he jumped with and tucked it into the rig he left behind. In this scenario too, Cooper jumped with the 24' canopy.

REQUIRES (struck through = not needed)

- ~~A clerical slip by Cossey on 5/21/71~~
- ~~Another customer's 24' Steinthal rig in Cossey's loft that day~~
- ✓ Cooper's chute was the 24', so Hayden's and Cossey's 28' were both wrong
- ✓ Someone deliberately moved the card after packing

FOR

- Cooper handled and compared both back rigs before choosing one.
- The pocket is outside the seal, so the card could be moved without opening the pack.

- ~~Card B was an older card that had run out of room (pre-1971 entries)~~
- ~~The rig once held a 24' Steinthal canopy that has left no trace~~
- ~~Cossey signed a card for a canopy no longer in the pack~~

AGAINST

- If he wanted the card off his rig, leaving it on the plane makes little sense; it could simply have gone out the door with him.
- A 24' canopy comes down faster than a 26', so the landing is harder and more dangerous. Anyone who read both cards closely enough to move one would hardly have chosen the smaller canopy.
- It would have been done in a dim cabin while he was rigging up under time pressure.
- Requires both witnesses to be wrong about 28'.

SECTION 5

What could settle it

CHECK	WHAT IT WOULD SHOW
Card B's full repack history , if it still exists in the packet with the chute (now at the Washington State History Museum, Tacoma)	Entries from the 1960s by other riggers would support #4 (carry-over). Only the 5/21/71 Cossey line would rule #4 out and point to #1, #2 or #3.
The container's maker's label	A Steintal or 1960 label would revive the carry-over theory. A Pioneer label closes it.
The canopy's own markings (pull it from the pack)	Settles whether any Steintal fabric is in the rig. Smith saw none in 2011, though he didn't pull the canopy. Larry Carr reportedly said Steintal, but he may simply have been repeating the FBI file's description of Card B rather than reporting markings he had seen himself.
Cossey's serial records	He told the FBI on 5/31/72 that he would check them (Part 64 p.109, Bates 26911). No result appears in Parts 1-122. They could separate #1 (unrelated rig) from #2 (same-day mix-up).
The 1972 Patterson, California contact	A Sacramento memo records the FBI recontacting someone in Patterson, the home of the card's printer, on 1/21/72 about the parachutes. He had nothing to add to what he had "previously furnished" (Part 22 p.204, Bates 6545). The name is redacted, and his earlier statement may describe the card form.

Sources

PART	PAGE	BATES	DATE	DOCUMENT
17	125	4951	11/24/71	FD-302, search of the aircraft at Reno
17	129	4955	11/26/71	FD-302, Nevada Air National Guard examination of the back chute
64	130	26940	12/21/71	FD-192 evidence inventory, leftover back chute (two cards); copies at Part 66 p.211 and Part 110 p.298 (Bates 606)
64	209	27054	11/25/71	Memo, SA Chipman: both back packs as described by the supplier (Hayden): #1 26' "civilian luxury," #2 28' military
11	53	1950	11/26/71	FD-302, Earl J. Cossey interview: missing rig NB-6, 28'
64	204	27046	11/26/71	Seattle teletype: Cossey identifies the missing back pack
64	108-109	26910-11	5/31/72	FD-302, Cossey re-interview: rig made up from components; leftover 26'; missing 28' flat circular, Navy NB-6; will check serial records
22	204	6545	1972	Sacramento memo: Patterson, California contact recontacted re parachutes
64	82-83	26879-80	4/21/75	Leftover chute returned to its owner; signed receipt

Bruce A. Smith, "DB Cooper case heats up again with controversy over parachutes," *The Mountain News* – WA, Oct. 25, 2011 · themountainnews.net/2011/10/25/db-cooper-case-heats-up-again-with-controversy-over-parachutes/

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