

# Plane Used In \$24,511 Bootheel Bank Holdup

By RICHARD H. WEISS

Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

The officers of the Bank of Kennett, Mo., never realized when they built their bank facility near an airport that they were setting themselves up for a bank robbery with a special sort of getaway.

They decided in 1973 to build a facility in a shopping center across Highway 84 from the Kennett airport.

Who could have foreseen then that a man would rent an airplane in Sarasota, Fla., fly it all the way to the small Bootheel community (population 10,000) and rob the Bank of Kennett's Bootheel Plaza facility of \$24,511?

How could the bankers have known that someone would be smart enough to have parked his twin-engine Piper Cherokee at the end of a runway with the engine running so he could make a quick getaway?

Lonnie Kinchen, president of the bank, said in a telephone interview last night that yesterday's robbery was a complete surprise to him. The bank facility — just east

of Kennett — was chosen for the convenience of customers, he said, with no thought of the airport across the highway.

Kinchen said he was "waiting for the dust to settle" before deciding what security precautions are needed to prevent a repetition.

Meanwhile, authorities are watching Midwestern landing strips for the robbery suspect, Dennis R. Holmes, 39 years old, of California. A federal warrant has been issued for Holmes's arrest on bank robbery charges.

Joseph Appleyard, chief pilot at Dolphin Aviation in Sarasota, taught Holmes to fly last fall. Appleyard said in a telephone interview that Holmes had aroused no suspicions.

"He didn't seem like my average bank robber," Appleyard said. "He seemed like an easygoing fellow. All we were interested in was wheth-

er he was going to pay his bill." He did.

Authorities were able yesterday to trace Holmes plane back to Sarasota because a construction worker on a job near the bank copied the plane's serial number. The worker, DeWayne J. Crawford, 36, became suspicious when he saw the man run from the bank across the highway to the plane. A robbery "was the first thing I thought of," Crawford said in an interview last night. In a matter of minutes, he was gone.

Kennett police said Holmes had rented the plane Thursday from the Sarasota firm. He arrived in Kennett on Saturday and gave the townspeople he met various reasons

why he had come to southeastern Missouri.

About noon yesterday, police said, a man fitting Holmes's description entered the bank, which was empty except for one teller. The man first told the teller that he wanted to wait for a friend, then displayed an automatic pistol.

Police said the robber told the teller, Mrs. Edra D. Batson, to lock herself in a rest room. He then filled a plastic trash bag with the money, police said, and ran for the plane, only 100 yards away.

The airplane was tracked for a time by radar at an Air Force base in Arkansas and appeared to be heading for Memphis. But the plane then was lost to radar, apparently

because the pilot flew at a low altitude.

The plane was believed to have had a full load of gasoline when it left the Kennett airport. Its range is about 700 miles authorities said.

The getaway was unusual. But then again, so was the robbery. Kinchen said the Bank of Kennett, established in 1890, had never been robbed.

A spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington said last night that he could not determine immediately whether the get away was unique.

But Edward T. Denham, president of the aviation company in Sarasota, vaguely recalled a similar incident near Winter Haven, Fla.

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