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Art Bell In 'Anthrax' Scare

From: **Gerry Lovell** <ed@farshore.force9.co.uk>
Date: Fri, 28 Aug 1998 00:24:12 +0100
Fwd Date: Fri, 28 Aug 1998 02:30:10 -0400
Subject: Art Bell In 'Anthrax' Scare

Source: The Wichita Eagle
Date: Aug 27 1998
Header: 20 FBI agents on hoax case
Sub-header: The search for the person responsible for the State Office Building anthrax scare has stretched to the Nevada home of syndicated talk show host Art Bell. Byline: Hurst Laviana

A task force of 20 FBI agents has been assembled to follow up on 160 leads in the hunt for whoever was responsible for last week's anthrax scare at the Finney State Office Building in Wichita, federal agents said Wednesday.

The investigation has stretched as far as Nevada, where a talk-show host specializing in topics such as alien sightings and conspiracy theories received a copy of the same threat note that accompanied a harmless white powder that was scattered in the Wichita office building.

The note falsely claimed the powder was anthrax, a deadly biological toxin.

Larry McCormick, special agent in charge of FBI offices in Kansas and western Missouri, said investigators are focusing their efforts on a rambling anti-government letter that accompanied copies of the threat note that were sent to the Nevada radio host and to a Wichita television station.

The FBI is convinced that the letters, which appeared to be identical, were written by the same person who claimed responsibility for the Aug. 18 anthrax threat.

Although there was no authentic danger to the public, authorities closed the office building for two days, idling hundreds of government workers and inconveniencing thousands of patrons.

A group calling itself the Brothers for the Freedom of Americans claimed responsibility. The letters sent by the group claimed it is affiliated with "Christian Identity" militia organizations in the United States and revolutionaries in Northern Ireland, the FBI said.

McCormick said the first letter arrived at KWCH-TV, Channel 12, a day after the anthrax scare. A second later arrived at the home of radio personality Art Bell, whose late-night talk show is carried on more than 300 stations including KFH-1330 AM in Wichita. Both letters consisted of 11 pages and were mailed in Wichita on the day of the scare, the FBI said. Both copies of the letter are being examined by the FBI lab in Washington, D.C.

Bell said he had no idea why the letter was sent to him.

"And I'm not at all happy about it," he said in an interview from his home in Pahrump, Nev. "You might imagine it a hoax, but it didn't read like a hoax. It read like somebody who was aware of what he was doing. ... There were specific demands and there were specific threats."

Bell said that when his wife opened the letter, the first thing she noticed were the words, "Congratulations -- you've been infected." State Office Building workers reported seeing the same words on the note found inside the building on Aug. 18.

McCormick said chemical tests showed that the powder left in the building was a common household substance that was not being publicly identified by the FBI.

"It is non-toxic, it is non-hazardous, and it could be found in any house," he said.

McCormick said the contents of the letter were not being disclosed, but that "it just sort of rambles on about their anti-government beliefs."

Bell said that was a good characterization of the letter he received. After reading it, he said, he posted a copy to his Internet Web site so people in Wichita could see what the threats entailed.

"The FBI came to see me the next day with evidence bags and gloves," he said.

Bell said he complied with the FBI's request to temporarily remove the letter from the Web site after agents told him it could interfere with their investigation.

Bell also said he was complying with the FBI's request not to discuss specifics of the letter.

McCormick said he didn't know exactly how much powder was spread throughout the building, but that "it wasn't buckets. Handfuls might be the way to put it."

Agents are continuing to seek help from the public, who can forward information by calling Crime Stoppers anonymously at 267-2111.

Bill Seck, who heads the FBI office in Wichita, said the federal government takes threats seriously in light of the Oklahoma City bombing and other acts of terrorism both at home and abroad.

McCormick said he has not yet tried to determine a cost of the State Office Building investigation.

"Those bills will add up, but I can't (give) you a number," he said.

He said he has not heard of any other cases involving anthrax scares.

"We do have strange people throughout this country who do strange things," he said. "There are none that that are directly related to this."

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> > > Gerry Lovell / Far Shores | <http://www.farshore.force9.co.uk>

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