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## 'The Bomber' called one of a kind

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To those FBI agents who pursued him, he is known as "The Bomber."

To those who represented him in court, he is *sui generis*, a Latin term meaning one of a kind.

It would be hard to argue with the accuracy of either name when describing James Roland Clark, who robbed 32 banks, according to the FBI. He was sentenced last week in

federal court in Little Rock for 26 of them.

For the 26 robberies — the first few completed with handguns, the last few completed with fake bombs — he was sentenced to 12 years and seven months in prison.

"He knew for sure he could have been there a whole lot longer than that," Jack Wagoner of Little Rock, one of Clark's court-appointed attorneys, said.

Clark's string of robberies

began Jan. 10, 1989, in Atlanta and ended Dec. 12, 1990, in North Little Rock. The take in those robberies totaled about \$140,000, but he has no assets, so no fine was issued during his sentencing hearing March 27.

In the courtroom, Clark looked little like the man photographed robbing banks in Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Missouri and Arkansas. His shoulder-length hair is start-

# Clark

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ing to turn gray and he is clean-shaven.

In the robberies, FBI photos showed Clark adept at disguising his looks. In one robbery, he has a full-length black beard and he wore a baseball cap. In another, he had full, light-colored hair and glasses. In another, he had short, black hair and a goatee.

Although his weight earned him the nickname "Fatso" by some of the law enforcement officers who pursued him, pictures and his appearance in the courtroom - about 5 feet 10 inches tall and weighing 215 pounds - show that not to be an accurate nickname.

"I had people guessing from 35 to 45 when describing his age," said Dale Kent, the FBI agent who pursued and finally captured Clark in a remote section of the Ozarks near Mammoth Spring in Sharp County. "He turned 60 (actually 59) in jail."

Kent, who seemed uncomfortable discussing Clark in an interview, declined to talk about his opinion of Clark. But during his sentencing hearing, Clark asked the veteran agent over to his table to speak with him on a couple of occasions. The conversations appeared cordial, with Clark showing no signs of animosity.

Clark declined to be interviewed by the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* before his hearing and is now in custody in Oklahoma.

Kent said he has been involved in the arrest of two men in Arkansas who had robbed more banks than Clark. One of them was on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted list.

Kent said it was Clark's disguises that made him so successful. His method of operation - the use of what he called a bomb - also appeared to help him take money without dye packs going off.

Normally, bank robbery is considered one of the riskiest crimes to commit, with security factors and sentencing far outweighing an average take of less than \$1,500.

## Risky business

"Bank robbery is very stupid to begin with and the solution rate is very high," an FBI spokesman told the *Democrat-Gazette* in February.

Clark never appeared to be in danger of arrest until FBI agents discovered a major clue in Clark's final robbery.

Even then, it took a lot of work to put all the pieces of

the puzzle together, Kent said.

Kent, who has been with the FBI more than two decades, became involved in the search for Clark late in his string of robberies. Arkansas was Clark's final home after living in Brooksville, Fla., from October 1987 to March 1988, and in Douglasville, Ga., for an undetermined length of time in 1989 and 1990, court records show.

## FBI joins pursuit

Kent and the Little Rock FBI office became involved in the pursuit of Clark when Clark placed a package on the counter of a North Little Rock branch of Savers Savings Association on Aug. 22, 1990.

The package contained a bomb, Clark told a bank teller. He then gave her a Polaroid photograph of a bomb on a couch. Clark also told the employee if she placed a dye pack with the money, he would detonate the bomb.

Clark robbed two more banks in the greater Little Rock area - a Metropolitan National Bank branch on Sept. 5, 1990, and a Union National Bank branch on Dec. 12, 1990. In the final robbery, Clark placed a remote control car with two pieces of pipe attached to it on the counter and said it was a bomb.

Another car that Clark used eventually led to his capture, court records show.

## Abandoned car

Clark abandoned a 1971 Volkswagen a short distance from Union National Bank near McCain Mall and investigators were able to trace it to its previous owner, Leroy Daniel Ruger, of Thayer, Mo., who had sold it in early November 1990.

Ruger could not be reached for comment, but he told FBI agents that he received a call from a woman about the car, and the next day, a man met him to test drive the car. The man subsequently paid Ruger in cash and identified himself as Billy Williams of Route 1 in Mammoth Spring.

Because Ruger only received one call about the car and knew of no other calls he would have received from Arkansas, the FBI traced his telephone records and found he received a three-minute call from a telephone number belonging to June Mitchell of Mammoth Spring, Clark's wife.

## Traced phone records

As Kent and other agents reviewed Mitchell's background, they found she lived within one hour of the 10 banks Clark confessed to robbing in Georgia and 45 minutes of the eight banks he robbed in Flor-

ida. They also found her social security number was assigned to a woman named June Clark.

"That's how we put it all together," Kent said. "It helped establish probable cause. We had seen he lived in Florida and Georgia and they had been having similar robberies in Florida and Georgia."

About the same time, Kent also learned that warrants from the Drug Enforcement Administration were issued for James and June Clark for a parole violation. The original violation involved a charge of conspiracy to possess and distribute marijuana.

About one month after Clark's final robbery, Kent was advised by a mail carrier that a house along Route 2 in Mammoth Spring was occupied by John and June Miller, both probably in their mid-50s, court records show.

For the next two days, Kent made spot checks of the area that revealed a one-story yellow frame house, several outbuildings and at least four vehicles, including a motor home.

On the morning of Jan. 23,



1991, FBI agents executed a search warrant at Clark's home. When they entered the house about 7 a.m., Clark was still sleeping.

Kent said they took him into custody and began to look for such things as the clothing and disguises used in the robberies. A wig and beard found closely resembled one used in the robbery of the Savers branch.

One of Clark's five children also was at the home during the search and he told agents that his father had worn the wig and beard.

#### Psychological profile

Kent said Clark at first did not acknowledge that he committed the robberies, but he eventually confessed to what he had done.

Early in the sentencing phase of the case, a psychological profile of Clark was worked up after he was interviewed in Springfield, Mo. Court records state that the profile showed a history of drug abuse and a need for medication, but Clark protested strongly to the govern-

ment's report.

"He cited instances where the psychiatrist reported items incorrectly in the report from his perspective and distorted other history, which makes him appear as a beast," U.S. District Judge Thomas Eisele wrote in the court records. "He testified that he knows he is sick and wants help."

June Clark, who now lives out of state, said in a recent telephone interview that the man she had lived with during the bank robbery spree is not the same man she married at age 18.

#### Beneficial testimony

It was her testimony at the end of the sentencing hearing last week that may have benefited Clark most, Wagoner said.

"I basically told them they were dealing with two different people," June Clark said. "The last three years that I lived with him, he wasn't what I call my Jimmy. There was another personality that came out within weeks of when he came out of prison (for the marijuana charge)."

June Clark said her husband was a successful, hard-working man during 30 years of marriage before cocaine came into their lives.

"The man worked three jobs at times," she said. "Sometimes, he would come home at midnight, fall into bed after a little bit of supper, and I would wake him up by shaving him in the morning to get him up for his paper route."

#### Boating accident

The introduction to drugs came after a boating accident in 1977 in which Clark was burned over 75 percent of his body and was not expected to live, she said.

"He started changing a little bit then," she said. "It was like dying made him realize he didn't have much time. He changed in personality then, but he was still the kindest, sweetest, gentlest person in the world."

June Clark said that after the long recovery process from the accident he got his business - installing central air conditioning units - going strong again and the family was well provided for financially.

However, both became addicted to cocaine, she said. Clark became a recluse and within a few years, he was arrested on a marijuana charge and sentenced to federal prison, she said. He was released in 1987 after serving about five years, she said.

#### 'Needed medication'

"He needed some medica-

tion, obviously, and he didn't have any and the stress of being out and trying to get back in the work world, I think it was just too much for him," she said.

After getting out of prison, Clark often showed the violent side of his personality, June Clark said. He was definitely not a likable person, she said.

During the first robberies, she said she did not know that her husband had committed them. She gradually began to realize he was doing something seriously wrong.

"I didn't know at first, not with my full mind," she said. "If you could understand, I didn't want to know what was going on. I knew the man was crazy, and I loved him, but it wasn't really him. I saw glimpses of the real him. I knew he was still in there and I tried to wait it out. I was hoping he would come back."

#### Robbery pattern

Prosecutors said there were no signs that Clark used the money to purchase extravagant items. Wagoner said it appeared that when the family was in need of money, he would commit a robbery.

The defense attorneys who came into contact with Clark appear to have grown to like him. They talk about his courtesy and how he appears to be very private.

"He's not like the public would expect him to be," said Jack Lassiter, a Little Rock lawyer who represented Clark for a few months before withdrawing because of a conflict.

Wagoner said he spent about 16 hours with Clark and found him to be quiet, but likable and "fascinating."

On the sentencing hearing, Wagoner said, "It was a painful deal for me."

#### Lighter sentence

Wagoner said the sentence was easier than what could have been handed out. Prosecutors and probation officers were seeking a tougher sentence of between 210 and 262 months instead of the 151 that he received.

"He hopes one day he can get back out in the daylight and be with his wife," Wagoner said.

June Clark has similar wishes.

"That's all we want. They said in the (pre-sentencing) report I didn't want him back," she said. "I never intended that. He's been my husband since I was 18 years old."

"He's still my husband and I don't care how sick he is, or what kind of trouble he's in, he's still my husband and I'm here for him as much as I can be."