

# Perfect crimes

To the nine law enforcement agencies who investigated the pair of armed bank robberies in Sussex County in April and May, the culprit carefully planned his moves and came close to committing the perfect crime.

The investigation that led to the arrest last week of a Morris County man pointed to the fact that despite all the security apparatus available to banks today, the commission of the celebrated perfect crime is relatively easy.

The seasoned bank robber can deal with the sophisticated security devices. But, as investigators say apparently was the case in the armed robberies of banks in Byram and Andover, he can be tripped up by some unexpected eyewitnesses.

Here are some ways banks stop armed robberies — and why they often don't work:

- U.S. TREASURY officials require that any bank with federally insured accounts install security cameras to photograph any would-be bank robbers.

BUT... the quality of the black-and-white pictures often lacks sufficient clarity. And if the bank robber, as was the case in the Byram and Andover robberies, wears a mask and a hat or hood to disguise or cover his facial features, the security footage becomes even less useful.

- MOST BANKS today maintain a supply of marked bills, with serial numbers in sequence that can be traced.

BUT... Since the marked money is legitimate currency, most merchants don't think to check on serial numbers, according to police and FBI agents familiar with the technique.

## EVAN SCHUMAN

Marked money can turn up through illegal activities that use lots of cash — such as drugs or illegal gambling — and can then be traced back to the bank robber.

A fear in this part of the country, according to FBI agents, is money "laundering" in Atlantic City casinos, where large amounts of cash can be spent without appearing conspicuous. This is done by purchasing casino betting chips and then either gambling them or cashing them in. Few records are kept of most casino transactions.

- ARMED SECURITY guards, statistically, discourage all but the most daring and dangerous of the armed bank robbers.

BUT... with the exception of some of the larger city banks, few lending or savings institutions have armed security guards.

- THERE ARE security devices available for banks, such as containers for the money that is booby-trapped with pellets filled with green dye. A few moments after the bank robber leaves the premises, the bag or container is set to explode, covering the robber with a bright green paint making him appear somewhat obvious.

The idea is that if police cannot find this green bandit, people seeing the person running through the streets might take notice and become witnesses.

BUT... not only did neither the Andover nor the Byram banks have such a device, it wouldn't have done any good since the robber provided his own paper bags on both occasions.

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Back in May, everything appeared to be running smoothly for the bank robber and, with the money in hand, he ran out the door.

Once again, he had hit a small branch bank, just a few hundred feet from the wooded area he would run into for cover.

Both Sussex County banks were hit on Fridays when the robber, apparently believed, on the basis of previous surveillance, that he could get in and out without any customers interrupting.

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Officials now say those witnesses played a key role in the Morris County man's arrest.

In an irony that has knocked the stuffing out of the perfect-crime plans of more than one bank robber, after taking steps to outsmart all the security measures the banking world

has come up with, it was the happenstance of some people walking by that might have done in this perfect crime.

(Evan Schuman is a Herald staff writer.)

The opinions expressed in this column are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of The Herald.