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St. Clair Shores officer arrested in connection with armed robbery

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A St. Clair Shores police sergeant is suspected of assaulting and robbing one or two victims potentially as retribution for a cell phone that was stolen from his daughter.

The 17-year veteran officer and a veteran Detroit cop are suspected of pistol-whipping a victim pumping gas at a Citgo gas station near Interstate 94 and French Road in Detroit, and stealing money and a cell phone from two victims in their early 20s, Detroit Police Chief James Craig said at a news conference on Monday.

But the off-duty officers' behavior may not have been random. Equipped with badges and guns, they may have acted in revenge for an earlier robbery of the cell phone of the St. Clair Shores cop's daughter, according to a local police officer who did not want to be identified.

"They may have gone and kicked some ass as retribution for taking the phone," the officer said.

The St. Clair Shores officer was suspended Monday without pay, according to city officials.

Detroit investigators on Monday submitted a request for arrest warrants to Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy. Maria Miller, a spokeswoman for the prosecutor's office, said the information was being reviewed and a decision on whether to issue the warrants may be made Tuesday.

Potential charges could include armed robbery and assault.

The two sergeants were arrested separately Saturday without resistance. The St. Clair Shores officer was arrested at his home, police said.

Their names have been withheld pending the issuance of an arrest warrant.

Initial media reports indicated the two men may be linked to at least one other incident of men posing as police officers preying on citizens. But Craig said the men are suspects only for the single July 21 incident on Detroit's east side.

"At this time, there is no evidence to support that both sergeants were involved in any other police impersonation cases that have been reported in recent weeks," Craig said. But he added, "We're still looking into that."

Craig would not elaborate on details of the investigation.

Inspector Brian Stair, head of Detroit Police Internal Affairs, said the St. Clair Shores and Detroit officers were in the same Police Academy class 20 years ago. The St. Clair Shores officer served two years as a Detroit police officer in the 12th precinct before moving to the shoreline city, police said.

Police were alerted to the suspects by someone who contacted a local TV station with a cellphone image from the robbery.

"Someone recognized our sergeant," Craig said. "We didn't have any knowledge before that it was a police sergeant."

Craig wouldn't elaborate on how the St. Clair Shores officer was implicated. He was identified in a police photo lineup, he said.

Witnesses told investigators in addition to badges around their neck and handguns, the men also were wearing bulletproof vests, although police did not know if they were department-issued items. The men used a private vehicle equipped with a light to make it appear official, police said.

St. Clair Shores Mayor Kip Walby said city officials are cooperating with Detroit police. The city's police department issued a statement indicating officials are aware of the arrest and are still reviewing information they've received.

"We're not jumping to conclusions and will let the system work, see how it plays out," Walby said.

Jim Santilli, executive director of the Traffic Improvement Association of Michigan, said he was "disappointed" by the arrests but reminded that they represent a tiny minority of police.

"I want to remind everyone that 99.9 percent of law enforcement officers are honest, compassionate, and hardworking individuals who are truly dedicated to protecting and serving the public," he said in a statement issued late Monday afternoon.

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