

# The Collar Bomb Heist

One ordinary summer afternoon a man walked into a bank with a bomb hanging around his neck. He demanded \$250,000, threatening that if the money was not handed over the bomb would detonate, killing everyone. Read the dramatic account of the Pizza Delivery Bombing, one of the most shocking bank robberies in US history.



Aviva Sternfeld

It was a beautiful summer day on August 28, 2003. A middle-aged pizza deliveryman named Brian Douglas Wells walked into a PNC Bank in Erie, Pennsylvania, a city with a population of 103,000 on the southern shores of Lake Erie. In his right hand the man held an improvised gun fashioned from a wooden walking cane. An unidentified object stuck out from beneath his shirt collar. The clock read 2:40 PM.

The 46-year-old, balding Wells walked up to one of the bank tellers and told her, "I have a bomb!" He then handed over a note that read: "Gather employees with access codes to vault and work fast to fill bag with \$250,000. You have only 15 minutes."

The note further warned that Wells was carrying a bomb, and that if his demand was not met the bomb would explode. "Don't trigger an alarm and don't start a panic and don't call the police! There is no way to defuse the bomb." When the teller finished reading the note, Wells lifted his shirt to reveal an odd box-like device hanging from his neck.

The frightened bank official explained to Wells that the people with the combination

to the vault were not there at the moment. Instead, she filled a sack with all of the cash she could access—\$8,702 in total—which she handed over to Wells. Wells took the sack and left the bank. On his way out he stopped to take a lollipop from the counter. Then, sucking the lolly, he left the bank, jumped into his car and drove off.

He didn't make it far, though. Around 15 minutes later, state troopers spotted Wells standing outside his tiny Geo Metro car in a nearby parking lot. He was easily identifiable by the strange object sticking out of his collar. The troopers quickly surrounded him, tackled him to the ground, and shackled his hands behind his back.

Wells shouted that he was innocent. He had delivered a pizza order to a certain address, but it turned out to be a trap. Three armed men had tied the bomb around his neck and forced him to rob the bank.

## Playing with Lives

The bomb itself was cleverly made. It consisted of two parts. The first was a metal collar consisting of three rings that were placed around Wells' neck. The collar required four keys and a three-digit number combination to open. The second part was a metal box that contained two six-inch pipes packed with smokeless gunpowder. The bomb had been attached to Wells' neck like a gigantic handcuff.

The bank robbery was only the first stage of Wells' ordeal. The bomb's makers were not satisfied with sending Wells to rob a bank and forcing him to threaten to blow it up. They also planned an elaborate scavenger hunt, a sinister game that would force Wells to race around Erie in an attempt to solve a series of riddles. If Wells cooperated with his captors' caprices he could win the game and the chance to live.

The instructions closely resembled those of a contest advertised in a local newspaper with the name "The Great Key Race." After leaving the bank with \$250,000, Wells was supposed to drive to



Partial view of the city of Erie, Pennsylvania.

various addresses throughout Erie to find different keys and numbers hidden around the city. These would be the only way to remove the bomb from his neck before the timer detonated.

At each location a note provided further, complicated instructions, all accompanied with threats, diagrams and detailed maps. Wells was promised that if he followed the instructions perfectly he would find the keys and numbers he needed to open the collar and remove the bomb. Any hesitation on his part was guaranteed to end his life.

"There is only one way you can survive and that is to cooperate completely," the note warned. "This powerful, booby-trapped bomb can be removed only by following our instructions... ACT NOW, THINK LATER OR YOU WILL DIE!" And one final threat: "If police or airplanes become mixed in you will be destroyed!"

When bomb experts later examined the remains they found that Wells had been given only 55 minutes to complete his tasks and remove the bomb before the timer triggered the detonator.

The first riddle was simple: "Exit the bank with the money and go to the McDonald's

restaurant [sic]. Get out of the car and go to the small sign reading drive thru/open 24 hr in the flower bed. By the sign, there is a rock with a note taped to the bottom. It has your next instructions."



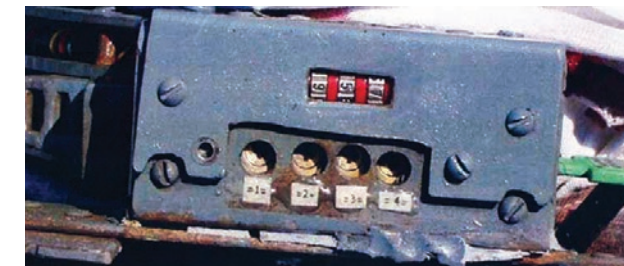
Photos taken from security cameras. Left: Demanding the money from a bank teller while carrying the improvised cane gun and wearing the bomb around his neck. Right: Brian Wells leaves the bank with a sack of cash.



The PNC Bank where the robbery took place.



The bomb included a collar made of three metal rings that were locked around Wells' neck. The collar survived the blast.



Opening the collar required four separate keys and a number combination.