

Hunt ends in suicide of rape suspect in San Diego

by Tony Manolatos

SAN DIEGO - The discovery of the body of rape suspect Jason Washington appears to cap a frightening case that started six days ago.

But the circumstances leading to his death are just starting to emerge.

Jason Washington A body matching Washington's description was found Tuesday morning in his white 2000 Honda CR-V, parked on Naranca Avenue near Third Street in El Cajon. The man had fatally shot himself, authorities said.

The county Medical Examiner's Office later confirmed that the body was that of Washington.

Three photocopies of a suicide note that investigators had found inside Washington's home Sunday were in the Honda, authorities said.

Washington, 33, of El Cajon, Calif., was wanted in connection with the rape of a 23-year-old Solana Beach neighborhood woman Thursday and the attempted rape of a 15-year-girl in the Rancho San Diego area on Saturday.

Cheryl Paz, a former nanny for Washington's daughter, said that Washington had been going to all-night parties known as raves lately and experimenting with Ecstasy, a drug popular in clubs.

Money also might have been a problem for Washington, who authorities said resigned Friday from his job as a computer technician.

But Paz and Cheryl Brown, a real estate agent whom Washington hired in December to list his home, couldn't understand how his life could apparently sour so quickly.

"He seemed to be at the top of his life," said Paz, 20, of Lakeside, who cared for Washington's 12-year-old daughter from May to December last year.

Brown, who spent hours with Washington, said he was a likable man with a good job and excellent credit.

"I'm absolutely in shock," Brown said. "It seems to me like he somehow snapped in the last week and threw his life away."

On Monday, an arrest warrant was issued for Washington on two charges of kidnapping to commit rape. Bail was set at \$5 million.

Sheriff's investigators had quickly zeroed in on Washington, a former Marine.

A broadcast on a police radio just after Saturday's attack indicated that the assailant had left behind a handgun. Authorities said several handguns were registered in Washington's name, including one found in his SUV.

An evidence technician also dusted for fingerprints on a parked motor home that the assailant may have left as he leaned against it, appearing to be preparing for a jog before Saturday's attack in Rancho San Diego. Witnesses saw the assailant drive away in a white SUV.

Deputies discovered Washington's body in his SUV about 1 1/2 miles east of his home, sheriff's Lt. Phil Brust said.

"We're relieved, our investigators are relieved and hopefully the public is relieved as well," Brust said.

Several El Cajon residents gathered Tuesday near the cordoned-off SUV that authorities had been searching for.

"I will sleep much better tonight," said Jennifer Unander, 31, an apartment manager.

Michael Maher, 47, a heavy-equipment operator, has been worried about the safety of his wife and 17-year-old son.

"My wife does a lot of walking and jogging here," Maher said. "When I heard about this, I told her, 'Don't go out alone anymore because he's in El Cajon.'"

Washington was selling his home on Sandalwood Drive because his mortgage had an adjustable rate that was ballooning and the home no longer was worth what he owed, said Brown, the real estate agent.

Washington recently received an inheritance after his mother died, Paz said. He used some of the money to buy a silver 2002 BMW 325ci convertible.

But Brown said money was a growing concern for Washington.

Washington, who divorced in 2006, worked for the San Diego office of EDS and ran a consulting business from his home. His work routinely required travel during the week, and he left his daughter with Paz.

Paz said the daughter recently had been living with her mother, a former girlfriend of Washington's, but she did not know where. To Paz, Washington was a regular, hardworking man who never let on that something was troubling him.

"He seemed like a normal person," she said. " ... It's very sad."

Mark Arner, Michele Clock, Jeff McDonald, Kristina Davis, Debbi Farr Baker and Angelica Martinez contributed to this report.

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