

GOOGLE MAPS SAYS MAYBE, MAYBE NOT



According to the WaPo, Bruce Ivins took personal leave time on September 17, 2001, which, the FBI argues, is when he would have driven to Princeton to mail the anthrax.

Meanwhile, bits of fresh information continued to come out. A partial log of Ivins's work hours shows that he worked late in the lab on the evening of Sunday, Sept. 16, signing out at 9:52 p.m. after two hours and 15 minutes. The next morning, the sources said, he showed up as usual but stayed only briefly before taking leave hours. Authorities assume that he drove to Princeton immediately after that, dropping the letters in a mailbox on a well-traveled street across from the university campus. Ivins would have had to have left quickly to return for an appointment in the early evening, about 4 or 5 p.m.

Ivins normally got to work early—around 7:30 AM. Assuming his brief stay was half an hour (are they suggesting he went in and picked up the anthrax? and if so, did anyone ask why he'd do so during daytime hours?), he would have had eight hours to drive to Princeton and back. That's certainly doable—Google says the drive takes 3 hours and 25 minutes. Who knows whether Ivins sped much in his 1993 Honda Civic (in 2001, he also had a 1996 Dodge van; he did not yet have his 2002 Saturn). But even if he went faster than Google says he should have (he would have been driving on I-95, after all, which pretty much requires speeding), he almost certainly would have hit rush hour traffic at least once in his drive, if not twice.

In other words, Ivins could have made the drive, but just barely.

All of which ought to raise the stakes on the FBI's really dubious explanation for why Ivins purportedly mailed the anthrax in Princeton. After all, there are Kappa Kappa Gamma chapters at George Washington in DC, at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, and Washington and Lee in Lexington, VA—all much closer to Ft. Detrick than Princeton. So what's the explanation for driving to Princeton (twice), when Ivins could have associated the anthrax mailing with KKG which much less effort if he had mailed it from any of a number of other schools.

And then there's this bit, which really damns the FBI case:

Federal agents did not interview owners of shops on the street where the mailbox is located to place Ivins at the scene, judging that any witness identification would have been inherently unreliable after nearly seven years. Nor did they uncover tollbooth footage or credit card or phone records that would directly link Ivins to the day's events.

The FBI never asked anyone in Princeton whether or not they had seen Ivins. However, we know that in August 2002, they did ask 200 people in Princeton whether they had seen Steven Hatfill.

...once the government determined the anthrax letters were mailed from Princeton, New Jersey, FBI special agents showed over 200 residents of Princeton only one photograph—a photo of Dr. Hatfill—and asked whether anyone saw him in the area.

[snip]

Immediately after Dr. Hatfill's [August 11, 2002] public statement, in an effort to obtain any evidence adverse to Dr. Hatfill with public relations value,

however unreliable and inadmissible in court, federal investigators began showing a single photo of Dr. Hatfill to residents of Princeton, New Jersey in the hope that someone would place him at the scene of the anthrax mailings. The presentation of a single photo instead of an array of photos, in dereliction of FBI protocol is so unfairly suggestive—particularly during a week in which Dr. Hatfill appeared on television and in newspapers around the nation and during the same week Newsweek published a two-page spread featuring several photos of Dr. Hatfill—that no criminal investigator could rightfully believe it to have a proper law enforcement function.

So after having asked 200 people if they had seen Hatfill, they ask no one if they had seen Ivins. I understand that Ivins didn't become a suspect until much longer after the mailing in question. But if Ivins really had an obsession with **this particular** KKG chapter, rather than the ones in DC or Baltimore or Lexington, VA, perhaps he might have returned to the scene of the crime.

But the FBI didn't check, I guess because they don't want to subject their fragile explanation for how or whether Ivins was ever in Princeton to any scrutiny.

And this is the utterly convincing evidence (not!) that the FBI has offered to explain their certainty that, rather than leaving work and handing off the anthrax to someone whose handwriting matched the envelopes, Ivins risked missing his afternoon appointment to mail the anthrax from close to a KKG chapter that was nowhere near the most convenient to his office.

Update: Hold on. **It would not be possible** for Ivins to have mailed the anthrax. According to my calculations above, the window during which Ivins could have put the letter in the mailbox

on September 17 was from 10:25 to 1:35. But here's what the FBI itself says about the window in which the letter was mailed:

The investigation examined Dr. Ivins's laboratory activity immediately before and after the window of opportunity for the mailing of the Post and Brokaw letters to New York which **began at 5:00 p.m. Monday, September 17, 2001** and ended at noon on Tuesday, September 18, 2001.
[my emphasis]

In other words, had he mailed the anthrax when they're arguing he did, the letter would have been picked up at the 5:00 PM pick-up (if not an earlier one—often boxes have a mid-day pick-up as well), and post-marked on September 17, not on September 18. [Note, suffragette and I were thinking along the same lines.]

Update: fixed the title per skdadl.