

King Manhunt 480

By JOE ZELLNER

Associated Press Writer

ATLANTA, Ga. AP - An Atlanta taxi driver says an FBI sketch matches a rude patron who rode with him two blocks in northeast Atlanta's "hippie" section a night after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was slain.

He said the man he identified to an FBI agent in a sketch Tuesday was in a hurry and rushed from his taxi, flinging the fare onto the seat.

The driver, who asked that his name not be used, said FBI agents have been checking taxi trip sheets since a white Mustang, matching the description of a car seen leaving the assassination scene in Memphis, was found abandoned in Atlanta last week.

The FBI continued its "no comment" policy. Atlanta police said they had received no information on the report.

In Birmingham Monday, the landlord of a boarding house said he was sure the description of Eric Starvo Galt fit that of a man sought by the FBI. "That's him, I'm sure," said Peter Cherpes, 72, referring to the drawings.

The Atlanta taxi driver said the name Galt was not mentioned to him by the FBI agent.

He said the agent questioned him first about a fare he had carried from a nightclub near Peachtree and 10th Streets, but the driver said he knew the patron "and he was not the same man."

However, the agent then disclosed the sketch which appeared to be a type of composite photograph, and the driver recognized him as a fare he had picked up between 10 p.m. and midnight Friday, April 5, (about four blocks away at Peachtree and 14th Streets in front of a "hippie" coffee house. He said the man appeared to be in a hurry.

"He told me to make a right-hand turn, and he'd let me know when to stop," the driver said. "I went about two blocks, and he told me he wanted to get out.

"When I stopped, he opened the door, and I turned around to make sure I got my fare. I got a good look at him. I put my hand out, but he threw the money on the seat, and it fell on the floor," the driver said. "That made me mad. That's the main reason I remember him so well."

He said the man left the taxi and started away. "I don't know where he went," the driver said. "I drove off."

The driver described the man as about 5 feet 11 and 28 to 30 years old with dark brown hair.

"He was very neatly dressed," he said, adding that the man wore a sport coat with a light-colored shirt without a tie. "He looked as if he had had acne. It looked like little scars on his face from pimples."

The driver said he had seen several sketches. "News reporters haven't shown me any sketches of anyone I've seen," he said. "The FBI has."

However, he then looked at a sketch drawn by an artist in Mexican police headquarters after authorities in that country were drawn into the probe and said it contained some features of the FBI picture "mainly around the eyes."

"The picture they have," he said of the FBI, "that's the man who was in my cab."

FBI agents have questioned hundreds of persons in search of the man named Galt who had identified himself in Birmingham as an unemployed merchant seaman and as a shipyard worker.

Galt lived at the Cherpes place in Birmingham from Aug. 26 to Oct. 7, then dropped from sight.

The white Mustang found in Atlanta had an Alabama tag issued to him at the Birmingham boarding house address.

BJ&JK306aes April 17