



The FBI Oral History Project

An initiative sponsored by
The Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI
and the Former Agents of the FBI Foundation
www.socxfbi.org



© Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI, Inc. 2005

**Interview of Former Special Agent of the FBI
John R. Arend (1952-1962)
Martin Weber, Interviewer
May 4, 2005**

Edited for spelling, repetitions, etc. by Sandra Robinette on July 15, 2005. Edited for Mr. Arend's corrections by Sandra Robinette on August 2, 2005.



Weber

(W): My name is Marty Weber and I am going to be talking with John Arend for the Society of Former Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation Oral History Program. Today is May 4, 2005 and this interview is taking place in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and that is the office where John has his business, as CEO of Interchem (International Chemical Co.).

John we have a release that we'd like to read that we'd both sign and it states:

"We the undersigned convey the rights to the intellectual content of our interview on this date to the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI. This transfer is in exchange for the Society's efforts to preserve the historical legacy of the FBI and its members. We understand that portions of this interview may be deleted for security purposes.

Unless otherwise restricted, we agree that acceptable sections can be published on the World Wide Web and the recordings transferred to an established repository for preservation and research."

And we both signed it and dated it today.

I introduced you but why don't you tell us again what your name is.

Arend

(A): Sure, I'm John Arend.

W: Where were you born?

A: In Taylor, Texas, January 5, 1931.

John R. Arend

May 4, 2005

Page 2

W: And could you tell us briefly about your childhood and family?

A: Sure. I grew up in Taylor and started working when I was seven years old selling Liberty Magazines in Austin, Texas and would you like me to continue on or follow that?

W: Well, yeah go ahead and why don't you mention your family?

A: My father was with the United States Post Office and as I stated I started working at a very early age. I went to Taylor High School and was a duck, that was our fighting mascot. I wanted to be a war eagle and from there I went to TCU and became a frog.

I always wanted to be an FBI Agent because J. Edgar Hoover was a hero of mine. You had to be an attorney at that time so I went to law school in Houston, Texas and I graduated from law school and went to the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. Do you want me to continue on?

W: And that kind of covers your education?

A: Yes, in Taylor High School, small town.

W: And did you work outside of the FBI before you before?

A: I worked as a clerk in the Houston Office while I was going to law school. Actually went to the Academy from there and stayed with the Bureau. My first field office was Los Angeles, where I worked the Fugitive Squad there for a couple of years and then we mainly worked bank robberies.

We were also in the those days working the old COINTELPRO, Communist Party verification of people in defensive positions and defense plants, etc., and then from there I was transferred to Portland, Oregon where I again worked many, many cases. As you know in the smaller office you work a variety of subject cases and from that point I was transferred to San Francisco where I worked the Fugitive Squad there.

John R. Arend
May 4, 2005
Page 3

A: Frankly, I've forgotten our supervisor, Phil LNU, who was the head of what they called a Fugitive Section in San Francisco at that time.

W: And when did you get transferred to San Francisco?

A: That would have been about 1959 or 60.

W: And how many years were you in the San Francisco Office?

A: Two years, two and a half years about when Continental Oil approached me and that was about the tenth year when I left the Bureau and went with Conoco.

W: So you served in the FBI from what year to what year?

A: Fifty-two to sixty-two. Ten years.

W: Okay and briefly could you tell us what happened with your career after you left the FBI?

A: Yes, I had planned to stay in the Bureau until I retired, however, Continental Oil Company, a former agent approached me in the legal department and he asked me if I would consider interviewing with him. I did and I became a trouble shooter which included world-wide responsibilities for all of Continental Oil activities and as a result of that I traveled all over the world twenty, thirty, forty times. We were quite active in the Libyan oil reserves at that time and the Egyptians blew up three of our oil wells. They even made a movie of that event, called *The Hell Fighters*. It was a Red Adair's life, played by John Wayne.

W: John Wayne?

A: John Wayne played the part. Actually the Egyptians used munitions from World War II that Rommel and Patton had left in the desert. We eventually retained Red Adair and his crew to come over there and blow out those wells. They made a movie of that. Then numerous and sundry trips to Conoco's investments in overseas operations and domestic and so forth. Then transitioned with them into what ultimately became part of their plant foods divisions, Agrico Chemical Company. Became friends with a man that was hired by John Williams of the Williams Company here in Tulsa to start a chemical division for the Williams Company.

John R. Arend
May 4, 2005
Page 4

A: I then moved up here and we began to buy out companies to which we ultimately bought a division of CONOCO Oil Company and bought properties in Faulstina, Louisiana and then in again back in international, we were trading with our manufacturing facilities in the United States and selling internationally again. Then I started this company after reading a book called, *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill, which I picked up in Tokyo and it gave me the format and the energy and drive to start a new company which most people know that's quite different from inheriting one or buying into one or whatever. We've been around twenty-eight years now and currently and hired a lot of great men and women and I've always maintained a great relationship with the FBI.

W: And you've been very active in the local chapter?

A: Yes. I've always enjoyed that relationship very much which brings us to today I guess.

W: It does and the topic that we're going to be focusing on is your involvement in the investigation surrounding the attempted escape from Alcatraz back in 1962. I know that you have prepared a slide show presentation that you've given to the retired Agents and others.

What I'd like for you to do is just give us your presentation and we have of course a video camera and we will try and capture both the audio and the visual and you have agreed to make a copy of the slide show itself which should supplement the audio. Okay well why don't you go ahead.

A: Sure.

W: Any questions, I'll ask them along the way.

A: Sure.

(Slide show is on the accompanying CD-R as Addendum A. All rights belong to the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI, Inc. and Mr. Arend. No use is authorized without express written permission.)

Obviously this is a picture of Alcatraz Island and it's interestingly enough it's still one of the most popular tourist attractions in San Francisco. This was a set-up of when Alcatraz was active at the time of the escape. Interesting thing in the warden's house and the other guards and where they live, Olin Blackwell was the head of Alcatraz and the warden at that time. He said it was very difficult to find prisoners that could work in his home because if they were trusted that much they didn't belong in Alcatraz.

John R. Arend

May 4, 2005

Page 5

A: It's kind of interesting what you've read about it. Alcatraz was the toughest, most secure prison of the federal prison system but it also was the best fed. They had the best food in the federal prison system. Blackwell insisted on that and he was also a very much of a disciplinarian but he believed in feeding the inmates well.

As stated previously I was working the Fugitive Division out of the San Francisco Office and we received a phone call probably around nine a.m. of the date of the escape that they were missing three prisoners and we scrambled.

The Bureau as you know has escaped federal prisoners as part of their jurisdiction and we immediately went in code three to the dock at Fisherman's Wharf area. Many of you that have traveled out there know where that is, where there was a prison boat and also by that time Coast Guard boats assisting in the search for the prisoners.

We immediately went to the prison and when we arrived at the gate, we all wore dark suits in those days, with appropriate tie and a little white hankie with about a quarter of inch above it, snap brim hats and, when we hit that gate, all three hundred inmates were holding onto the gates and watching us. Because they were all aware of the escape obviously and they screamed out three cheers for the FBI and the cheers rhymed with it, it, it. So we went in and began the process. We immediately went to Frank Morris' cell who was the ring leader of the escape.

Frank Lee Morris. You can see this on the film, this is the wanted poster that we put out on the escape date of June 13th, 1962. Frank had a very high I.Q. In my opinion if he'd had gone into a legitimate business I think he would have been a successful business person. Had a very good mind and he had robbed a number of banks and burglarized a number of banks, escaped from a number of prisons, that's what earned him the ticket to Alcatraz.

Frank worked with John Lee Anglin and his brother, Clarence Anglin. And over a period of years, I think we felt two to three, as confirmed by and with information furnished by a prisoner named Alan West who was planning to go with them. He was the fourth to-be-escapee and was a little too late or couldn't finish digging out the back of his cell and he was left.

John J. Arend

May 4, 2005

Page 6

A: This is the B-Block which the fugitives were housed. This is a picture of the vent leading from the rear cell 152-B, into the utility service area. The cell could be virtually concealed by dropping the prison issued bathrobe over it. They had been digging and chipping at this with spoons that they took from the dining room to gain this access. It's kind of an interesting side note that the reason they chose spoons instead of forks and knives is because the guards kept track of the forks and knives but they did not of the spoons.

In this picture you can see where they began to drill out little holes to get out to this air vent to where it would be big enough for them to crawl into the utility area behind it.

These are replicas of ventilator grills that they had made up to replace the actual one, so that while they were out of their cell blocks working above they would put this in in case a guard came by.

This is the cell, Clarence Anglin's toilet facility. There is a discarded grate in front of the toilet on the night of the escape when they went out the last time. This is one of the dummy heads. This one was in Frank Lee Morris' cell. The head was made of cement, real hair, using eyelashes, eyebrows and head cover. They got that from the barber shop. The nose was broke when the head was rolled off the bed when the guard reached in and they had discovered the escape and it fell on the floor. But you can see it's a very good replica. Obviously the blankets pulled up next to it. This is a picture of a reverse of a dummy head found in the cell of Clarence Anglin showing you the process of how they built the dummy heads. This was one of the first ones, Allen West called it "oink," because it was one of the first heads made and it was funny looking. So they gave it a nickname of "oink."

This is matted swatches of human hair that was found under Clarence Anglin's bed. You'll notice this thing is actually a periscope. It's being photographed laying flat on the table, with a hole on the left where they could look through and watch the guards at night while they're working in their workshop above their cell block.

W: John?

A: Yes.

W: Was West the only inmate that cooperated or how many?

John R. Arend

May 4, 2005

Page 7

A: There were a number of interviews all the way from “no we don’t know anything,” to “yes we knew they were planning something,” that type of information. Alan was part of the escape and he knew he could be prosecuted for escape so that’s why he cooperated with us. He obviously answered most of our questions and gave us some of the ideas which I’ll explain a little bit more as to what

W: Was he the main source of the information that you had?

A: Yes, yes, that’s correct. Besides these physical pieces of evidence that we’re showing, he was the one that told us how. Over the years, Alan had other contacts in the prison, a guy named Joe Carnes who was from Oklahoma, who was a murderer as a young boy. Due to his age and the concern for him being sexually abused, he was put in Alcatraz and had a single cell because you know what goes on in prisons with young prisoners. But he stayed there a long time and he networked with this Alan West a great deal. A lot of history of other escapes and other tools and how they had used electronics to make saw blades. It’s fascinating history. The amazing amount of cooperation we got was they felt that they could get even more time was the main reason that Alan cooperated with us.

This you can see are many of the tools, spoon handles were sharpened to use to dig through the walls. Interesting thing about that vacuum cleaner, they found it broke one day and they found it had two motors in it. They found also that they could take one motor out and wire it up and it would still work and then obviously they used this other motor for a drill to help them cut through the bars on the top of this roof, etc.

This again is the work room, materials. They used raincoats that were provided at Alcatraz to build a raft and Mae West’s. This is one of the yoke-type Mae West’s that they made. The plastic tube obtained are the usual type from a squirt bottle, air was maintained by folding over the flap held in place by the clamps, which is securely tied to prevent the loss in the water. I found remnants of one like this under the Golden Gate Bridge in the rocks down there. There was blood on that little tube you see there for inflation and teeth marks which was just one of many pieces. We felt he was drowning at the time and was trying to keep the thing and himself afloat.

This is a rear view of a paddle found about a hundred yards offshore of Angel Island. This is the ventilator opening on the roof, the vent rod is on the eastern side of the hole, and is bent enough to squeeze through.

John R. Arend

May 4, 2005

Page 8

A: This is on the roof looking down where they came out. The photo was taken south and shows the heavy iron grate which probably fits inside of a funnel shape, galvanized metal cone. Object to the rear behind the opening is the ventilator top which you could move to permit the fugitives to escape.

That is, if you can see it, a tennis shoe which appears to be a left foot pointed in a northwest direction, the way the fugitives ran out once they got up to the roof.

W: Where did that photograph come from?

A: We took pictures of the escape the next morning. We officers went up to the roof and found all of these which you'll see. There are many copies of these photographs of course.

That's on the roof looking in a southern direction towards the Coast Guard lighthouse. The change in roof elevation Block A, B, C, etc. you can observe where the catwalks are on the left, the paddle was found under the catwalk, in approximate location where the officers are standing up there in extreme left.

This is where they ran to and got on the pipe and shimmied down from the roof to the ground. They stepped across these metal pieces and grabbed that and slid down to the ground.

This shows the outside lighting. Also the dogs led us down to the water on the right hand side of the picture. That's where we think the subjects went into the water.

W: How far down from the top of the facility was it to the water?

A: Marty, as I remember, it's about two hundred yards, maybe three hundred yards. It's quite a drop.

This is a picture of one of the raincoats they used and fashioned the life preservers and the rafts. Another view of a discarded raft also made out of that raincoat material.

John R. Arend

May 4, 2005

Page 9

A: This is a picture of an old *Sports Illustrated* that they had in the library and which had this picture of a Mae West which they used as a model to build the ones that they crafted. This is the pontoon they allegedly built. We never found that.

This is actually one of the old faxes that you can get on the Freedom of Information Act, if you want to pull it up on the website. This is actually one of the memos where we're describing at that point. Obviously it's a copy of a probably just a memo or fax. I don't even remember if we had faxes in those years but that was sent to headquarters. Which was a summary of the initial information to the Washington head of the Bureau Office in the Fugitive Team Squad.

Mr. Hoover took a direct interest in this obviously immediately. It discusses about Morris and Anglin's, about the dummies they made, the faces they had and then how they worked over the time to create the dummy heads and the escape program.

They had many concerns obviously according to West that a number of people knew they were doing these things. They were worried that somebody might cop out to the warden or the guards, etc. Another interesting feature was any noise in the prison, of course, the guards were very attuned to whether it's just wire flapping against the window. They're very trained at good hearing so if there's any sawing and they pounded on those bars with rubber hammers and did serious things.

They had something called music hour there. Every night from about like six to seven and all the squawking of all the different instruments was a great time to work on the escapes. So I thought that was kind of an interesting aspect of this case.

They obviously accessed the barbershop, they developed their materials. This one is after the escape. The warden received this post card which says Warden, Alcatraz Prison, Alcatraz Island, San Francisco and in it says, "Ha, ha, we made it, Frank, Jim and Clarence." Obviously the handwriting samples do not match, that is not the address that the prisoners were aware of. They knew the real address. So any number of reasons along with fingerprint analysis, etc., this is just some clown that sent a postcard as kind of a joke.

John R. Arend

May 4, 2005

Page 10

A: This is interesting. Obviously we networked with the engineers and the Coast Guard. The US engineer's office stated at the time of the escape, the escapees went into an area called the potato patch where the Sacramento River runs into the bay, and the tide running at that time would have caused any floating body, whatever it was, life raft, a body, whatever, to sweep out to the Pacific under the Golden Gate Bridge. Because of the force of the tides, reaching Angel Island would have been very difficult, water temperature was fifty to fifty four degrees. Doctors told us the body gets hypothermia in about four to five minutes in that temperature of water.

This was written at the time of the escape and I believe as I remember that's Mr. Hoover's handwriting there. Some of you that saw his writing might recognize that. He's saying stuff like I think - SAC of FBI San Francisco should be taken off of this case and with no other indication. "H" as you can see. He was a little unhappy with the SAC handling of the relationship with the media. Of course it became the hottest thing in the media at the time. We didn't have cable news but you had all the media very fascinated with this case.

One of the reasons we think they all died that night, is this Norwegian vessel, SS Norefjell which had been out to sea, came back and they told the Coast Guard on August 8th, that on a trip July 17th, that about twenty miles northwest of the Golden Gate Bridge, they spotted a body floating next to the vessel. They didn't have ship to shore capabilities, that's why they didn't call the Coast Guard at the time, but there was a body floating next to the vessel. The watch recorded it as the body floating face down but it appeared he had faded blue jeans on, which is exactly what our subjects had on the night of the escape. A coroner from San Francisco, City County advised, in his opinion, this body was probably one of our escapees.

We checked out the suicides around that time and other suicides who wore those type of trousers. The Golden Gate Bridge was a popular place for people committing suicide in those years. We had police records, coroner records and so forth. We studied all that to just see what would happen to bodies in that proximity, how the tides, the records they had and what had happened to others. We found out that night there was one suicide off the Gate and it was a homosexual whose friend went to the bridge and tried to talk him out of it. He jumped in the water about the time of our escape and they were never able to recover his body either. So it was sort of further verification that the tide took them all out to sea pretty quickly.

John R. Arend

May 4, 2005

Page 11

A: Some interesting history in what we did to assist in the investigation, checking local police and Coast Guard records in the two years prior to the escape. There were thirty-five definite suicides, that all had been listed jumping from the Golden Gate Bridge. Five bodies hit the rock aground under extreme ends of the Bridge and those bodies were recovered. Of the other thirty, seventeen bodies were recovered and thirteen bodies were never recovered. Records show twelve probable suicides without recovery. A total of forty-two, only seventeen bodies were recovered in those attempts. There was no investigation recorded by the San Francisco police unless there were at least three to four witnesses to the jumping.

One witness only was classified as a probable suicide. When the jump had been witnessed a marker was thrown near the spot where the individual went into the water and then they followed it out to a point of trying to recover bodies.

When the escapees entered the water it would have been at the beginning of an outgoing tide which offers the distinct possibility that they could have been taken out to sea in a very short period of time. If they had a raft it would have been a sweeping fast event.

There were some alleged sightings years later, a couple of bank robberies down south that they felt the subjects may have been involved in it. But after hundreds of interviews and following out leads, it was never believed to be factual.

West told us what they had planned to do. When they hit the water, they were gonna try to paddle over to Angel Island, lay there till the next morning or early morning and steal a car and make their escape from that point. There were no cars stolen that night. As most law enforcement people will know, that usually a fugitive case where you have neighborhood coverage, phone mail surveillance and contacts of all other people they know, their ex-girlfriends, etc. generally there's one or two hits within a two, three, five year period. This case there's never been any confirmed activity with any of their families since the escape.

W: That kind of gets to the scope of the investigation. Could you comment on how the San Francisco Office handled this investigation in terms of number of Agents and priority?

John R. Arend

May 4, 2005

Page 12

A: It was right out of central casting because you could imagine the media coverage. There were, I don't know, twenty, thirty, fifty Coast Guard vessels put on the scene, numerous helicopters, a lot of volunteers beyond law enforcement. Certainly in the Bureau we everybody that day was brought into this investigation either riding in helicopters or Coast Guard boats and it was an intense investigation for a number of days and nights. Obviously liaison was great with the San Francisco Police Department, sheriff's office, warden, all offices and it received a lot of notoriety.

I remember a famous New York reporter, I think his name was Drew Pearson, came out there with the media and the San Francisco Examiner. Everybody with a lot of hype and then there were a lot of scenarios that were guessed at, put into the media, not unlike today. Hypothesis of what they really did and what really happened to them. There are a lot of people today even ponder, did they make it?

There have been numerous and sundry books in addition to the *Escape from Alcatraz* written about that. Frankly I even thought about writing one myself. It is a very interesting, fascinating case. The details in which they went through. But again the Bureau kept the case open I think until about six, seven years ago and they finally, just because of the inactivity and nothing happened on any of the contacts, I believe they closed the case. I think someone recently in our Former Agent Society told me they did finally get a cancellation of these wanted posters.

W: There was something else I was going to ask you about. Well in terms of the number of Agents that were working on the case was this the kind of an effort that the FBI has been known for during those years while J. Edgar Hoover was the Director?

A: Yes. I think because, as many of you may know, this prison was a result of his desire to have a maximum security prison and really put the bad guys in a tough place to escape from and it received a lot of notoriety of course. It was allegedly escape proof and most people did drown or die that tried it.

W: Was there anyone ever that is known to have escaped from Alcatraz?

A: No. There, in the last year or two ironically while the prison was still open, there were two inmates as I remember cut through a window and stuffed surgical gloves they filled with air and stuck them up their sleeves. One of them was caught and he was shivering, freezing and willingly gave up.

John R. Arend

May 4, 2005

Page 13

A: The other one did float over to the other side over on the Bay area, however, they found him totally stripped of clothes, laying on the rocks there. He was still alive. Of course they brought him back but that's the only two I've ever heard that actually made it beyond Alcatraz where there was evidence that they did.

I understand later there were people trained, or went out there and swam from Alcatraz Island, but I think in all fairness they were trained and accomplished and their bodies were, you know actually like Olympics. But I don't think a prisoner that's taken cold showers would qualify for being able to withstand the water's cold. If you've ever been out there and with that riptide, the potato patch.

They did some sequels after that. There was some TV movie or TV show that did a make-up of the story I'm describing. They had the guys get into the pontoon and they were paddling towards Angel Island but that the tide itself carried them past it and that it filled up with water and they were suffering and drowned. They leave it up to your imagination whether they made it.

W: That was a dramatic version.

A: Yeah that was one of the versions.

W: Did you happen to see the movie that Clint Eastwood starred in?

A: Yes.

W: How accurate was that? That was well-received.

A: Yes, and of course Clint did a great job as he does in his other movies. I thought it was relatively well done. I did not agree with the Hollywood portrayal of Warden Blackwell because I thought he was very competent professional. They made him in the movie to be a real bad guy and he was responsible for torture and some other bad things. I don't believe that was accurate, but I think the actual portrayal of the events was reasonably well-done. It certainly was on the workshop and the areas, the spoons and the dummy heads, getting the hair out of the barbershop, the liaison with Bumpy Johnson A guy I think I remember that ran the library, former very famous Chicago hoodlum and he helped pass messages back and forth and that, I think was fairly reasonably well-done. The book itself was reasonably well done, a lot of speculation in there.

John R. Arend

May 4, 2005

Page 14

A: There have been numerous books as I mentioned earlier that had different spins on this. The captain of the guard's little daughter was about eight years old when all this happened. She wrote a book after that. I've forgotten her name, Jody? She gave as a child her accounts of the events of the escape. There were others that wrote about the events of the escape. A former US Marshall wrote a book about it. He presumed they got away and he invited them to come back and he'd be sure they got a fair trial after all these things. But my personal view and I think the Bureau's is that they drowned.

W: John, it's been very informative and interesting. Do you have any other thoughts before we close regarding this investigation or anything we've talked about?

A: I, naturally I've always been very fond of the Bureau and my relationship with the FBI. I'm very proud of that. As I mentioned earlier I had planned to retire and just a happenstance in my life offered me another career and opportunity but I have the highest respect for the Bureau. The ex-Agents that I know are outstanding men and women and I'm proud to have been part of that elite corp.

W: Well thank you very much for your time and this information and I hope that it is used.

A: I hope so too.

W: Thank you.

A: Thank you, Marty.

INDEX
JOHN R. AREND
MAY 4, 2005

A

Adair, Red, 3
Agrico Chemical Co., 3
Alcatraz, escape from, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10,
11, 12, 13, 14
Anglin, Clarence, 5, 6, 9
Anglin, John Lee, 5, 9

Arend, John R.,

Assignments,
 Los Angeles, 2
 Portland OR, 2
 San Francisco, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,
9, 10, 11, 12, 13
Early education, 1, 2
Entered FBI, 2

B

Blackwell, Olin, 4, 13

C

Carnes, Joe, 7
COINTELPRO, 2
Communist party USA, 2
Continental Oil (CONOCO), 3, 4.
Copyright release, 1

D

E

Eastwood, Clint, 13
Escape from Alcatraz (book), 12
Escape from Alcatraz, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10,
11, 12, 13, 14

F

G

H

Hell Fighters (movie), 3
Hill, Napoleon, author, 4
Hoover, J. Edgar, Director, 2, 9, 10, 12

I

International Chemical Co. (Interchem),
1, 4

J

Johnson, Bumpy, 13

K

L

M

Morris, Frank Lee, 5, 6, 9

N

O

P

Pearson, Drew, 12
Postcard to warden, Alcatraz, 9

Q

R

S

San Francisco Police Department, 12
SS Norefcell, 10

T

Think & Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill, 4

U

V

W

Wayne, John, 3
Weber, Martin, interviewer, 1
West, Alan, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11
Williams Co., 3
Williams, John, 3

X

Y

Z