

Tiger kidnapping: Victim given photo of partner and daughter with gun to their heads

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The prime suspect behind the country's latest heist is a career criminal who specialises in tiger kidnappings and was recently released from prison.

The Dubliner has travelled to Eastern Europe to be trained in surveillance techniques and firearms by ex-special forces soldiers there.

But now he is back in Ireland and has joined up with criminal associates to end a relatively quiet period for terrifying tiger kidnap raids.

The latest heist sparked a huge security operation, with armed gardaí swooping on a van at Dublin Airport.

But the gang were already making their getaway with almost €225,000 that had been handed over. The victim, who is aged in his mid-50s, had earlier been forced to give the cash to the gang who had held his partner and her adult daughter hostage.

It is understood that he also had been given a phone by the gang which contained photos of the women at gunpoint.

But the terrified cash-in-transit employee handed over a note begging for help to an airport official.

It has also emerged the victim and his two colleagues were due to collect a multi-million euro sum from a plane scheduled to arrive from London.

This cash was due to be brought back to the company's depot in Ballymount.

It is not known if the tiger kidnap gang had planned to target the money from this flight as well as the €225,000 in cash that they had earlier seized.

Last night, a massive manhunt continued for the kidnap gang but no arrests had yet been made.

The chief suspect, who was released from prison for robbery earlier this year, has been linked to a number of tiger kidnappings and has been known to use bleach to forensically clean crime scenes. Gardaí believe the targeted family had been under surveillance for weeks.

Their ordeal began at 8pm on Wednesday when the gang forced their way into their house in Artane and held them there before driving off with the two women at around 5am.

The security employee was forced to drive to Ballymount Industrial Estate, collecting around €225,000 from his company's depot which was to be delivered to Dublin Airport.

While at Ballymount, it is understood that the employee failed to use a designated password which would have let his employers know that he had been the victim of a tiger kidnap. He was in extreme fear for the well-being of his partner and her daughter at the time, having been given the phone which contained photos of them being held at gunpoint.

He was told his wife and daughter would be harmed if he tried to raise the alarm or refused to surrender cash.

He then drove to Dublin Airport where he was due to do a cash drop off at Corballis Road Business Park at 8.30am.

Two raiders took the cash haul at this location and made their escape. The employee then drove a short distance and approached an airport worker who deals with the gate allowing vehicles access. The employee said he was being watched and told the person to turnover the piece of paper to the authorities.

"On the back was a handwritten note describing how the security worker's family was being held hostage and that he was the victim of a robbery. It was a cry for help, and he asked the worker to call the police," a source explained.

It is understood that after this happened, the worker then locked himself into a security van with two other employees who had been waiting for him for another job.

Armed gardaí arrived and freed them. However the gang escaped while officers focused on the security van.

Meanwhile, the women had been taken from their home at Gracefield Road in a silver VW Caddy van with the partial registration 09D. It was eventually parked at the Chestnut Grove estate in Dunboyne. The mother in her 50s and her daughter in her 20s were handcuffed and bound in the back. A member of the public alerted gardaí after hearing screams coming from the van.

Terrifying tactic was first used by IRA paramilitaries

Tiger kidnaps are so-called after the tactic of stalking potential victims and then using hostages to force business people or bank managers to hand over cash.

The terrifying tactic was first used by the Provisional IRA and other paramilitaries during the Troubles. The Northern Ireland Bank robbery by members of the IRA, in which two bank workers and their families held hostage, netted a staggering £26m in 2004.

Northside Dublin criminal Derek Murphy was the first ordinary criminal to use the technique in a bid to rob a restaurant in 2000.

Murphy told his accomplice: "If he tries anything funny, shoot him in the leg." He was convicted after DNA found on a cigarette butt linked him to the scene.

Despite the risks tiger-robberies can yield big results for criminals compared to straight-forward armed hold-ups.

Two days before Christmas in 2008 a businessman from Co Kildare was the target of a tiger kidnap. The security company director was forced to take €1.2m from secure storage and hand it to the gang holding his wife and daughter.

In 2005 another well-orchestrated tiger robbery netted €2.28m for an armed gang in which a family were held hostage.

And in February 2009 a Bank of Ireland official was forced to hand over €7.7m while his girlfriend was held at gunpoint.

The spate of such tiger robberies between 2005 and 2010 sparked calls for tighter protocols to stop criminal gangs using the tactic

Last year armed gardaí foiled a tiger kidnap gang who had targeted three women in a bid to rob a post office outlet at Sutton, north Dublin, thanks to safety protocols.

Shots were fired by officers during a dramatic car chase as a member of the gang was arrested in Malahide.

More than a dozen garda vehicles were involved in the operation. They were backed up by the helicopter unit and all the stolen cash was recovered.