

THE HUNT FOR A SNIPER: THE SUSPECTS; Suspects Spent Year Traveling, Nearly Destitute

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Body

John Allen Muhammad was known to friends for his crushing handshake, his deft touch in repairing fast cars -- and his temper.

He met his 17-year-old traveling companion, John Lee Malvo, an illegal immigrant from Jamaica, when he dated the teenager's mother in Washington State. The teenager called Mr. Muhammad his father and followed a strict diet of crackers, honey and vitamin supplements that the older man prescribed, relatives said.

The two lived almost as destitutes early this year in a Lighthouse Mission in Bellingham, Wash., a small city in the far northwest corner of the country. They traveled this summer and early fall through Louisiana, New Jersey and finally to the nation's capital. They were arrested together early this morning at a Maryland rest stop while sleeping in a former undercover police car with nearly 150,000 miles on it.

After being arraigned in federal court in Baltimore this afternoon, they are being held in connection with the 13 sniper attacks that terrorized suburban Washington for the past three weeks. Federal officials said they were confident that the homicidal rampage, which killed 10 people, had come to an end.

But what precipitated the killings, what guided the seemingly random selection of innocents, and even what drew to Mr. Muhammad, 41, and the boy to the Washington area is far from clear. Some federal officials speculated that Mr. Muhammad, who converted to Islam in 1985 and later changed his last name from Williams, had been motivated by anti-American sentiments.

Late last year, the lives of the two men seemed to spin out of control.

Just before Christmas, the police in Bellingham responded to a domestic dispute involving Mr. Muhammad and Mr. Malvo's mother, Uma James. The woman and her son were arrested for being in the country illegally. After they were freed, the boy disappeared from high school.

In February, Mr. Muhammad, a decorated Gulf War veteran and a combat engineer, was arrested on shoplifting charges in Tacoma, Wash., a city where he had lived on and off since leaving the military in 1994. He skipped a court appearance and a warrant was issued for his arrest in March.

By midsummer, the two men were halfway across the country in Baton Rouge, La., where they dropped in unexpectedly on some of Mr. Muhammad's relatives and former in-laws. Mr. Muhammad, long known as a sharp dresser, surprised one of his relatives by appearing dirty and unkempt. "He looked dingy, not clean cut," said Denitra King, 18 and cousin by marriage.

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The two men apparently came to the East Coast sometime in late summer, picking up a 12-year-old Chevrolet Caprice for \$250 in Trenton, N.J. Less than two weeks later, on Sept. 21, the authorities say, Mr. Malvo fled on foot from the police after a robbery-killing at liquor store in Montgomery, Ala.

It is possible that what drew Mr. Muhammad to the Washington suburbs was the presence of his second former wife, Mildred D. Muhammad, and their three children. They live in Clinton, Md., not far from where many of the shootings occurred.

Two years ago, Mr. Muhammad, who has at least five children by three women, abducted the three children from his estranged second wife, she claimed in court papers. She said he often threatened "to destroy my life."

Somewhere along the way, Mr. Muhammad, who qualified as an expert marksman in the Army, picked up the Bushmaster rifle that the police say they found in his car.

The killing rampage around Washington began on Oct. 2.

Perhaps the least unusual part of John Muhammad's past was his upbringing in Baton Rouge.

He graduated in 1977 from nearby Scotlandville High School and joined the Louisiana National Guard the next year. In 1981, he married his high school sweetheart, Carol A. Kagle, and they had a son. Some friends and relatives said they could not believe that he is suspected as a serial killer.

"He was a good, caring man," said Edward Holliday, his first cousin, who saw Mr. Muhammad this summer when he was visiting Baton Rouge. "He coached a football team and liked kids. He was well mannered and friendly. Real clean cut."

Others saw a different side.

"Williams was a loner and to himself," said a high school classmate, Stanford Joe Young. "He had a temper. He was one of the quiet ones, that if you got him mad, you got him up."

In the National Guard, he ran into disciplinary problems. In 1982, he pleaded guilty to disobeying orders by failing to appear for duty and was fined \$100. In a more serious incident that occurred soon thereafter, he hit a noncommissioned officer. He was convicted the next year and sentenced to seven days in confinement, which was suspended. He lost a stripe and was demoted from sergeant.

Until the events of this fall in Washington, the pivotal year in Mr. Muhammad's life appears to have been 1985. That November, he separated from his wife and son and joined the Army. He also converted to Islam.

"After he changed his religion, he called and told me what not to feed my child," Carol Williams told The Seattle Times. "I told him as long as he lived with me, it was up to me."

On paper, at least, military life seemed to suit Mr. Muhammad.

After joining the Army, he was trained as a metal worker and a water-transport specialist, but primarily as a combat engineer. He served near Tacoma at Fort Lewis, in Germany and at Ford Ord, Calif. He served in the Gulf War and was described by military officials as a competent but not extraordinary soldier. Although he was not trained as a sniper, he received his marksmanship badge with an expert rating, the highest of three categories, in the use of the M-16.

In 1988, nearly three years after joining the Army, he married for the second time, to Mildred D. Green at Fort Lewis. They had a son and two daughters: John Allen Jr., now 12, Salena, 10, and Taalibah Aanisah, 9.

After leaving the Army in 1994, he stayed in the Pacific Northwest, serving for a year in the Oregon National Guard.

In Tacoma, Mr. Muhammad struck at least some of his neighbors as a solid family man.

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"You know, I'm sitting here watching all this stuff about him, and, really, during that time he was just the hardest working guy I ever met," said Leo Dudley, a former Marine who lived nearby. "He would work long hours. If I needed some help on something, if he had the time, he would always come and give me a quick hand. So as a neighbor, he was a really good neighbor."

Mr. Dudley said he never saw Mr. Muhammad lose his temper in the five years that they were neighbors.

In March 1995, Mildred Muhammad, his second wife, helped him start a business, Express Car/Truck Mechanic Service Inc., an automotive repair operation he ran out of the couple's home. Customers described him a good mechanic, but an erratic businessman. One client said Mr. Muhammad once called him to say that not only was his car not ready, but that he also no longer had it and would have to find him a replacement.

With a partner, Mr. Muhammad also opened a martial arts school in Tacoma in the mid-1990's. The partner, Felix Strozier, said the business went well for a while, but that there was a falling out over money that Mr. Muhammad borrowed from the school and did not pay back.

"He was manipulative and would do anything to get his way," Mr. Strozier said.

Mr. Muhammad was also having problems with his first wife, Carol. The couple had a bitter dispute over the custody of their son. When the boy was 12, he visited his father in Washington State over the summer, converted to Islam and failed to return until his mother got a court order, her sister Sheron Norman said.

Mr. Muhammad attended a mosque in Seattle, some former associates said. But neighbors said he rarely went out of his way to talk about his religion.

"The only thing that really sticks out is, he was really excited that he was attending the Million Man March," Mr. Dudley said.

He said that Mr. Muhammad helped provide security for Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam, who organized the march in Washington in 1995. "When he came back, he told me that it was a great experience and he really enjoyed the camaraderie and the feeling and all that stuff," Mr. Dudley said.

Mr. Muhammad's second marriage began to unravel in the late 1990's, over what his second wife wife described as his abusive behavior toward their three children.

They were separated on Sept. 8, 1999, when she was granted a permanent restraining order against him. The order barred Mr. Muhammad from her home and workplace and the school or day care facility of the children.

In May, 2000, in Pierce County, Wash., his second wife sought to limit Mr. Muhammad's contact with their children, alleging "physical, sexual or a pattern of emotional abuse of a child." Even after the restraining order was issued, she said, she was afraid of him.

"He was demolitions expert in military," she wrote in a court document. "He is behaving very irrational. Whenever he does talk with me he always says that is going to destroy my life and I hang up the phone."

In federal weapons charges filed against Mr. Muhammad on Wednesday in Seattle, the government cited a protection order against him in 2000. It said that he had threatened his wife and children and was known to own a semiautomatic .223-caliber Bushmaster rifle. It was this type of rifle that the police said they found today in Mr. Muhammad's Chevrolet.

As part of the divorce settlement, Mr. Muhammads was ordered to pay child support for the three children at \$869 a month.

On Jan. 10, 2001, Mildred Muhammad signaled her intention to move from Washington State and remain hidden from her ex-husband. She filed a court document seeking to waive the requirements that she notify her husband of

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their children's whereabouts. But in a hand-written notation in the document, Mildred Muhammad said Mr. Muhammad had abducted the children more than nine months earlier, and she did not know where they were.

"At the present time, my ex-husband, John, still has the children," she wrote. "I've been awarded custody of the children. Their whereabouts are still unknown. I am requesting this waiver so that when my children are found that I may be able to remove them from the state legally and without notification to John where we will be."

By May 2001, Ms. Muhammad had moved to the Prince George's County, Md., apparently with the children, and she worked last year as temporary employee at the Justice Department. She filed documents in the county court and the Superior Court of the District of Columbia to maintain her existing restraining order and have it expanded to shield their children.

It is unclear how and when Mr. Muhammad met Uma James and her son, John Lee Malvo. But about four years ago, Mr. Muhammad took the boy to the martial arts school in Tacoma, where his partner, Mr. Strozier, gave him instruction.

"Sometimes a little bit too aggressive with the smaller kids," said Mr. Strozier, referring to Mr. Malvo. "When I tried to bring it to his attention, he also tried to be aggressive with me. But when I put him back in his place, he sometimes would sort of bow his head and sometimes even would cry."

In October of last year, Mr. Malvo enrolled as a junior at Bellingham High School. He showed up without any records of his prior education, and school officials were unable to trace the boy's origins. The officials notified police officers, who interviewed the boy but took no other action in the matter.

By the end of last year, Mr. Muhammad and Ms. James were apparently living together in Bellingham. On Dec. 18, the police were called to settle a domestic disturbance involving the couple.

After finding that she and her son were in the country illegally, the police called the United States Border Patrol, which arrested them and turned them over to the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Mr. Malvo and his mother were fingerprinted.

It was his fingerprint -- matched to others found at the scene of the robbery-killing in Alabama and at the scene of the sniper shootings -- that ultimately helped investigators to break the case.

By early this year, Mr. Malvo had dropped out of high school and was living with Mr. Muhammad at the Lighthouse Mission, a homeless shelter in Bellingham. The pair spent many weeks at the mission, but did not always seem to belong.

"I always thought, this guy has no visible means of support, but he's flying to Jamaica, he's flying to D.C., to Louisiana," said Rory Reublin, a staff member. "That's one of the nagging suspicions I had in the back of my head."

About six months ago in Tacoma, Mr. Muhammad paid a visit to an old Army friend, Robert Edward Holmes. The two had served together at Fort Lewis.

According to a federal complaint filed on Wednesday in Seattle, Mr. Muhammad brought along an AR-15 assault rifle with a scope, which he carried in an aluminum briefcase. He also had a book on how make a silencer for a rifle, the complaint said.

"Can you imagine the damage you could do if you could shoot with a silencer?" Mr. Muhammad asked Mr. Holmes, the complaint said, adding that Mr. Muhammad failed to make such a device and left behind its unassembled parts.

Witnesses to the shootings in Washington, although they rarely were able to identify where the noise came from, consistently said that they had heard the loud report of a rifle.

One person who spoke with Mr. Williams in the past month was Travis, who relatives in Baton Rouge say is Mr. Muhammad's first son. He said his father had called him regularly over the past two and a half month, but never

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revealed where he was. Then, about 8 or 10 days ago, Mr. Muhammad left another message on his son's answering machine.

"He said he loved me," said Travis, who asked that his last name not be used. "He said he was about to hit the road again. He said to take care of my mom.."

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Graphic

Photos: John Allen Muhammad was stationed at Fort Lewis, in Tacoma, Wash., in the 1980's and 90's. (Reuters); Sharon Norman, a former in-law of John Allen Muhammad, with a picture of him and John Lee Malvo. (Associated Press)(pg. A30) Chart/Map: "**Suspects**' Stories Unfold"More details are known about John Allen Muhammad, a 41-**year**-old American, than John Lee Malvo, a 17-**year**-old from Jamaica. TRACING THEIR PATHSJohn Allen MuhammadJohn Lee MalvoBoth men together 1.) 1977 -- Graduated from Scotlandville High School near Baton Rouge, La.1978-1985 -- Served in the Army National Guard1985 -- Divorced first wife, with whom he had a son 2.) 1985 -- Joined the Army. Sent to Fort Lewis, Wash.1990 -- Transferred to Germany 3.) 1992 -- Transferred to Fort Ord, Calif. 4.) 1993 -- Transferred to Fort LewisApril 1994 -- Discharged at Fort Lewis1994-95 -- Served in Oregon National Guard 5.) Late 1990's -- Ran a karate school in Tacoma, Wash. 6.) 2000 -- Divorced second wife, Mildred Green, with whom he had three children. Ms. Green moved to Clinton, Md., with the children. 7.) 2001 -- Both men moved to Bellingham, Wash. 8.) July 2002 -- Visited Mr. Muhammad's relatives and former in-laws in Baton Rouge 9.) Sept. 11, 2002 -- Registered a car in Camden, N.J. 10.) Sept. 21, 2002 -- Mr. Malvo is a **suspect** in a liquor store shooting in Montgomery, Ala., where one woman was killed and another was wounded. 11.) Oct. 24, 2002 -- Both men are arrested at a rest stop near Frederick, Md. Map of the United States highlights the locations of the events above.(pg. A30)

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