

IVINS AND THE ANTHRAX INVESTIGATION

As I showed in this post, the claim that Iraq was responsible for the anthrax attack developed in two phases. First, after the first and less lethal round of attacks, Neocons spread the story that Iraq had supplied anthrax to Al Qaeda. Then, after the more lethal attacks associated with the letters to Daschle and Leahy, ABC News reported that Ft. Detrick scientists had found bentonite in the anthrax samples.

In comments, I suggested that it was possible the first round of accusations were just typical Neocon war-mongering, but that the second round was the culprit, playing on the Neocon attacks, inventing the bentonite claim as an alibi. In other words, after the attacks started killing people, the culprit may have spread the claim that the anthrax had to have come from Iraq as a way of throwing suspicion off him or his colleagues.

A couple of longer articles on Ivins make it clear that he was in a position to spread such disinformation. For example, the WaPo reports that Ivins was one of the scientists analyzing the anthrax for the FBI.

His expertise eventually earned him a front-row seat for the FBI's investigation, as he was called upon to help the bureau with its analysis of the wispy powder used in the attacks.

[snip]

After the anthrax mailings in October 2001, the Fort Detrick labs went into a frenetic response, testing suspicious mail and packages virtually round-the-clock. Ivins was part of a team that analyzed the handwritten letter sent to

Daschle, packed with *Bacillus anthracis* spores that matched the primary strain used in Fort Detrick research.

Creepier still, the WaPo reports that Ivins volunteered for the Red Cross as it supported FBI agents investigating Stephen Hatfil.

In fact, in early June 2003, when the FBI drained a pond in rural Maryland in search of clues to the perpetrator of the anthrax attacks, Ivins was one of the Red Cross volunteers who brought investigators coffee and donuts. Investigators, however, singled him out and asked him to leave "because he was somebody involved in the investigation," said Byrne, Ivins's former colleague and fellow parishioner.

None of this, of course, means that Ivins was the killer—nor that he acted alone. The WaPo also reports, for example, that Ivins' work was supportive of those opposed to mandatory anthrax vaccination—which would seem to refute his claimed motive (to make money—as this LAT article explains, expanding on stuff JimWhite noted yesterday).

Ezzell said the experiments did not involve anthrax in its dried form, the type found in the letter to then-Senate Majority Leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.) that was so finely ground it could immediately become airborne. Ivins worked with small teams of scientists; their findings had global significance in the field of anthrax studies and were later used by opponents of a mandatory vaccination program instituted by the Pentagon that has been highly controversial.

Meryl Nass, a physician and leader in the vaccine opposition movement, met Ivins at a conference in the early

1990s, and they talked regularly over the next decade. She said Ivins told her he had a chronic blood disorder and feared that it might be linked to the anthrax vaccine booster shots he had to take to work in the Fort Detrick laboratory.

"He had some issues with work," Nass said in an interview.

Also, I'm still dubious about the claims Ivins' analyst made—because she claims he has homicidal tendencies going back years, which none of the people interviewed about Ivins seem to have noticed.

In court records, filed after Dr. Ivins discussed his plans to kill his co-workers, a social worker who led the sessions, Jean Duley, said that Dr. Ivins's psychiatrist had "called him homicidal, sociopathic with clear intentions." She went on to say that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was looking at Dr. Ivins and that he would soon be charged with five murders – the same number of fatalities in the anthrax attacks.

"He is a revenge killer," Ms. Duley told a Maryland District Court judge in Frederick as she sought a restraining order against Dr. Ivins. "When he feels that he has been slighted, and especially towards women, he plots and actually tries to carry out revenge killings."

And it's not like the anthrax killings were revenge killings (nor did they target women). I'm also curious about what led Ivins to lose consciousness earlier this spring. Suicide attempt? Stress? A blow to the head? It could be anything.

The LAT suggests that DOJ is going to release

investigative documents, which I guess may clarify things somewhat.

If the investigation is declared over, the department will seek a court order releasing investigative documents in the case that have been under court seal, the officials said. They declined to be identified because they were not authorized to discuss the investigation publicly.

"We anticipate being able to provide additional details in the near future," the Justice Department statement said. Officials indicated in the statement that they wanted to update victims of the attacks about the investigation before making further details public.

Until then, it sure seems that Ivins was in a position to inject disinformation into the investigation.