

Then and now: Bombing transformed Harveys



The bomb blast at Harveys in 1980. Photo/FBI

Thirty-five years ago this week – Aug. 27, 1980 – an extortionist's bomb exploded inside Harvey's Resort Hotel at Stateline.



This view from the California side of

the state line is a frame from the FBI documentary just seconds before the 1980 explosion.

The FBI ultimately arrested John Birges of Clovis as the mastermind. Birges tried to extort \$3 million but plans went awry and a robot detonated the bomb during an attempt to disable it. The entire area had been evacuated. No one was injured. The explosion hollowed-out a five story cavern inside the hotel, from the basement up to the fifth floor.

Two years later, the rebuilt hotel had a grand opening. One of the invited attendees is said to have been John Birges. Later, by the time of his arrest, Birges had completed building another bomb, supposedly intended for the Transamerica building in San Francisco. Birges died in a Nevada prison on Aug. 28, 1996, exactly 16 years and one day after the Harveys bomb exploded.

Click on this link to view a fascinating six-minute documentary by an FBI special agent.



The rebuilt hotel-casino looks completely different. It is the largest hotel at Lake Tahoe. Photo/Bill Kingman

– Bill Kingman