

FBI: COPS PLANNED HEIST 3 DETROIT OFFICERS CHARGED WITH ROBBERY PLOT

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If the plan had gone down the way it was designed, says the FBI, the three **Detroit** police **officers** last night would have posed as FBI agents and raided a posh Southfield home, tying up and teargasing anyone inside, before wheeling away a safe stuffed with \$1 million in cash.

Instead, the 5th (Jefferson) Precinct **officers** -- Vernon Gentry, 37, Edward James, 33, and Kevin Larkins, 40 -- were arrested and **charged** Wednesday with conspiracy to commit robbery. Also **charged** was 33-year-old Selena Turner -- James' cousin and the intended victim's ex-girlfriend.

According to the criminal complaint filed in U.S. District Court in **Detroit**, the trio had for months worked out in excruciating, seemingly flawless detail how they were going to take the cash and an arsenal of guns from the house.

But they made one slip.

About a week ago, they tried to recruit another policeman into the plot, according to the complaint. That **officer**, Darwin Roache, called up Chief Isaiah McKinnon to blow the whistle. He also agreed to pretend he would take part in the robbery. He met with his colleagues at an east side hangout named Jimmy's Bar, where they sketched on a napkin how their intended victim's house was laid out. The FBI recorded a number of Roache's conversations with the three men about the robbery, which they dubbed the "house party," the complaint said.

According to a seven-page, single-spaced affidavit signed by FBI Special Agent Robert Beeckman and filed at U.S. District Court, this is how the alleged scheme was hatched and eventually foiled:

The three **officers** heard that Turner's ex-boyfriend, Sterling Talley -- whose lawyer says he had just been released from prison for gambling and tax evasion -- had a stash of \$1 million and about 20 guns at his Southfield house.

Talley, had been suspected by the FBI of making gambling collections once a week and could have easily had hundreds of thousands of dollars in the house.

The **cops** staked out the house on Sherfield, watching the comings and goings. A woman came home at about 6 p.m. each day, they discovered, and always went in through the garage door.

They **planned** to rent a van, stencil FBI onto their jackets, arm themselves and rush the woman, pretending that it was a police raid. They would lug along sledgehammers just in case they were needed to gain access. Once inside, they would tie up anyone inside, spray them with tear gas and seal their mouths with duct tape.

They **planned** to send the Southfield police to the other side of town by making a phony "**officer** in trouble" call.

If the victims refused to open the safe, Gentry would melt it open with an acetylene torch. If push came to shove, they'd wheel the safe off with a dolly.

Their planning seemed to leave little to chance, officials allege in the filing. Because James had met Talley, he would not speak during the robbery. The other **cops** would address each other by a number, not by name. Their victim was nicknamed "the host," and the woman who lived with him "guest number one."

They would all wear black jeans. If they had to shoot Talley, they would leave his body in the house. They'd have radios and wear masks. They would rent a van and put a blue light in it to make it look like a police vehicle.

Gentry found the flashlights they'd need at Kmart for \$18.99 apiece. They went on a dry run to the house on Tuesday of this week and parked in the neighborhood, watching the house and discussing their plan.

After the robbery, they would burn their clothing and meet in a drop house in the 5th Precinct where they would divide the money.

Before the scheme could be executed, the three **officers** were arrested: James and Gentry at the east side station house as their midnight shift came to an end, and Larkins at home.

"The good thing is that it didn't take place," McKinnon said at a news conference after the court hearings.

McKinnon said Roache called him last Friday. He said he referred Roache, who also works in the 5th Precinct, to the department's internal affairs section. They brought the FBI on board and the investigation was born. Roache, McKinnon said, has a police detail assigned to protect him.

In federal court Wednesday, James, who came onto the force in 1995, spoke in a shaky voice to U.S. Magistrate Judge Steven Pepe, telling him he needed a court-appointed lawyer. He chewed on a thumbnail and stared blankly ahead before marshals led him off in handcuffs, clutching the complaint against him in his hands.

Larkins, who has been on the force since 1986, waved to his mother.

Gentry, still wearing his police shirt and slacks, looked angrily around the courtroom.

Turner, dressed in all black, with her hair pulled back in a ponytail, was released on \$10,000 personal bond.

Turner and the three **officers** , who were suspended without pay, made initial appearances on the complaint charging them with conspiracy to commit robbery affecting interstate commerce. They are scheduled for a detention hearing and preliminary examination today, at which a judge will decide whether there is enough evidence to convene a grand jury. Indictments could follow.

If convicted, the **officers** and Turner could face 20 years in prison.

As the court proceedings lumbered on, federal agents were executing search warrants at the homes of the three **officers** , the drop house and Talley's Southfield home.

Richard Lustig, Talley's lawyer, stood outside his client's home as federal agents carted off boxloads.

"He's in a state of shock that these people would try to take his life," Lustig said. "He told the agents as they left: 'Thanks for saving my life.' "

Lustig wouldn't say what was removed from Talley's house -- a two-story brick-pillared home with a crescent driveway and a Jaguar in the garage -- but said the agents were using the evidence to verify the allegations against the **officers** .

It's the latest allegation of wrongdoing against **Detroit** police **officers** . In September, eight **officers** from the 6th (Plymouth) Precinct were indicted on charges ranging from ripping off drug dealers and planting drugs on innocent people. Last week, two **officers** were indicted on charges they stole a copy of a police promotional exam.

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Caption: Photo DAVID P. GILKEY/ Detroit Free Press; Photo Vernon Gentry

This 10-year veteran has been in trouble before -- with the department and the courts. Kevin Larkins

Another veteran: He joined up in 1986. Larkins was arrested at his home. Edward James A **Detroitcop** for less than **3** years. He was arrested with his partner, Gentry. Selena Turner The alleged link: She is James' cousin and the target's former girlfriend. **Detroit** Police Chief Isaiah McKinnon, left, listens Wednesday as U.S. Attorney Saul Green fields a question about the latest criminal case against **Detroit** police **officers** .

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