

Fugitive caught after eluding pursuit near canyon

PHOENIX (AP) - Danny Ray Horning, the convict who Thumbed his nose at the law on a much-documented 7-week chase through the Arizona wilderness, said Wednesday he's no Rambo - the cops are just dumb.

"I'm just a nice guy," the convicted robber and accused dismemberment-killer said by telephone from the state prison at Florence.

Horning is back at the prison - this time in the highest-security unit. He was captured Sunday in a chase that started May 12 at the desert prison 50 miles southeast of Phoenix and went north to the Grand Canyon 200 miles away.

He dodged helicopters with

night-vision equipment. He lost trackers and bloodhounds. And he slipped through two roadblocks sitting in the back seat of a hijacked car.

The "Rambo" tag came from the police and the media, Horning said.

"I think anybody that knows the woods at all could have done the same thing," he said. "I just went down obstacle courses that they're too lazy to go through and the dogs can't go through. ... Down cliffs, up cliffs, through nice little springs, through thick brush."

Horning had been serving four life terms for a bank robbery last year in Winslow when he walked out of state prison in Florence, disguised in a stolen white lab coat and carrying a forged prison identification badge.

On Wednesday, state prisons

chief Sam Lewis fired the guard who let Horning out the gate and imposed discipline ranging from demotion to suspension for six other prison staffers for allowing the escape.

Police in Stockton, Calif. said Tuesday they'd seek his extradition as a suspect in the 1990 killing of catfish farmer Sam McCullough, whose dismembered body turned up in an irrigation canal.

Horning and his brother, Jerry, had worked for McCullough, and police say the gun used in the Winslow bank robbery was stolen from McCullough's home.

Horning denied Wednesday that he or his brother, also in the Florence prison, had anything to do with the killing. He also denied involvement in the sinking of an Alaskan fishing boat, though he once was inves-

tigated in the disaster that killed nine.

He did admit to several kidnappings and car thefts during the escape, and to a Tucson bank robbery a week after his escape.

He got \$2,300 from the bank and rode away on a bicycle, then used \$200 to hire a stranger - "just a guy that needed the money bad" - to drive him to the timber country that marks the start of the northern Arizona high country.

Once he was forced to take hostages to escape a closing dragnet, he formed a plan, Horning said: Kidnap a family and ransom them for \$1 million and his brother's freedom.

"I would have went to Mexico, bought me a nice piece of property," he said. "I would have hired about five to 10 families and set them up like

they've never been set up before and when I needed something they could go to town and get it. ... I'd never have to show my face again."

Horning has been charged with 16 felonies in Coconino County, where most of the chase took place, including the kidnappings of an Arizona couple he forced to drive him to the Grand Canyon, and of two British women tourists in whose car he began his final chase.

After Horning left the women tied to a tree outside the Grand Canyon National Park on Saturday, a police officer saw him speeding. Horning dumped the car off an interstate and took to the woods, slipping through a net of searchers rushed from the park to the area.

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