LUFTHANSA HEIST 1978
By: Naga Avinash Raya
Location: John F. Kennedy International Airport
Date & Time: December 11, 1978
Summary: An estimated $5 million in cash ($18.1 million today) and $875,000 in jewelry ($3.2 million today) were stolen, making it the largest cash robbery committed on American soil at the time.
Its magnitude made it one of the longest investigated crimes of all time and the latest arrest was made in 2014.
Nearly 40 years later, Vincent Asaro is on trial on charges that he helped plan the robbery
The heist was planned by Jimmy Burke, an associate of the Lucchese crime family, and carried out by several associates.
The plot began when bookmaker Martin Krugman told Henry Hill (an associate of Jimmy Burke's) about millions of dollars in untraceable money: American currency flown in once a month for military service members in West Germany.
The currency would arrive via Lufthansa and was then stored in a vault at Kennedy Airport. The information had come from Louis Werner, a worker at the airport who owed Krugman $20,000 for gambling debts ($78,000 adjusted for inflation) and from his co-worker Peter Gruenwald.
Louis Werner helped Krugman throughout the planning, even telling him where the robbers should park.

A Ford Econoline 150 was used to transport the money and there was a backup crash car incase there was a cop chase. This car would distract the cops or atleast reroute a few of them during the chase, taking away more of the task force from the Ford.
Inside Gunmen: Tommy DeSimone, Joe Civitello Sr., Louis Cafora, Angelo Sepe, Tony Rodriguez, Joseph M. Costa, Paolo LiCastri and Burke's son Frank James Burke

Parnell "Stacks" Edwards was a black associate of Burke's gang who served as a "gofer" and chauffeur, and he was also included to dispose of the van used in the heist.
December 11\textsuperscript{th} 3:12 am
agent Kerry Whalen returned from making a transfer at American Airlines, he spotted a black Ford Econoline van backed into the ramp door
Struck in the head by two men with pistols
His wallet was taken and family was used to blackmail him into cooperating with the robbers
Senior agent Rolf Rebmann heard a noise by the loading ramp and went to investigate.

Handcuffed by 6 robbers and used keys provided by Werner (employee at airport) to make their way in.

Burst into lunch room with firearms and a bloody Whalen as a warning sign to back off.
They knew each employee by name and forced them to the ground.
They blackmailed to kill all the employees and made the senior cargo agent John Murray call Rudi Eirich who was the only one that knew the combination to the double-door vault.
However, Murray was instructed to tell Eirich about a problem in the lunch hall as to not give away the true intentions of the phone call.
When Eirich arrived, he was taken to the vault with a gun pointed to his head and forced to open the vault.

Eirich reported that the robbers knew about all the safety measures of the airport.

They only opened one of the vault doors as opening both would have triggered an alarm and alerted Port Authority Police who could have locked down the entire airport in 90 seconds.
40 parcels were removed and all the employees were tied up and ordered not to call the Airport Police until 4.30 am. The robbers left at 4.16 am and no calls were made till 4.30 am. This gave them enough time to escape without having to worry about a 90 second window.

The loaded van and the crash car left the terminal with all the packages.
The robbers drove back to a garage in Canarsie, Brooklyn where Burke was waiting and the money was shifted into a 3\textsuperscript{rd} van driven by Burke.

All the robbers left and Parnell Edwards swapped the license plates of the vehicles with stolen ones and was supposed to take the cars to a junk yard to be turned into scrap metal.
Edwards celebrated the heist instead of driving the vans to the junkyard by smoking marijuana and the van was parked outside his house and identified by police. His fingerprints matched those on the wheel and he was able to escape from the vicinity before being arrested.

The FBI suspected that the robbery was either committed by Burkes crew or John Gotti’s crew.
The FBI found the robbery to most likely be Burke’s crew due to Edwards’ previous connections with Burke. Burke became agitated and paranoid once this happened and decided to kill anyone who would give away his name in the heist starting with Edwards. Next followed a series of killings (either by Burke or his loyal associates) and unhappy endings.
### BURKE’S KILLING SPREE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parnell Steven &quot;Stacks&quot; Edwards</td>
<td>1978 Dec. 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martin Krugman</td>
<td>1979 Jan 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Eaton</td>
<td>1979 Jan. 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theresa Ferrara</td>
<td>1979 Feb. 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom Monteleone</td>
<td>1979 March</td>
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<tr>
<td>Louis Cafora</td>
<td>1979 March</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joanna Cafora</td>
<td>1979 March</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joe &quot;Buddha&quot; Manri</td>
<td>1979 May 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert McMahon</td>
<td>1979 May 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paolo LiCastri</td>
<td>1979 June 13</td>
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Jimmy Burke - convicted of murdering Richard Eaton/ die of lung cancer at the age of 64 on April 13, 1996.

Paul Vario died in Fort Worth Federal Prison (FCI Fort Worth) of respiratory illness May 3, 1988 at age 73.[16]

Henry Hill entered the Witness Protection Program. Hill died in a Los Angeles hospital on June 12, 2012, the day after his 69th birthday, after a long battle with an undisclosed illness.
Martin Krugman's body was never found. In 1986, he was declared legally deceased and his wife, Fran, received a $135,000 payout from his life insurance policy.

Louis Werner convicted on May 16, 1979; married Janet Barbieri following his release from prison.

Paolo LiCastri, Joe Manriquez, Robert McMahon, and Angelo Sepe's murders haven't been solved.
More security measures

Higher pay for workers to ensure loyalty

Depends on robbers – workers can always be bribed for larger sums of money, and with technology constantly evolving, maybe the heist can be done completely online through hacking.