

# Sniper task force information leads FBI to search Tacoma home with metal detectors

TACOMA, Wash. (AP) — The search for the sniper stalking the suburbs of the nation's capital stretched across the country Wednesday as FBI agents converged on a rental home in Tacoma with metal detectors and chain saws.

The agents, acting on information from the sniper task force, were seeking evidence related to ammunition, a senior law enforcement official in Washington, D.C., said on condition of anonymity.

The development raised hopes that investigators had a lead in the shooting spree that has left 10 people dead and three others critically wounded since Oct. 2. But the source said no arrests were expected soon.

At the site, FBI spokeswoman Melissa Mallon said the search had been going on for a

few hours and would be finished soon. She said the search was consented to by the property owner, but refused to say why officials were there.

"There's no immediate danger to anyone in this neighborhood," she said.

The backyard of the home was divided into grids, and agents swept metal detectors back and forth over the ground. Other crews used chain saws to remove a stump from the yard and load it onto a truck; a source said the stump would be returned to Washington, D.C., for analysis.

Lt. Col. Joseph Piek, a spokesman at nearby Fort Lewis, said the FBI had asked for help from the Army base south of Tacoma. He said he could not confirm TV reports that a Fort Lewis soldier may

have been a tenant at the home.

Meanwhile, worried parents across the Washington area sent their children off to school with extra-tight hugs, defying the sniper's warning that children are not safe "anywhere, at any time." Thousands of others kept their kids at home.

As expected, investigators confirmed that a bus driver shot to death on Tuesday was the sniper's 13th victim in the three-week rampage.

They also urged immigrants to come forward with any information without fear of deportation, and the governor raised the possibility of posting National Guardsmen at Maryland polls on Nov. 5 unless the killer is caught.

Ballistics and other evidence connected the slaying of Conrad Johnson, 35, to the

sniper, said Michael Bouchard of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

Investigators waited three days to reveal the threat against children, which was contained in a letter found after a shooting Saturday in Ashland, Va.

Bouchard insisted vital information was not being withheld.

"We're all parents and are certainly concerned about the safety of our kids and of our co-workers," he said. He said if information is released too early, "it inhibits our ability to do the job we need to be doing."

For the first time in three days, Montgomery County Police Chief Charles Moose did not issue a public statement to the sniper. A news briefing was scheduled, then abruptly canceled just before word

leaked of the search in Washington state.

"The investigation has taken us down different avenues and roads that we need to explore," police spokeswoman Capt. Nancy C. Demme said without elaboration.

Earlier this week, Moose had implored the sniper to contact authorities and continue a dialogue, and he suggested police were having trouble complying with undisclosed demands.

The latest message believed to be from the killer was a letter found not far from where the bus driver was slain, two law enforcement sources told the Associated Press on condition of anonymity. The message reportedly demands \$10 million — the same request sources say was made in Saturday's letter.

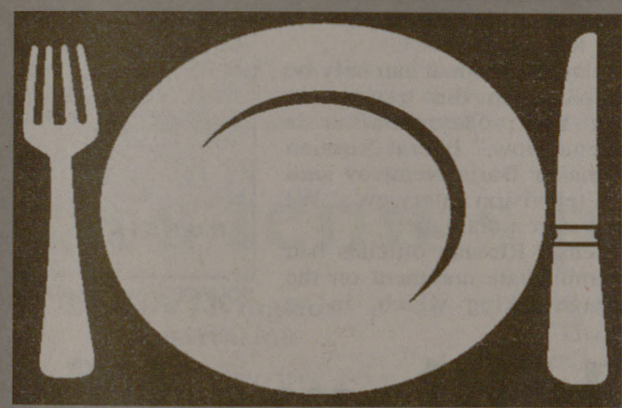
## A GROWING FORCE

### Manning the hunt

In addition to hundreds of local agents, hundreds of federal agents and other resources are working in the sniper investigation.

Who	How many
FBI personnel	600
Federal agents	454
ATF intelligence analysts	101
Inspectors	59
Secret Service agents	50
Canine handlers	9
A-Star helicopters and 20-person flight teams	2
Blackhawk helicopter	1

SOURCE: Associated Press



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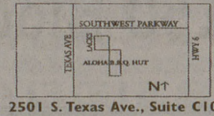
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