

10 Years Ago This Month...

23 Days of Terror when Residents of Washington D.C.
Locked Themselves Indoors Not Daring to Step Out:

SNIPERS IN WASHINGTON

*For 23 days in October 2002
panicked reigned in the streets of
America's capital. Two sharpshooters
drove around the streets unseen,
firing randomly on innocent civilians.
Thousands of Americans throughout
the region locked themselves in their
homes and dared not step outside
while the police... wasted time
following false leads.*

| Dov Levy |



Ten years ago this month, the “DC Sniper” terrorized the Washington DC area, including parts of Virginia and Maryland—indeed, the entire nation. People fell dead in the streets from gunshot wounds, but there was no sign where the bullets had come from or where they would be fired next. There were no warning signs preceding an attack, just a low crack and then a victim slumping over. It happened once. Then it happened again. And again. And again....

With no way of knowing who would be the next victim, people remained locked in their homes. Children ran from their houses straight onto the waiting school buses each morning under the concerned gaze of their parents who could not relax until their children returned home that afternoon. Kids stayed locked in their school buildings from the beginning of the school day to its end.

Gas stations were surrounded by sheets to protect customers while they tanked up. Sports were played in the protective shelter of military bases. Brave individuals who ventured onto the streets walked in zigzag patterns with their heads bent over. The fear in the air was palpable.

A special unit of the local and federal police was assembled to catch the sniper. But all their efforts were in vain, a matter not helped in the least by media leaks detailing the investigations. What made the story of the DC Sniper so unforgettable was that the police turned to the media itself—the very same media that was disrupting its investigations—to send messages to the unknown murderer.

Here is the full story.

Wave of Crime Breaks Out

Wednesday, October 2, 2002. 6:04 PM.

55-year-old James Martin just finished his shopping in a supermarket in Wheaton, Maryland. He emerged from the store carrying a few bags of food and other necessities. Just as he reached his car, a shot rang out

and Martin fell to the pavement, lifeless, his bags spilling out onto the sidewalk.

Frightened bystanders immediately called 911 and the police showed up in record time. They quickly scoured the area for a sign of the murderer, but found nothing. The only clue was the single bullet recovered from Martin’s body in the hospital during the autopsy.

Police experts immediately realized that they were dealing with a trained sharpshooter. The bullet had been fired from a firearm with a particularly long range. So long, in fact, that it could be set through the scope’s crosshairs for a distance that virtually guaranteed the victim would never catch a glimpse of his murderer.

Martin’s shooting, just 12 miles from the capital, did not draw undue attention at the time. While it was true the police had no leads in the case, it was just one of 16,000 murders that occur across America each year. A brief report appeared in the local newspapers, and that was it.

There was one baffling detail, though: The police could find no motive for the crime. Detectives questioned Martin’s family, neighbors and acquaintances, but they could not find anyone who would hold a murderous grudge against this affable fellow.

5 Murders in 24 Hours

Less than 14 hours had passed when police were called to the scene of another murder just four miles away, in Rockville, Maryland.

It was 7:41 AM, October 3. 39-year-old Sonny Buchanan was calmly mowing the lawn around the Fitzgerald Auto Mall, when a shot suddenly rang out. Buchanan fell to the ground dead.

The police who arrived were very disturbed when they discovered that the crime so closely paralleled the previous day’s homicide. Again there was absolutely no sign of the murderer; there was only the single bullet found in Buchanan’s body. By

now the twin crimes were raising eyebrows, but the police had no explanation other than the notion that this was an unusual “coincidence.”

But that misconception would be shattered in less than half an hour.

At 8:12 that same morning, 54-year-old taxi driver Premkumar Walekar was filling up his car for the day at the Mobil gas station at the corner of Aspen Hill Road and Connecticut Avenue, barely five miles from where police were investigating the mysterious murder of Sonny Buchanan. Without any warning, a bullet hit Walekar. He fell down, fatally wounded, and was pronounced dead a few minutes later.

Less than half an hour passed when police were called to a fresh murder. This one occurred just two miles away from the gas station, in Silver Spring, Maryland.

At 8:37 AM, Sarah Ramos, a babysitter who had emigrated from El Salvador, alighted from a bus at the Leisure World Shopping Center in Aspen Hill. She sat down on a bench and had just opened a book when she slumped to the ground, dead from a direct hit.

Four deaths had occurred under strikingly similar circumstances. This was no coincidence. It was clear that a deranged murderer was on a rampage, shooting victims at random. And there was no reason to believe that the murders were over yet.

The police were at a loss. The only trace of the murderer in each case was the single bullet that reached its mark with deadly accuracy. Obviously, the murderer was a highly qualified sharpshooter. How could they stop him?

The police did not have much time to ponder the mystery. At 9:58, five-and-a-half miles away in Kensington, Maryland, 25-year-old babysitter Lori Rivera was vacuuming her Dodge Caravan at a Shell station, when the sound of a shot rang out. Now there was a fifth victim....

National news stations began reporting the outbreak of mysterious murders in

Montgomery County, Maryland. Five were left dead from sniper attacks in which the perpetrator vanished into thin air each time. Nobody could comprehend how a murderer could accomplish such a feat without leaving the slightest trace. And the circumstances under which people were attacked—filling up with gas, mowing the lawn, cleaning the car—were such ordinary activities. There couldn’t possibly be any connection between the victims. Obviously, the murderer was simply shooting indiscriminately at whomever he was able.

Panic quickly descended on the area. Parents who heard the news rushed to their children’s schools to take them home themselves. They refused to rely on the school buses or public transportation.

Montgomery County Police Chief Charles Moose—whose responsibilities included security in nearby Washington DC—called a press conference to explain to the media what was going on. In his worst nightmare, Chief Moose never imagined that this was but the first of a long series of press conferences



ATF (Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) agent uses a metal detector to search for bullets after one of the attacks at a gas station.