

Record \$5.8 million heist cracked with two arrests

United Press International
NEW YORK — The arrests of a reputed mobster and an airline employee have given authorities the first big break in the nation's biggest cash heist ever — the \$5.8 million robbery at Lufthansa Airlines cargo hangar in December.

New York City and airport police, the FBI and U.S. Customs agents are pressing the search for at least five other suspects.

None of the \$5 million in U.S. currency and estimated \$850,000 in gold, jewels and pearls taken in the robbery at Lufthansa's Kennedy Airport terminal has been recovered.

But authorities said the arrests Saturday of Angelo John Sepe, 37, of New York, a convicted holdup man, and Peter Gruenwald, 39, of Levittown, N.Y., a cargo traffic division operator for Lufthansa, provided the first major break in the Dec. 11 robbery.

The two are to be arraigned today before a U.S. magistrate.

Sepe was charged with taking part in the heist. He was arrested in a 1979 Thunderbird that agents said

he bought in a spending spree with his share of the loot.

Gruenwald was held as a material witness in the case. No formal charges have been filed against him.

Both were lodged in the federal Metropolitan Correctional Center in lower Manhattan.

The arrests came six days after a

federal grand jury heard testimony from seven subpoenaed witnesses.

Sepe is a reputed member of the Paul Vario organized crime family, authorities said. He was released from prison in August 1977 after serving time on a robbery conviction.

Charges against Sepe include theft from an interstate shipment, a federal extortion charge, possession of goods taken from an interstate and foreign shipment and conspiracy.

Another suspect in the case was believed to be Thomas DiSimone, an ex-convict said by police to have ties with organized crime. He was

reported missing Jan. 14 and his wife reportedly was among those who appeared before the grand jury.

The robbery occurred at 3:05 a.m., when six masked gunmen drove a stolen black van into a Lufthansa cargo hangar, overpowered one employee, handcuffed eight others and entered the airline's high-value safe.

They loaded the van and disappeared. The planning that apparently went into the heist led authorities to believe it was an inside job, and 150 Lufthansa employees were given lie-detector tests.

Cultist pleads 'innocent'

United Press International
GEORGETOWN, Guyana — Peoples Temple member Larry Layton Monday pleaded guilty to murder charges in the airstrip massacre of Congressman Leo P. Ryan, D-Calif., and four other people.

Layton, a 32-year-old ex-Marine from San Francisco, had been expected to plead guilty to charges of attempted murder at his arraignment today in a bid to escape the gallows. In a surprise move, he pleaded innocent to all five charges of murder, three of attempted murder and several lesser charges.

State prosecutor Nandram Kisson said he was ready to proceed on all charges. Conviction on the capital murder charges would bring Layton an automatic sentence of death by hanging.

Chief defense counsel Rex McKay said he was not ready to present the defense because an eminent psychologist and psychiatrist from New York with opinions crucial to his presentation was unable to obtain airline reservations to Guyana.

Chief Justice Harold Bollers then granted an adjournment until Feb. 28. The prosecution had wanted to start the case, but the judge said he thought a break in the testimony would be inconvenient.

Asked what happened to the plea-bargaining deal, prosecutor Kisson said there was never a firm deal as such, "just feelers," and that "something went wrong somewhere, with him."

A guilty plea to charges of attempted murder could have resulted in a sentence of life imprisonment in the Georgetown Prison for Layton.

Layton is being held in Georgetown prison without bail and in isolation to protect him from other prisoners. Earlier, there was an attempt on the life of another Peoples Temple prisoner awaiting trial for murder, Charles Beikman, 45, of Indianapolis, Ind.

Layton is specifically charged with killing Congressman Ryan, three newsmen and a Temple defector on Nov. 18 at a remote airstrip near the Rev. Jim Jones' jungle commune where Ryan had just completed an investigation into the sect and wanted to leave with 17 defectors.

'Progress' in New Orleans police strike

United Press International
NEW ORLEANS — Only gun salesmen are reporting record business, and the mayor has canceled additional carnival activity, but a federal mediator reports progress in finding a solution to a 4-day police strike before Mardi Gras revelry culminates a week from today.

"I'm very pleased to report that some progress has been made," federal mediator Ansel Garrett said Monday night after police and city negotiators met for 6½ hours in the first bargaining session since more than 1,000 officers left their posts Friday night.

Despite the progress, Mayor Ernest Morial canceled another downtown Mardi Gras parade that was to roll through the streets tonight and said it was "realistic" to accept the fact the raucous pre-Lenten carnival festival could be wrecked by the strike.

Hotels reported an increase in telephone calls from concerned Mardi Gras guests, but no wholesale cancellation of reservations was involved. Carnival visitors continued to stream into the city and crowd French Quarter streets, but Bourbon Street businesses reported a 30 percent drop in sales this year compared to last year's pre-carnival activity.

Only gun salesmen reported record business.

"A lot of pistols we're out of and a lot of shotguns we're out of because we've got a run on them," said gun dealer Emmett Bellaire.

State troopers and National Guardsmen supplemented the handful of police remaining on the job to protect the city of 650,000 and hordes of Mardi Gras visitors arriving daily despite the strike.

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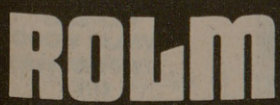
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