

Pagan's Body Found in Steel Drum

By Carl W. Sims
Washington Post Staff Writer

Maryland State police are investigating the death of a 22-year-old member of the Pagans Motorcycle Club whose body was found Sunday welded inside a steel barrel in the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal.

The man was identified as Joseph K. Vargas, of Woodbridge, Va., who was reported missing to State police on July 6, after he disappeared from a three-day encampment of about 300 Pagans near North East, Md., on July 3, 4 and 5.

An Oxford, Pa., man who was fishing at low tide along the canal near Chesapeake City spotted the barrel about 5 p.m. Sunday. Police believe the barrel was washed up on the sandy shore of the swiftly flowing canal during high tide.

According to 1st Sgt. Robert C. Adams of the Cecil County Sheriff's Department, the top had been spot-welded onto the drum and steel bands had been welded up the sides and across the top.

See PAGAN, A3, Col. 1

Pagan's Body Found in Barrel

PAGAN, From A1

In addition to the body, which appeared to have no external injuries, police found a sleeping bag and a pair of boots in the barrel. The body was clad in blue denim trousers and white socks and bore no identification.

Vargas was identified by two members of the gang, who had originally reported him missing. The body was sent to Baltimore, where an

autopsy is being performed, police said.

Adams said the grey and green drum had six small holes punched in its base and three larger holes had been punched in the side. He said any water that may have entered it probably had drained out while it was lying on the shore. Police theorized that the body had been in the barrel for four or five days.

2 Other Reports

Vargas also had been reported missing to Prince William County, Va., police on July 8 by a woman who identified herself as Vargas' wife and to Maryland State police by Kay Smith of Falls Church, who said she was his sister and feared for his safety because he was a diabetic — taking daily injections of insulin.

A State police spokesman said searches had been made of the area surrounding the campsite on four occasions after he was reported missing and that no sign of foul play had been found.

The spot along the canal where the body was found is about 1½ miles east of Chesapeake City, five miles south of Elkton and about 14 miles from the campsite.

Police said they had no trouble from the gang during the encampment and had no involvement with them.

When Vargas was reported missing, Adams said, his friends said he had complained of not feeling well and wandered away from the site. They returned his motorcycle to his home in Virginia, police said.