

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Feds Arrest - and Release - St. Thomas Man in Attempted Bank Robbery and Armored Guard Shooting

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ST. THOMAS -- The Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested one of three alleged bandits who almost pulled off a near-\$1 million bank robbery on St. Thomas last week. An armored vehicle guard was shot and wounded during the bungled heist. The guard's injuries were not life-threatening.

U.S. Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shaper said in a press release Monday that 28-year-old Melik Petersen of St. Thomas was arrested on Sept. 12th, the day after the attempted robbery and shooting outside of the Altona branch of Scotia Bank, seen above.

A day later, by order of U.S. Magistrate Ruth Miller, Mr. Petersen was released from custody until he posts \$50,000 cash or property bond.

By the official account, the attempted heist was a criminally stupid, potentially deadly enterprise from the start.

According to court documents, three masked gunmen in a black Nissan Altima pulled into the bank parking lot while guards for Ranger American Armored Service prepared to load three large cash bags into their armored truck.

"As the Altima approached the Ranger guards, a masked individual exited the rear driver's side of the Altima with a long gun, and a second masked individual exited the rear passenger's side door with a handgun. The masked individuals discharged several shots at the Ranger American guards," documents said.

One guard was shot in the rear-end.

Surveillance video from Scotia Bank shows the driver of the Altima -- apparently spooked by the gunfire -- sped off, leaving his accomplices behind.

"The other two armed robbers dropped the Scotia Bank money bags while they ran after the getaway vehicle," U.S. Attorney Shappert said in her written statement.

The bags held \$951,000.

At about 11:30 the night of the attempted robbery, Virgin Islands Police Department units canvassing the area spotted the black Nissan Altima in the parking lot of Mitchell Motel in Contant. The original VI license tag had been covered by a different license plate.

Officers also recovered a .40 caliber shell casing from the vehicle and a fresh, visible bullet hole in the passenger side door, according to the release.

The investigation by the FBI continues. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant US Attorney Delia L. Smith.