

Good Afternoon. My name is R.J. Gallagher and I'm a retired FBI Agent and I would like to begin by acquainting members with the background of George Wright.

On Friday night of Thanksgiving weekend in 1962, George Wright and two others robbed and mortally wounded Walter Paterson, a service station proprietor in Wall Township, New Jersey. That night Wright and his codefendants wore nylon stockings over their faces, and wore gloves on their hands. Wright carried a sawed off rifle, his codefendant a cheap handgun. They brought with them white adhesive tape for binding their victims. Earlier that same day, Wright and his codefendants cut the rifle down, bought ammunition and test fired the weapon. They had also driven around the Jersey shore area looking for prospective places to rob.

At 9:30 P.M. when Wright and a codefendant entered Walt Peterson's ESSO Gas Station on Route 33 they were committing their second armed robbery of the night. This robbery, unlike the first did not go as planned. For it would appear Walt Patterson was not sufficiently compliant or quick enough to the demands of the robbers and a fight ensued. Wright and his codefendant repeatedly rained blows to the head and shoulders of Walter Patterson with their weapons. At some point the handgun carried by the codefendant fired and Walter Patterson was struck in the abdomen. He fell to the floor. The two robbers fled taking with them about \$70. Both robbers were very aware that their victim was shot and wounded yet they left him alone on the floor of his gas station. They did not place an anonymous call to anyone to get Walt Patterson medical attention. Instead, using the money proceeds

from their two robberies that evening, they went out and partied. They dined, they drank and they played pool till 2 or 3 in the morning.

Investigation over the next two days led to the identification and arrest of the persons involved in the robbery murder. This included George Wright. All physical evidence was recovered: guns, stocking masks, gloves, ammunition. All the arrested gave full confessions.

On January 28, 1963, Wright pled “non vult” to a murder indictment. By this plea Wright did not contest his guilt and he waived his right to a trial. This plea allowed Wright to receive a 30 year maximum sentence as opposed to a life sentence, had he gone to trial and been convicted. On February 15, 1963, Wright was sentenced to a prison term of not less than 15 years and not more than 30 years.

At this point I'd like to take a break from Wright's crime chronology. I have read in numerous media accounts subsequent to Wright's arrest that Wright has stated that since he did not fire the shot that killed Walter Patterson he is not guilty of the crime of murder. Both of Wright's codefendants stated that in the immediate of this crime, Wright told them he had fired. Nine bullets from the sawed off rifle Wright carried were found on the floor of the service station. The presiding judge at the time of Wright's sentencing went on the record stating that these nine rounds indicated Wright's intention and attempt to fire the weapon but that it had malfunctioned. But regardless of Wright's intent, attempt, or belief that he had fired or that he had not fired it was the law of the State of New Jersey that if a person

committing a robbery kills another or death ensues during the robbery that person is guilty of murder.

I have also read that there is some mitigation in the age of George Wright as he was but 19 years old at the time. Here it should be noted that Walter Patterson was barely a much riper 21 when he entered the US Army shortly after Pearl Harbor. Walter Patterson then served in the Army for 3 years and 7 months until after the war was over. Of his time in the Army, 2 ½ years was spent overseas in Europe.

Back to the Wright time line. On August 22, 1970, Wright and others escaped from the New Jersey State Prison. At this time Wright had served 7 years, 7 months and 25 days. Wright has remained a fugitive from U.S. justice since this date.

On July 31, 1972, Wright and 4 other adults (to include one of the persons who escaped prison with Wright) hijacked a Delta Airlines DC 8 en route from Detroit to Miami. The hijackers were accompanied by 3 of their small children. Wright was dressed in the garb of religious clergy. Wright was the eldest and the leader of the hijackers. He wielded a hand gun, gave the orders and issued the threats. He pointed a cocked weapon to the head of the airplane pilot, Captain William May. In Miami, Wright demanded one million dollars and threatened that if his demands were not met that he would toss bodies out of the plane.

Wright and his fellow hijackers received the one million dollar ransom and they released approximately 80 passengers. The flight crew was not released and were forced to fly the plane and the hijackers first to Boston then on to Algiers, Algeria. Algerian authorities seized the one million dollars and the plane, returning

them to the U.S. The hijackers however were allowed their freedom and eventually made their way to France. Wright and the other 4 adults were all indicted for Air Piracy in the United States on August 3 1972. While in Algeria, Wright and the other hijackers made a videoed press statement and as part of the statement the speaker stated that they were revolutionaries. In May of 1976, 4 of hijackers, the lone exception being George Wright, were arrested by French authorities for the 1972 Air Piracy. In 1978, France tried these four for the Air Piracy and they were all convicted of the Air Piracy.

And so to this day, Wright has not served his sentence for his homicide conviction nor has he been tried for the indicted charge of Air Piracy.

My involvement in this matter began in 1994 when I reopened the New Jersey fugitive investigation regarding Wright. I worked it until my retirement in July, 2011. The United States Marshals and the New Jersey Department of Corrections joined the investigation in approximately 2003. Since the case was reopened most all the techniques used in fugitive investigations were employed. These would include but not limited to interviews, both domestic and abroad, notification to international law enforcement, court orders, human intelligence, cooperation of foreign law enforcement, fingerprints were disseminated worldwide, age enhanced sketches and computer images were produced and distributed. The United States Marshals commissioned the making of an age enhanced bust. All three agencies played a vital and significant part in the investigation and to my mind it was a model of organic, ad hoc interagency cooperation.

In March of 2010, the Portuguese police notified the FBI legal attaché in Madrid that they had positively identified the person living in Portugal under the name of Jose Louis Jorge dos Santos as George Wright. This they did unknown to Wright by the comparison of fingerprints they had on file for Santos with those of George Wright.

In September of 2010, six months after a positive identification I, along with attorneys from the Department of Justice-Office of International Affairs met with Portuguese law enforcement and prosecutors in Lisbon, Portugal. The purpose of this meeting was for the United States to seek Portuguese legal input and work together so that the United States might produce an extradition request with the greatest chance of success. I would characterize the meetings as both positive and productive. All parties agreed that the extradition could proceed for U.S. person George Wright. Further there was agreement that George Wright was using a made up name of Jose Santos and had provided false pedigree information to the Portuguese government as regards to his name, place of birth and parents. One unresolved issue remained. Portugal saw as a barrier to extradition Wright's exposure to a 25 year sentence of incarceration for an Air Piracy conviction. This they viewed as the equivalent of a death sentence and would therefore serve as a basis for denial of extradition.

Well over a year passed since the positive identification had been made and this issue still proved intractable and no extradition request had been submitted to Portugal. In May of 2011, the decision was made to tender the extradition request

based solely on Wright's homicide conviction. I participated in this decision and supported it fully.

Portuguese law enforcement arrested George Wright in September of 2011.

Since his arrest, the Portuguese courts have denied the United States extradition request for George Wright. It is my understanding that they cited the following in their ruling: 1.) too much time had passed and that there must be a closure to criminal cases
2.) Wright's integration into Portuguese society demanded that extradition be denied on humanitarian grounds. (Per DOJ, these two reasons are not recognized as basis for denial of extradition per the United States Portugal Extradition Treaty.)
3.) and the court ruled that Wright is a Portuguese citizen.

Looking Forward:

Each nation is free to choose its own criteria for citizenship. This is how it is and always should always be. But it would also seem that each nation would have as self interest imposing the obligation upon those seeking naturalized citizenship to provide a true identity and true information. This obviously provides for the safety and security of a nation's citizens. George Wright provided false information to Portuguese authorities it would seem because he suspected that if he provided his true identity not only would citizenship not be conferred but that he would in all likelihood be arrested.,

In August, 1972, George Wright was indicted on the criminal charge of Air Piracy. If one looks at the elements of the crime Wright committed, this same act committed today might be potentially charged as an act of terrorism, and for such a

charge the United States- Portugal Extradition Treaty provides for the extradition of one of it's citizens.

Specifically with respect to George Wright, I've seen media accounts post arrest that suggest he has for some time led a good life and that he is in fact rehabilitated. This is perhaps a valid argument and he might have a case for such but there remains only one place that can decide if such an argument is valid and that is here in the United States where he committed his crimes in front of a court or parole board of proper jurisdiction. I would encourage George Wright to come and make his argument.