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U.S. citizens' bodies found near border

CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico (AP) — FBI forensic experts joined Mexican soldiers and police yesterday in searching two desert ranches near the border for the bodies of more than 100 Mexican and U.S. citizens, apparent victims of a drug gang.

A convoy of 16 vehicles, many with U.S. license plates, rumbled through the iron gates of Rancho de la Campana, 10 miles southwest of Ciudad Juarez, at midmorning — joining scores of Mexican soldiers and police already working around the buildings in the desert.

Some vehicles had newspaper taped over the windows to conceal what, or who, was inside.

Attention seemed concentrated around a concrete barn-like structure where workers were using a backhoe.

Attorney General Jorge Madrazo said in a television interview that investigators suspect the victims were killed by the Juarez drug cartel, once Mexico's largest cocaine smuggling outfit.

He said more than 100 people could be buried on the ranches just across the border from El Paso with 22 believed to be U.S. citizens.

"We believe these people were killed for their knowledge or for being witnesses to drug trafficking," Assistant FBI Director Thomas Pickard said in Washington. "Most of the information we have shows these individuals were buried there at least two to three years ago, so it's not a recent situation."

Authorities were led to the ranches by an informant who approached the FBI early this year, a fed-

eral law enforcement official said in Washington. The informant said there might be as many as 100 bodies there, including people who had been providing information to U.S. drug agents, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Eighteen-year-old Rodrigo Falcon said his family had been taking care of one of the ranches for the property owner. Other nearby residents who refused to give their names said they had seen parties at the ranch in the past, but it had seemed abandoned recently. While there were stables for horses, the only animal visible was a dog.

Pickard said digging began late Monday and part of one body had been recovered by midday yesterday. Sixty-eight FBI agents and forensic experts and other U.S. personnel were at the ranches, he said.

"We've been discussing this for a period of time with the Mexicans," he said. "We've been getting outstanding cooperation from Mexico."

Pickard said elaborate preparations were required to decide where to start digging, to secure the sites and to "make sure we thoroughly cover the sites with ground-piercing radar," using techniques the FBI developed in Kosovo. The FBI sent forensic teams to Kosovo twice this year to exhume bodies in a search for evidence of war crimes by Serbs.

In Washington, President Clinton said he had not received confirmation that 22 Americans were among the suspected victims but condemned the killings as "a horrible example" of the excesses of Mexico's drug cartels.



New York publisher to print recalled Gov. Bush biography

AUSTIN (AP) — A controversial biography of Texas Gov. George W. Bush, which was recalled by its first publisher after questions were raised about the book and its author, will be reprinted by a New York company.

Soft Skull Press said this week it plans to print 25,000 paperback copies of *Fortunate Son*, in which author J.H. Hatfield cites anonymous sources as saying Bush was arrested on a drug charge in 1972 but had the arrest expunged from his record through family connections.

Within days of the book's initial publication, *The Dallas Morning News* reported that Hatfield had been paroled from Texas prison after serving five years for

hiring a hit man to bomb his supervisor's car in Dallas.

Bush, the Republican presidential front-runner; his father, the former president; and the Harris County prosecutor at the time all have denied the book's drug arrest allegation.

Soft Skull Press said in a news release that it is reprinting the book to allow voters next year to decide for themselves

whether Hatfield's allegations are credible.

Mindy Tucker, a spokesperson for the Bush campaign, again challenged the book.

"I have to question whether or not they're going to publish it under the category 'science fiction,'" she said. "It contains allegations that are libelous and untrue."

"It contains allegations that are libelous and untrue."

— Mindy Tucker
Bush campaign spokesperson

Religious Christmas decorations removed from public area

BOERNE (AP) — The image of the baby Jesus made a brief appearance in the city's Main Plaza before it was quickly taken away on the advice of attorneys.

A nativity scene featuring the Christ child, Mary, Joseph, the three wise men and assorted animals was erected in its traditional spot on the downtown square Friday by municipal workers.

But the employees were unaware that constitutional issues had already convinced their bosses, on the advice of their lawyers, to display the nativity scene on private property this year.

"We knew we couldn't put it up there any more because somebody last year mentioned that we had a nativity scene on public property," Chris Turk, the city's development director, told the *San Antonio Express-News*.

When word reached Turk that workers had set up the nativity scene in its usual spot, he quickly sent a crew to remove it.

"They had it up and within an hour," he said.

A 1989 U.S. Supreme ruling allows holiday display of public property if they are mostly secular settings with decorations such as Santa, reindeer, Frosty the Snowman, Turkey and a Christmas tree.

But the city decided to remove its nativity scene in front of private business.

The decorations will be put this week with help from workers.

Jay Jacobson, of the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, said the relocation was a

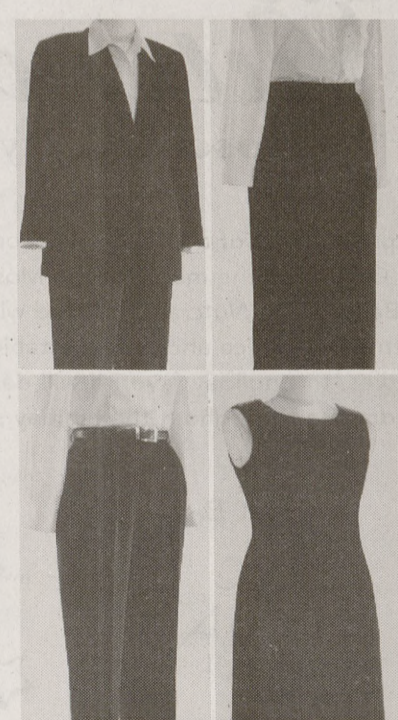
comed move for religious freedom, but it did not answer his concerns.

"I would point out that appropriate for the city is the religious scene or put anywhere," Jacobson said.

The civil rights group would not take any action in Boerne unless Jacobson received a complaint.



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