

From News Wires

Chowchilla, Calif. — Twenty-six children and the driver of the school bus from which they all vanished were still missing Friday, apparently victims of a mass kidnaping, the Madera County sheriff said.

Deputies and police scoured the farmlands around Chowchilla, search planes were out at dawn, volunteers joined on horseback and the FBI was called in. Parents gathered at the police station and life ceased its normal routine along the two blocks of the main street. Still, nearly 24 hours after the disappearance of the children and their driver, there was no real clue as to why or how or where they might be

"It appears to be an abduction," said Sheriff Ed Bates. "We'll search the whole state if we have to. And if we have to, we'll search the entire United States."

It was Thursday afternoon and the children — ages 6 to 15 — were due home from a swimming outing. The bus from the Dairyland Union School District made three stops, letting out three groups of children, and had one more stop to make.

It never made it. The bus was found Thursday night hidden in a stand of tall bamboo in a dry canal about four miles south of Chowchilla and 150 miles southeast of San Francisco.

All-Points Bulletin

A statewide all-points bulletin was issued by the sheriff's office this morning for up to three vans — white with gold and blue trim — believed traveling together along Calif. 152, heading west from Chowchilla to Los Gatos.

The bus was found about two miles from the point where Calif. 152 passes near Chowchilla. Los Gatos is a community near the Pacific Coast about 50 miles south of San Francisco and adjacent to San Jose.

There was no immediate information on why the bulletin on the three vans was issued. There were earlier reports that a van had been seen along the school bus route for the past few days.

Night Search

The San Joaquin Valley farmlands around Chowchilla were searched throughout a night shattered by thunder and lightning. Joining the land and air search were about 70 local volunteers, some on horseback and some in cars and trucks equipped with citizens band radios.

The only possible clues found to date were two cotton swabs, gauze and a plastic cup about 75 yards from the abandoned school bus. But Bates said he was "not

satisfied' the find was significant. "It could be people taking photographs

Several sets of footprints and the light tracks of what appeared to be one or two heavy-duty vehicles were found leading out of the canal where the bus was abandoned, according to authorities.

Tire tracks were imposed on top of the bus tracks, Bates said, indicating the vehicles could have been waiting for the bus. The ignition key was missing from the bus. No signs of foul play were found in the bus or the immediate area.

The children are students at the Dairyland Union School, which school district secretary Nita Hansen described as "just a little country school."

She said the bus driver, 55-year-old Frank Edward Ray Jr., was 'very reliable' and had been driving for the school for 28 years. "You couldn't ask for a nicer guy," Mrs. Hansen said. "He was born and raised here."

Sheriff Bates, who set up a command post at the Chowchilla Police Dept.,

speculated there were five possibilities: a "deranged guy" who had kidnaped the entire group; a "personal revenge, somebody who wants to make the parents suffer," a kidnaping "for money," a "terrorist" plot; or "some older kid on the bus took com-

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