

Pensioners 'kidnap and torture' financial adviser

A group of wealthy pensioners have been accused of kidnapping and torturing a financial adviser in Germany after he lost £2 million of their savings in the financial crisis.

By Allan Hall in Berlin

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The men, dubbed the "Geritol Gang" by police after an arthritis drug, face up to 15 years in jail if found guilty of subjecting German-American James Amburn to the alleged four-day ordeal.

Two of his kidnapers are said to have hit him with a Zimmer frame outside his home in Speyer, western Germany, before he was bound up with duct tape, bundled into the boot of a car and driven 300 miles to the home of two of the abductors on the shores of Lake Chiemsee in Bavaria.

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"I was bleeding from my eyes, nose and my mouth," he said. "But the nightmare had only just started."

During his alleged confinement in an unheated cellar, Mr Amburn, 56, claims he was burned with cigarettes, beaten, had two of his ribs broken was hit with a chair leg and chained up "like an animal."

The incident began on Tuesday last week as he made his way home after enjoying a drink at an outdoor café with a friend.

Mr Amburn, the boss of an investment firm called Digitalglobalnet, was allegedly attacked by two men – aged 74 and 60 – as he entered his apartment building.

Mr Amburn, who also has a home in Florida, said: "I had no reason to be afraid. But as I went into my home I was jumped from the rear and struck.

"Then they bound me with masking tape until I looked like a mummy. It took them quite a while because they ran out of breath. When they loaded me into the car I thought I was a dead man."

After being driven through the night he allegedly arrived at the home of one of his captors and his 79-year-old wife in Chieming on the shores of what is one of Germany's main holiday lakes.

As he was bundled into the cellar another couple, two retired doctors, aged 63 and 66, arrived to take part in the alleged

four-day torture and humiliation of the captive financial adviser.

"I was led into the cellar," recalled Mr. Amburn, "I saw a folding bed and a WC reserved for me. They immediately went on about there money. I told them what I had told them before, that due to market conditions, unfortunately it was gone.

"I was struck. Again and again they threatened to kill me. The fear of death was indescribable. I never thought I would make it out alive.

"I told them that if I sold certain securities in Switzerland they could get their money and for this I had to send a fax to a bank in that country so funds could be transferred."

They agreed and he sent a fax, but unbeknown to them he scribbled a message on the bottom of the paper for whoever received it to call police.

"It was disguised as a policy," he said. "I wrote 'call. po-lice' and they didn't notice it but someone at the bank was bright enough to pick up on it."

He attempted to escape when he was allowed out of the cellar on Friday for cigarette break in the garden while the kidnapers waited on their loot attempted. In the pouring rain he ran down the street pursued by his captors in the Audi A8 they had used to transport him to the house.

Several people saw him but one of the captors shouted: "He's a burglar!" Held by people who believed him to be a crook, he was dragged back to the cellar.

He then claims to have sustained broken ribs when he was "punished" for the escape attempt.

When the Swiss bank telephoned police in Germany an armed team of commandos was scrambled and the house was stormed in the early hours of Saturday morning.

Forty armed police rescued Mr. Amburn who was naked except for his underwear. A physician had to be on hand to help his captors into police vans because of their various infirmities.

Volker Ziegler, the chief public prosecutor from nearby Traunstein, said: "They were angry because they invested money in properties in Florida and he lost it all. This was black money – they hadn't declared it to the revenue authorities in Germany."

The pensioners now face up to 15 years in jail each for illegal hostage taking, torture and grievous bodily harm.

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