

Aptos bank heist ends with chase, 7 arrests



LEFT: Sheriff's deputy Steve Watson holds a rifle taken from a bank robbery suspect after his arrest at New Brighton State Beach on Monday afternoon. Deputies say three bomb threats called into area schools, as well as a lookout and second getaway car, were all part of the robbery plan.

Shmuel Thaler/
Sentinel photos

Cops say rifle-toting robbers part of an inside job

By **BRIAN SEALS**
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✓ **APTOS** — A former bank employee is suspected of helping her boyfriend and five others plan Monday's daring daylight robbery of the Wells Fargo bank branch on Soquel Drive.

Kristen Swenson, 20, of Santa Cruz, who quit her bank job about a week ago, provided information on the bank's practices and procedures to her boyfriend, Anthony Castillo-Brenkwitz, 20, also of Santa Cruz, authorities said late Monday night.

The pair and the five accomplices are accused of staging the heist, which started with bomb threats at area schools, was executed with assault rifles and ended in a car and foot chase.

A female teller was either punched or struck with a rifle butt, and another person was assaulted near New Brighton State Beach, where three of the suspects were arrested.

Capitola police found two of the men sitting on a picnic table at New Brighton State Beach, out of breath with a backpack of money and an assault rifle beside them.

Swenson and Castillo-Brenkwitz were arrested at their homes.

Also arrested, and believed to have been involved at the bank, were:

■ Nonu Randy Aluni, 18, of San Bernardino;

■ Joseph Castillo Cattaneo, 23, of Riverside;

■ Frank Otele, 19, of San Bernardino;

■ and Toni Marie Castillo, 47, of Belmont, who police believe was a lookout.

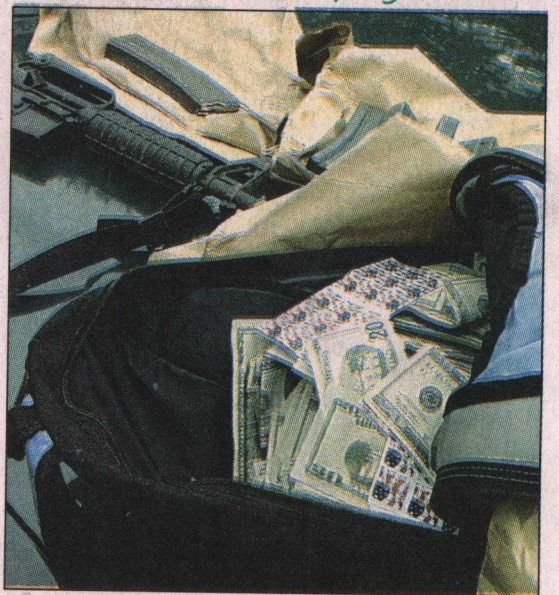
Also arrested was Daniel Solomona, 18, of San Bernardino, who fled Santa Cruz after the robbery by hopping a Greyhound bus headed for Los Angeles. Authorities

tracked him to the Greyhound depot in San Luis Obispo, where he was arrested without incident, said Lt. Terry B. Parker of the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office.

Deputies were headed to San Luis Obispo Monday night to pick up Solomona. It was unclear how he was involved.

All seven suspects face bank robbery and related charges, with bail set at \$1 million each.

The 11:13 a.m. robbery at the Wells Fargo branch was preceded by bomb threats at Aptos High, Soquel High and Cabrillo College. Deputies say the threats were meant



Cash and stamps taken from the Aptos branch of Wells Fargo sit on the hood of a sheriff's patrol car, along with a rifle and seven full ammunition clips used in the foiled heist.

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as diversions to the bank robbery.

Aluni, Cattaneo and Otele approached the bank, brandished their weapons and forced several people standing outside the bank inside.

They entered the bank and flashed the assault rifles, demanded money and fled when they got it, said Lt. Roger Wildey of the Sheriff's Office.

There were conflicting accounts of the rifle type, but deputies agreed it was a copy of an M-16.

A sheriff's deputy stationed at Cabrillo College, looking for signs of a bomb after the earlier threat, spotted the getaway car, a Honda. He jumped into his

patrol car and chased the suspects.

He was soon joined by officers from the Capitola Police Department, California Highway Patrol and state Parks Department.

After winding through Capitola and onto Park Avenue at speeds up to 65 mph, the chase ended when the suspects stopped along MacGregor Drive, jumped from the stolen car and ran.

Police say a second getaway car had been stashed nearby.

As they fled, Cattaneo assaulted a resident near the beach, injuring the resident's face, deputies said.

A state parks ranger in a four-wheel-drive truck on New Brighton State Beach spotted the suspects and radioed pursuing officers a "play by play" of their direction.

Capitola police found two of the men sit-

ting on a picnic table at the beach, out of breath, with a backpack of money and an assault rifle beside them. A second rifle was found between the car and the picnic area, as was another bag of loot.

Authorities did not release how much money was taken or how much was recovered.

"I think they were pretty exhausted and decided there was nowhere to go," Wildey said.

A third suspect was spotted elsewhere in the park and arrested. It was unclear Monday night which two men were found sitting on the picnic table and where Castillo, the apparent lookout, was caught.

The six suspects in local custody are being held in County Jail.

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