

FBI: YES WE STILL HAVE OUR ANTHRAX SHINY OBJECT

I agree with all the comments littering bmaz' trash talk thread: the new anthrax story still does nothing to prove that Ivins was the lone gunman. First and foremost, that's because the FBI is still doing what it has been doing from the start—boasting of their fancy new technology to prove that the anthrax came from a flask in Ivins' office, without making an affirmative case Ivins was the one who used the material in the flask, and certainly without providing any evidence that Ivins was the one who mailed it. Even if Ivins prepared the anthrax, after all, that's a far cry from driving to Princeton to mail it.

But even within their shiny object story about the flask, there are reasons to doubt. For example, when the story dismisses a second flask because of an erroneous lab notebook entry, we get no detail about what that entry is or who made it.

Initially, agents thought Ivins divided his spores into two flasks and kept one in a different building, which would have increased the number of people with potential access. That belief was based on a lab notebook entry that turned out to be erroneous, agents said.

After all, if the FBI's own lab book has these errors, then why should we trust them? If it's an error in Ivins' own lab notebook, are they suggesting he was trying to confuse them? The error, by itself, certainly doesn't dismiss the concerns.

Then there's the question of the different qualities of the anthrax samples used in the attack.

Differences between the two grades of anthrax powders used in the attacks – the earlier batch sent to New York news outlets was coarser and darker than the powder mailed to the Senate – confirm that there were at least two production runs. Bureau officials knew they were looking for someone who had repeated access to Ivins's flask as well as talent for sophisticated spore preparations.

As freep points out, there's no reason to believe someone accessed the flask in Ivins' office twice, just that someone created samples specific to each attack. Furthermore, how can you make this argument without having some explanation for who sent Judy Miller fake anthrax? There's every reason to believe that her non-attack was part of the larger scare; if so, then you'd need to acknowledge that some of the attack anthrax wasn't anthrax at all.

Here's how they dismiss the many complaints that no one at Detrick had experience drying liquid anthrax into powder:

Ivins normally worked with liquid anthrax spore solutions, not dry powders, investigators acknowledge. Ivins's colleagues insist that he had no experience with "dry aerosols" of anthrax spores and would not have known how to make them.

But drying the spores turned out to be no obstacle at all, FBI scientists said. It required only one more step, using a common laboratory machine known as a lyophilizer. Ivins had one in his lab.

"Because he grew spores on a daily basis, he was in a position to make [the powder], and no one would be the wiser," Montooth said.

Apparently, the FBI has dismissed all the issues

about expertise drying anthrax to the consistency of that used in the attack by pointing to a piece of equipment. No really—it was as easy as toasting a bagel in a toaster oven.

Finally, the thing that disgusts me is the way the WaPo ends the article, suggesting that all those associated with victims of the crime believe it is solved:

The only solace, he said, came on the day the Amerithrax team sat down with family members of the victims of the attacks. In an FBI conference room, Montooth laid out the still-secret details of the seven-year investigation.

"They thanked us," Montooth said, recalling the families' reaction. "They said, 'We believe you got the right guy.' "

Ending the article that ways seems to give it a sense of finality: if the families of victims are convinced, then of course the FBI must be right!

Funny, no one thought to ask Patrick Leahy, the recipient of one of the attack letters, whether he "believes the FBI got the right guy." Because we know that he still has all the concerns we've got about the case.