

CNN CARRIES DOJ WATER IN REPEATING WEAK AMERITHRAX ACCUSATIONS AGAINST IVINS

In an article published on CNN.com on Saturday and a program aired Sunday evening, CNN does their best to lend credence to DOJ's shoddy work that resulted in the unsupported conclusion that Bruce Ivins acted alone in the anthrax attacks of 2001. Remarkably, in their effort to shore up DOJ's weak evidence, CNN chose to emphasize one of the weakest links used to tie Ivins to the attacks.

The article and program center on Ivins' apparent fixation on the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority. One former object of Ivins' attentions, researcher Nancy Haigwood, is relied upon almost exclusively for making the leap from Ivins' obsession with the sorority to his role in the anthrax attacks. The article relates the early interactions between Haigwood and Ivins:

Haigwood had met Bruce Ivins in the mid-1970s during graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She recalled his incessant questions about her sorority, Kappa Kappa Gamma.

Having joined the sorority as an undergraduate, Haigwood stayed involved as the adult adviser at the UNC chapter. Ivins, she says, always asked her for information about Kappa Kappa Gamma.

"Every time I talked to him, nearly, he would mention it," says Haigwood. "And finally I said, 'You know, Bruce, that's enough!'"

As time went on, Ivins continued to contact Haigwood and apparently submitted a false letter to the editor of a newspaper under her name and vandalized her car. Haigwood began to suspect Ivins in the attacks because of an email he sent to her and others in November, 2001 highlighting his work with the anthrax isolated from the attacks. In one a photo in the email, he is handling culture plates without gloves, a break of containment protocol for working with such dangerous material. Haigwood felt that by sending out this photo, Ivins was emphasizing his immunity to anthrax because he had been vaccinated.

In January of 2002, the FBI emailed members of the American Society of Microbiology, asking for help in identifying suspects in the attack.

Only Haigwood replied to this request and she submitted Ivins' name.

Once the FBI finally got around to concentrating on Ivins as their primary suspect, they had to undergo some very significant contortions in order to incorporate the Kappa Kappa Gamma obsession into the "evidence" of Ivins' guilt:

Prosecutors were convinced they had solved a crucial aspect of the mystery: why the anthrax letters were mailed from Princeton, New Jersey. The nondescript but heavily contaminated drop box was on Nassau Street – across from Princeton University.

It had taken several years from the time Nancy Haigwood first contacted the FBI about Bruce Ivins for investigators to make what they believe to be the critical connection:

The mailbox on Nassau Street was just a few doors from a building that leased office space to a sorority: Kappa Kappa Gamma.

That's it: according to the FBI, Ivins has to be the guilty party and his Kappa Kappa Gamma

obsession led him to drive about three and a half hours from where he lived and worked, in order to mail the anthrax letters from a mailbox a few doors away from an office space rented by the sorority.

But this shaky claim already has been thoroughly destroyed. In this post from August, 2008, Marcy showed that Ivins' work records—from data released by the FBI—indicate that it would not have been possible for him to make the round trip to Princeton and put the letters in the mailbox with them getting the appropriate postmark:

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.

When DOJ adjusted their claims on the mailing slightly, Marcy was able to point out that adjustment also was faulty.

Also not explained by DOJ or CNN is why Ivins chose to go all the way to Princeton and use a mailbox near an office (where there likely would have been employees of the sorority but few if any undergraduate members) when there are other Kappa Kappa Gamma chapters closer to where Ivins lived:

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.

It's a real mystery why CNN chose to try to shore up DOJ's weak case against Ivins. In their defense, they do include these two paragraphs in the online story:

Ivins denied having anything to do with the anthrax letters. And investigators had no direct evidence linking Ivins to the crime: no DNA on the letters, no fingerprints, no eyewitness.

"How [the anthrax] was made, how it was prepared, where it was done, over what period of time – there's a total void of evidence," Ivins' attorney, Paul Kemp, said in a recent CNN interview.

Those weaknesses, however, were simply brushed aside by CNN as they happily joined DOJ in making the leap from Ivins' harassment of Haigwood to making the Kappa Kappa Gamma obsession a central part of their "proof" Ivins

carried out the anthrax attacks entirely on his own.

Because DOJ has officially closed the Amerithrax investigation, it is highly unlikely that the true culprit or culprits in this attack will ever be known. CNN, however, is doing its part to make sure the DOJ's unsupported conclusion is cemented in the minds of the low information public.