

NEWS

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Bank Robber Who Dressed in Drag Pleads Guilty to Nine Robberies in Two States

(More)

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CAMDEN, N.J. – A Jersey City man today admitted robbing or attempting to rob nine banks in New Jersey and Connecticut over a five-month period in 2008 and getting away with more than \$39,000, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr., announced.

Huy Trong Luong, 40, specifically pleaded guilty to two counts of bank robbery associated with the April 20, 2008 robbery of Commerce Bank in Bergenfield, N.J. and the Jan. 11, 2008, robbery of a Wachovia branch in Greenwich, Conn. Luong, however, also admitted committing the other seven robberies, and all of the conduct will be taken into consideration at sentencing.

In each of his robberies, Luong disguised himself as a woman, according to a criminal Complaint filed after his arrest following a final, failed robbery attempt on May 5, 2008, in Chatham, N.J. Inside his getaway minivan, Police found a black wig, a black Dolce & Gabbana hat, a women's make-up kit and black jacket, according to the Complaint.

Luong entered his guilty plea before U.S. District Judge Jerome B. Simandle, who scheduled sentencing for July 10. Under terms of his plea agreement and, as determined by the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, Luong, who remains in custody, faces a potential sentencing range of between 70 and 87 months in prison. His criminal history, once determined by the court, could increase his sentence. Luong also faces fines and mandatory restitution to the banks.

During the plea hearing today, Luong admitted his participation in the following robberies and attempted robberies:

- April 30, 2008 robbery of Commerce Bank in Bergenfield, N.J. of \$12,020;
- Jan. 11, 2008 robbery of Wachovia Bank in Greenwich, Conn. of \$2,000;
- Jan. 13, 2008 robbery of Commerce Bank in Westport, Conn. of \$2,000;
- Jan. 22, 2008 robbery of Provident Bank in Toms River, N.J. of \$11,109;
- April 20, 2008 robbery of Commerce Bank in New Canaan, Conn. of \$3,600;
- April 26, 2008 attempted robbery of Wachovia Bank in Highland Park, N.J.;
- April 28, 2008 robbery of Commerce Bank in Stafford Twp., N.J. of \$5,388;
- May 4, 2008 robbery of Commerce Bank in Mahwah, N.J. of \$2,950;
- May 5, 2008 attempted robbery of Commerce Bank in Chatham, N.J.

Luong admitted at the hearing that he made death threats or threatened the tellers with violence in each of the robberies. At the time of arrest, law enforcement recovered cash and a hoax bomb – what appeared to be three sticks of dynamite with fuses, wrapped together – in Luong's minivan. In reality, the sticks were Roman candle fireworks, according to the criminal

Complaint. In the three Connecticut bank robberies, Luong passed a note to the tellers advising them that he had a bomb and would detonate it if they did not meet his demands.

In May 2008, Luong was indicted in the District of Connecticut in Bridgeport for the three Connecticut robberies. The cases were consolidated in New Jersey for purposes of the guilty plea and sentencing.

Marra credited Special Agents with the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun in Newark, N.J. for the investigation. He also credited the FBI in Connecticut and local police in New Jersey and Connecticut involved in the arrest and investigation of Luong.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert G. Marasco of the U.S. Attorney's Violent Crimes Unit.

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Defense Counsel: Lisa Mack, Assistant Federal Public Defender, Newark, N.J.