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Police ID slain robbery suspect

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Man shot by cops

is from Alabama

TRENTON _ The suspected bank robber killed in a shootout with police Tuesday morning in Chambersburg has been identified as Robert Elijah Cox, an Alabama man.

Late yesterday, city detectives confirmed they are investigating whether Cox, 37, of Anniston, Ala., was also the armed bandit who in December robbed the Roma Federal Savings Bank on South Broad Street and left behind a fake bomb.

A similar device was found Tuesday after the shootout, which began moments after Cox, who was carrying a bag, suspiciously left a branch of Sun National Bank and fired at an off-duty police officer working at the bank who had followed him from the building, Meyer said. In December, the Roma robber was described as a white man in his 40s who wore a fake beard, a tweed suit and brown fedora hat.

On Tuesday, Cox was clad differently and had a real beard.

The Roma bandit was armed with a semiautomatic pistol and left behind a device he claimed was a bomb he could detonate by remote control.

That device, wrapped in plastic, was found by a bomb squad to be harmless, police said at the time. They believe the robber used the story to buy getaway time.

Seconds before Cox was shot in the 200 block of Franklin Street at 11 a.m. Tuesday, after running through some back yards, he dropped a black bag containing what police said was a device made to look like a bomb.

State police bomb squad members examined the device and determined it was harmless. City police spokesman Lt. Joe Juniak said it was a flashlight wrapped in duct tape and plastic.

Yesterday, a law enforcement source told The Times the device found Tuesday matched the one from the Roma robbery.

Deputy Police Chief Paul Meyer confirmed the connections. "The similarities . . . that it was a fake bomb, and the suspect being white, are being looked at," Meyer said of the Roma robbery. He declined to comment further about the connection, saying it was under investigation.

Cox was identified yesterday by the FBI through fingerprints, Meyer said. He had been living in Anniston, Ala., but had previous addresses and past arrests in Gainesville, Fla.

Why Cox was here is being investigated by detectives, Meyer said, but they have learned he frequently traveled between Alabama and New Jersey.

Cox's wife, who Meyer declined to name, was in Tabernacle, Burlington County, yesterday.

After city detectives notified Alabama authorities of Cox's death, his wife called city detectives from an address in Tabernacle, Meyer said.

The exact address or her reason for being in New Jersey was unknown, Meyer said.

In the Gainesville area, Cox had three arrests for burglary and drug possession dating to 1989, records show. In May of last year, he was extradited from the Gainesville area as a fugitive, but details of that incident could not be learned yesterday.

Cox has had addresses in Alabama since 1993, criminal records in Florida show.

Cox allegedly bolted from the Sun National Bank at Chambers and Forrest streets at 11 a.m. Tuesday when he saw Sgt. David Cruz working as a security officer at the bank. Cruz followed the man, who police said was acting nervous, and he shot at the officer seconds later on Franklin Street.

Cruz radioed he was under fire and on foot in pursuit of a white man carrying a black bag south on Franklin Street.

Patrol units rushed to the scene. At Mifflin and Chambers streets, Cox tried to hide behind a group of young boys, then fired again at Cruz and Patrolman David Godbold, police said.

City detectives said yesterday Cruz had taken cover with Godbold, and Godbold shot back.

Cox then ran through the parking lot of the Camelot Lounge on Chambers Street, through some back yards and back to Franklin Street, now in the 200 block.

Other officers confronted Cox, and after he raised his gun, Officer Tom Paccillo shot at Cox numerous times, downing him. He died two hours later at a city hospital, Meyer said.

(Officer Anthony Paccillo was incorrectly identified yesterday as an officer who fired at Cox.)

An autopsy showed Cox's body had four wounds, three in the chest and abdomen and one in his right hand, Meyer said yesterday.

Dozens of area residents and bystanders saw parts of the wild, running gun battle. Witnesses said the police were calm, coordinated and herded people to safety as the shots flew through the residential area.

Police Director James B. Golden said Tuesday afternoon preliminary reports indicated the officers' actions were legitimate and justified.

But Mercer County Prosecutor Daniel G. Giaquinto said yesterday his office, not city police, has the final say whether shooting Cox was a justified response by police.

"It is the role of the (prosecutor's) office, not the police, to determine if the shooting was justifiable, or if the police conduct should be presented to the grand jury," Giaquinto said.

"The preliminary indications are that this was a fast, fluid and dangerous situation involving an armed subject. However, we cannot make a definitive decision or determination on the propriety of the shooting until the investigation is complete," he said.

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