

Hills bank robber comes, goes in cab

By Joanna Maliszowski
and Bob Sklar
staff writers

A gunman — "well dressed and very calm" and armed with what was determined to be a phony bomb — robbed a Michigan National Bank branch of at least \$73,000 Wednesday morning, Farmington Hills Police said.

Seven employees were inside, but no one was injured. There were no customers at the time.

The branch and the office building immediately to the north were evacuated when police arrived at the bank, at 28177 Orchard Lake, just north of 12 Mile, about 11 a.m., Police Chief William Dwyer said.

Investigators from the Michigan

State Police bomb squad entered the bank about 12:15 p.m. to examine the bomb, which looked real, according to police.

What they discovered were red candles bound together with electrical tape to look like sticks of dynamite. The so-called bomb was connected by wires to a battery, Lt. Richard Murphy said.

Farmington Hills firefighters stood by in case of fire or injury while the bomb's composition was determined.

INVESTIGATORS, who included FBI agents, gave the following account of the stickup:

About 10:10 a.m., Southfield Cab Co. received a call to pick up a man at Tally Hall, at 14 Mile and Orchard

A \$73,000 haul

Lake roads, at 10:30 a.m.

When the cab driver arrived, the man — described as 40-45 years of age with a southern or New England accent and dressed in an expensive-looking business suit — said he wanted to be driven to 12 Mile and Orchard Lake roads.

But, he said, he first wanted to make a stop at the Michigan National Bank two miles to the south. There, he asked the driver to wait while he went inside. Once inside, the man asked to speak to the person in charge. When an assistant to the manager appeared, he flashed a

badge and said he was an IRS agent.

The two then went into a conference room, where the man pulled a revolver and said he had a bomb inside his attache case. He ordered the employee to lead the other employees into a restroom.

The man then ordered a teller to gather money from the teller drawers and the vault. He put the money in his attache case.

THE MAN threatened to activate the bomb with a hand-held electronic transmitter. "and blow the place up," unless his demands were met or

If anyone sounded the alarm, Sgt. Dennis Rochford said.

Before leaving, the man left the bomb, which was in an open athletic bag, under the conference room table. He threatened to activate the bomb once outside if he found he had been given funny money (a pack of money containing dye timed to explode and spew red on both the bills and the holder).

About 20 minutes after entering the bank, the man returned to the waiting cab and asked to be taken a few doors south to the Swensen's Ice cream parlor, 27841 Orchard Lake. When he exited the cab, he gave the driver a \$20 bill and asked her to pick up a business associate across 12 Mile Road at the Quality Inn of Farmington Hills, and bring him back to Swensen's.

But when the cab driver arrived at the Quality Inn, no one was waiting.

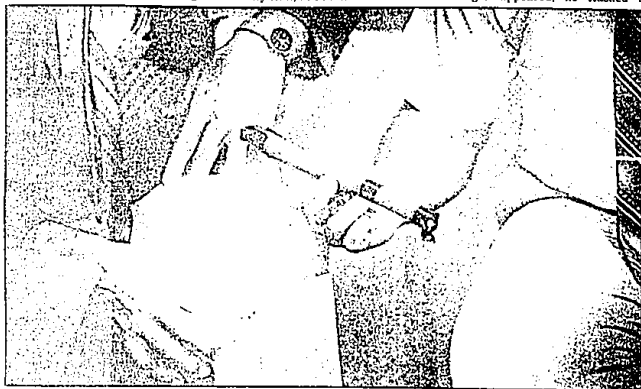
The gunman apparently left Swensen's in a waiting car. It was not known if he had an accomplice.

"NO QUESTION about it. It was well planned," Chief Dwyer said.

It appeared the gunman knew banking procedures. "He was very calm, which makes us believe he wasn't an amateur," Sgt. Rochford said. "I've never seen an amateur that cool. The cab driver never suspected anything."

A reward of up to \$1,000 will be paid through the Oakland County Chamber of Commerce Silent Observer program for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the robber.

Call tips to the Farmington Hills Police at 474-6181. Identify yourself as a Silent Observer and give a number that you will later recall to receive the award.



Through the window of the Michigan National Bank, investigators could be seen placing pieces of the phony bomb in a paper bag.

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