

Police arrest two sniper suspects

Daniel Chang, Shannon McCaffrey and Martin Merzer
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

ROCKVILLE, Md. — Police declared the Washington-area sniper murders solved Thursday. In custody was a veteran of the Persian Gulf War and a teenage companion who authorities say has been implicated in a deadly robbery.

Police said a rifle found in their car matched the murder weapon.

Neither man had been charged in the killings as of Thursday evening, and their alleged motive remained unclear. But acquaintances said both men sometimes expressed anti-American sentiments, and whatever the motive, police believe the suspects shot 13 people — innocent

men, women and a 13-year-old boy — from a distance and then ran. Ten of them died.

Police said a trail of tips and clues that stretched from the Washington, D.C., area to Alabama and Washington state led a federal SWAT team to a blue 1990 Chevrolet Caprice. It was parked at a rest stop off Interstate 70 in Frederick County, Md., about 50 miles northwest of the nation's capital.

Inside the car, police found John Allen Muhammad, 41, who changed his name from John Allen Williams when he converted to Islam, and John Lee Malvo, 17, a Jamaican native who apparently is not Muhammad's stepson, despite previous reports that he is.

The two were asleep. Officers cap-

tured them without additional violence. It was 3:19 a.m. EDT.

A search of the Chevy Caprice produced a rifle that ballistics tests later concluded was the same weapon employed during the three-week reign of terror, a federal agent said. Officers also found a sighting scope and a tripod.

The car reportedly was modified so a shooter could lie on the back seat and fire out of the trunk. That, experts said, could explain why no shell casings were found at most of the shooting sites.

Authorities said the final tip came from Ron Lantz, a truck driver from Ludlow, Ky., who spotted the car at the rest stop. Lantz said he called police and was told to stay in his vehicle

and keep an eye on the suspects.

"I'm no hero, get me right," he said in a radio interview. "I think I did a real good deed and may have saved a lot of people's lives."

By Thursday evening, Muhammad and Malvo had not been formally charged with the crimes, but authorities said they were certain they had their men. Prosecutors were scheduled to meet Friday to discuss charges and work out jurisdictional and other issues.

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Chechen rebels release body of hostage

Alex Rodriguez
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

MOSCOW — Heavily armed Chechens holding about 700 people hostage at a Moscow theater released the body of a woman they had shot to death and fired grenades Thursday at two other captives who escaped, ratcheting up tensions with the Russian government.

Even as attempts at negotiations lurched, the rebels threatened to kill 10 people each hour if their demand for an end to the 3-year-old war in Chechnya was not met, said two reporters for an Italian news agency who were released from captivity Thursday.

Hundreds of heavily armed Russian troops, police officers and special forces soldiers encircled the theater. Inside the main hall, nerves began to fray, a hostage said by cell phone. The Chechens refused police offers of food but were providing hostages with water and chocolate. At least three of the hostages are Americans.

The Chechens, who seized the theater Wednesday night during a performance of one of Moscow's most popular musicals, gave Russia a seven-day deadline to pull out of Chechnya, according to a pro-rebel Web site, kavkaz.org.

Russian President Vladimir Putin broke his public silence about the crisis, saying the Russian government would exercise "maximum safety" in working for the release of

the hostages. At the same time, he vowed not to give into the group's "provocations" and said the raid was an act of international terrorism planned by "overseas terrorism centers."

A spokesman for Aslan Maskhadov, who was the Chechen president when Russian troops stormed back into the territory in October 1999, said his government was not responsible for the

hostage-taking.

Public support has been flagging for the war, which has ground down into a deadly stalemate of hit-and-run attacks by Chechens on civilian and military targets and crackdowns by the Russian army that even pro-Moscow Chechens deem abusive.

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