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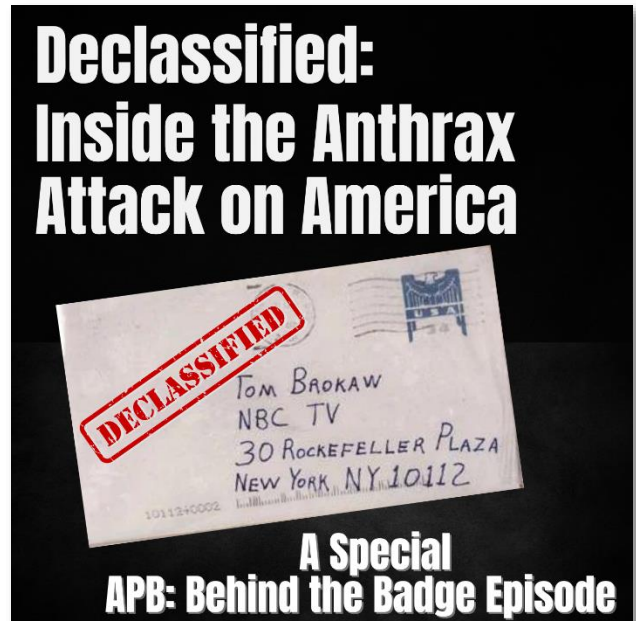
## Inside the Anthrax Attack on America

The fall of 2001 was a dark time in American history. The terrorist attacks of September 11 had shaken the world. And while government leaders were simultaneously dealing with the mobilization of emergency resources and preparing for war, another threat was coming. Just days after the attacks, anthrax-laced letters had been mailed to NBC News and the New York Post in New York City, and to a media production company in Boca Raton, Florida. America was under attack *again* – this time, by an unseen enemy. The following month, October 2001, two additional tainted letters were mailed to U.S. Senators.

The first victim of the anthrax letters was Robert Stevens, a newspaper photo editor in Florida who died on October 5, 2001 from inhalation anthrax. The FBI promptly began an investigation.

Before the 9/11 attacks, America had already experienced episodes of both foreign and domestic terror: The 1993 bombing in the underground parking garage of the World Trade Center that claimed 6 lives; the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people, including 19 children; and the 1995 SARIN gas attack on a Tokyo subway which underscored the magnitude and widespread impact of a biohazard attack. In the months leading up to 9/11, the U.S. Capitol Police considered the precautions they needed to take to protect our government from future threats.

In 2001, U.S. Capitol Police Captain Edward Bailor was in charge of developing procedures and cultivating a special team to handle any potential biological or chemical weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Bailor's team was the first police Hazardous Materials (Haz Mat) team in the country, dubbed ALERT – Advanced Law Enforcement Response Team. The ALERT team consisted of 160 specially trained officers who would respond to suspicious calls, including



‘unknown white powders’ at government facilities. Bailor told *APB Behind The Badge* that prior to 9/11, ALERT members were handling 3-4 white powder runs daily. Team members would conduct tests on residues to determine whether there was a hazardous biological or chemical substance present. At that time, they were fortunate that there was never a positive test. But no one was taking their security for granted. Government leaders and staffers were on high alert, especially after 9/11, for anything out of the ordinary.

On October 15, 2001, just over a month after the 9/11 attacks, U.S. Capitol Police received a call from Senator Tom Daschle’s Office at the Hart Senate Office Building in Washington, DC where a staffer had opened a letter containing a powder. Capitol Police Officer Snookie Woods answered the call, finding the envelope that had been opened by a staffer along with a powder that came from the envelope. Woods used a test kit on the substance and waited for the results. Then, he called Captain Bailor who, to this day, vividly remembers the call: “He said, Captain, we’re pregnant!”, said Bailor, knowing exactly what Woods meant. Bailor explained that the test kits are much like a pregnancy test – a sample is swabbed and then placed in a solution. If it turns pinks after several minutes, it’s positive. Until that point, Bailor said officers had tested many suspicious items, but all had been negative. Bailor responded to Sen. Daschle’s office and began notifying his superiors, at the same time helping to set up a perimeter around the contaminated “hot zone” at the senator’s office. Only on the scene for minutes, Bailor looked outside a window and saw President Bush with Sen. Daschle already announcing on television that there had been a biological attack.

An investigation would soon determine that the letter sent to Sen. Daschle, and another sent to Sen. Patrick Leahy, along with the other letters (NBC, New York Post, and Boca Raton, FL) had all been postmarked from Trenton, New Jersey. The letters sent to the Senators were processed through the Brentwood postal facility in Washington, DC where two employees would later die. Police would learn that the particular strain of anthrax used in Sen. Daschle’s likely contained more than 3 trillion spores of anthrax.

FBI and U.S. Postal Inspectors had their hands full tracking the paths of the letters and trying to determine which facilities and equipment might be contaminated, in order to determine who might be exposed. For Bailor and his officers their focus was on the senate office building. Bailor explained that mail coming into the building arrives in the basement, is then sorted, wrapped, and sent on to individual senator’s offices. “That mailroom is now contaminated, the push cart is contaminated, the hallways are contaminated,” said Bailor who next ordered testing on the floors above and below Daschle’s office – both came back positive. Knowing that there are 4 chambers to the HVAC system in the building, he then orders testing of each unit – all come back positive. The Hart Senate Office building must be immediately evacuated and closed.

Bailor said that the fear felt by senators, staffers, and police officers was palpable. Said Bailor, “If you’re in a dangerous situation, you can see and feel the danger. But this is something you couldn’t see.” However, said Bailor, there was one person who was remarkably calm – the staffer who opened the anthrax letter. “He previously attended one of our classes (on how to handle biological threats), and he knew exactly what to do, so he wasn’t afraid.”

There are different kinds of anthrax exposure. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the most common kind is cutaneous anthrax, when spores get into the skin such as through a cut or a scrape. But the most serious form is inhalation anthrax which can be fatal.<sup>1</sup> For those exposed to anthrax, certain antibiotics can be used to prevent illness, but persons with serious exposures need to be hospitalized.<sup>2</sup>

In the days, weeks, and months that followed, attention was now concentrated on treating people who were exposed and decontaminating the building. Bailor said the scope of contamination of the Senate offices was so bad that there was some consideration to demolish the entire structure. Instead, a plan was developed to decontaminate the building using chlorine dioxide. But as the cold winter months were upon them, and the fact that there was no heat in the building, Bailor said that one of the problems was getting the building to a temperature where the chlorine process would be effective. “They had to have that chlorine at a certain temperature. So, they had to heat it up to get it in the building. If it was too high of a mixture with a certain temperature, it’s an explosive,” said Bailor.

Simultaneously, the FBI and U.S. Postal Inspectors are leading one of the most expansive investigations in U.S. history – code name: Amerithrax. Offers of assistance came in from all areas of government, said Bailor, including the Atlantic Strike Force of the U.S. Coast Guard who provided the Incident Command System for Capitol Police operations.

About one month after the letters to Senators Daschle and Leahy were received, the FBI held a press conference. They wanted to engage the public in their search for the letter-writer, so they released photographs of the letters and envelopes (*see show notes*) hoping that someone might recognize the writing. They also released a profile of who they believed the suspect would be based on behavioral and linguistic attributes of the letters (Daschle, Leahy, and NBC letters, specifically – see show notes for pictures). The FBI highlighted how the writer used dashes instead of slashes in writing the dates; that there was a downward slant in the addressing and how the writer used block letters; the envelopes used were pre-stamped and of a nontraditional size. They estimated the suspect would be an adult male with a scientific background, a loner, with access to anthrax and the expertise to refine it; have a familiarity with Trenton, New Jersey;

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<sup>1</sup> CDC.gov; Possible signs of an anthrax attack; <https://www.cdc.gov/anthrax/bioterrorism/threat.html#print>

<sup>2</sup> CDC.gov; Treatment of anthrax infection; <https://www.cdc.gov/anthrax/treatment/index.html>

they would be non-confrontational and may hold grudges for a long time. The profile also indicated that the writer's post-offense behavior could include significant behavioral changes like an altered physical appearance, unusual interest in the media, mood swings, absenteeism, and altered sleeping and eating habits.

Early in the investigation there was a man who became the focus of the FBI – he would eventually be cleared. But later, another man became their prime suspect: Dr. Bruce Ivins, 55 years old, and an employee at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases. Declassified FBI reports indicate that Ivins had a Department of Defense security clearance and had co-authored articles on anthrax. Ivins had been questioned by the FBI and also submitted to a polygraph. One of Ivins's comments about the polygraph relayed by a witness to the FBI was that Ivins “spoke about the polygraph he took for the investigation, and that he passed some questions but failed the one about taking stuff from work.”<sup>3</sup> Ivins reportedly also talked about the “grand jury sessions from hell.”<sup>4</sup> And in another message, he reportedly said, “I’ve hit burnout.”<sup>5</sup>

Things seemed to be closing in on Dr. Bruce Ivins. It appeared he was becoming unhinged. On July 9, 2008, he reportedly made a threat during a therapy session about killing co-workers. He also discussed suicide, claimed to have a bulletproof vest, and that he was going to get a Glock semi-automatic handgun, “and he had a list of people he was going to kill. He said that he was tired of the investigation and that killing certain co-workers would take care of it.”<sup>6</sup>

Reports say that Ivins was committed to a psychiatric facility around July 10th or 11th, 2008<sup>7</sup>. The FBI searched Ivins' work place, but we found nothing in the reports to indicate that anything illegal was found.

An FBI report from that same year - June 2008 - indicated that Ivins had already spent over \$100,000 on an attorney, and that attorney reportedly told him an indictment was coming and to be prepared to face the death penalty.<sup>8</sup>

The FBI later reported that Ivins took his own life on July 29, 2008.<sup>9</sup>

According to the Department of Justice, charges were likely coming for Ivins. But his suicide closed a chapter of the worst biological attack in U.S. history. Sadly, 5 deaths were linked to the anthrax letters, and several more were sickened. We will never know exactly how many people were sickened or died by the anthrax attack. Bailor explained that the symptoms are similar to

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<sup>3</sup> FBI FD-302, 6/5/2008

<sup>4</sup> FBI FD-1023; reported 2/6/2008; contact date 7/16/2007; email date 7/1/2007

<sup>5</sup> FBI FD-1023; reported 2/6/2008; contact date 5/24/2007; email date 5/23/2007

<sup>6</sup> FBI, 7/15/2008

<sup>7</sup> FBI report; 7/15/2008

<sup>8</sup> FBI; FD302; 6/25/2008, 6/26/2008

<sup>9</sup> FBI Archives; Anthrax Investigation – Closing A Chapter; 8/6/2008

the flu. And for the elderly or those with weakened immune systems, those deaths may not have been attributed to anthrax.

Bailor said that many people in the Senate offices did get sick, largely due to the strong antibiotic Cipro. But because of the actions of Inspector Bailor and his team, there were no deaths on Capitol Hill. “We were way at the forefront of this”, said Bailor. “We weren’t by any means experts. But we trained to handle this. One of the major things I am proud of in my career...” he said.

The Amerithrax Task Force logged more than 10,000 witness interviews and secured 6000 items of potential evidence in the investigation. The motivation of suspect Bruce Ivins remains unknown, though some believe he wanted more attention and funding for anthrax research. One positive thing that resulted from the investigation was the development of new science that helps to identify a specific strain of a biohazard with forensic accuracy.

Inspector Edward Bailor retired in 2006 after 32 years of service with the U.S. Capitol Police. He has since worked as a consultant with the government in developing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) standards for handling WMDs.

*This blog and the companion audio podcast episode touch on the topic of suicide. If you feel you are in crisis and need help, reach out to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention – we have links on our Resources page at [apbcoldcase.com](http://apbcoldcase.com)*

Check our show notes for photographs of the anthrax letters and a timeline.

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