

Philip Zack Steals Anthrax

By Matt Hutaff

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It was five years ago this month that the United States descended into the chaos of September 11. Sadly, even now it's hard to imagine a time when our nation was neither afraid nor vengeful; for better or worse, those events continue to shape and mold our world, and they are still on the forefront of many American minds.

Strange, however, that the anthrax scare that piggybacked on 9/11 has all but disappeared from earnest debate and discussion. Where is the flowery prose commemorating the victims of *that* tragedy? Where is media coverage highlighting half a decade of biowarfare fears? After all, never have four small envelopes wreaked so much havoc on a country; Capitol Hill underwent voluntary castration when spineless representatives refused to return to their offices, clean-up costs for suspected contamination passed the billion-dollar mark and sales of Cipro were almost as spectacular as those for duct tape and plastic sheeting.

Anthrax remains a big story, one worthy of continued investigation. The tainted letters were addressed to senators, members of the media and average citizens, killed five, injured 17 and turned an already inefficient postal system into a large-scale security nightmare. They also childishly implicated Arabs ("Death to Israel, Allah is Great?" Please.) precisely at a time when American rage towards the Middle East was reaching a boiling point. That alone served as a deciding factor for many Americans to take war abroad, yet despite being an attack on American soil, the Federal Bureau of Investigation repeatedly drags its feet on the issue.

Why? Because they know who stole the anthrax and choose to protect the culprit.

Simply put, the man most likely responsible for stealing the anthrax is Dr. Philip Zack. Zack is a prominent microbiologist who worked at the U.S. Army's Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases in Fort Detrick, Maryland while weapons-grade Ames anthrax -[the same genetic strain used to terrorize the populace](#) - was stored there. A bigot who taunted his Arab colleagues during his tenure at the facility, Zack was also monitored breaking in and conducting experiments during off hours... while no longer employed at the lab.

Zack has been a prime suspect for years - the *Hartford Courant* [wrote a piece](#) about missing anthrax in January 2002, and *Salon* [pursued its own investigation](#) later that year. Suspicion arose from an allegation against Egyptian microbiologist Ayaad Assaad, a former coworker of Zack's. Assaad was fingered anonymously as a potential bioterrorist in the aftermath of September 11 but *before* victims were identified. Though cleared of all charges by the FBI, the fact that Assaad's accuser knew so much about his life raised suspicions that said accusations were personally motivated. That dozens of lethal samples of anthrax, ebola and hantavirus disappeared during Zack and Assaad's watch in the 1990s only compounded misgivings that Zack was responsible.

Remember, all of this was widely reported in 2002, less than four months after anthrax filled the country with panic. You would think a man with a grudge against Arabs who was seen breaking into a facility where at least two dozen samples of lethal pathogens later went unaccounted would push Zack ahead of Dr. Stephen Hatfill on the "person of interest" list. As we all know, however, that was not the case.

So now we sit, five years later, unfulfilled and perplexed as to how our own government failed to follow up on the obvious. What's even more frustrating is that the FBI and its friends in the press are currently misleading the public about the investigation, insisting now the anthrax was not weapons grade at all! [This article from last week](#) states that the anthrax could have been a homebrew mixture capable of being made *anywhere*; meanwhile, [this piece from yesterday](#) obfuscates the issue and contradicts years of prior reporting. As Mike Rivero of the news source *What Really Happened* said in response, "what pointed the finger at Fort Detrick as the source of the Anthrax spores used in the letters was not just the high degree of 'weaponization' of the spores, but DNA tests which showed the anthrax in the letters to be the exact same strain used at Fort Detrick.

"Even if one buys this pathetic attempt to blur the issue, and believes in a kitchen-sink bioweapons lab, the fact remains that the original source spores still had to come from Fort Detrick." Again making Philip Zack a likely suspect.

The only reason the investigation is (by MSNBC's account) "frustratingly slow" is because no one wants a resolution to this caper. It was easy enough to devastate Hatfill's life as the conclusion would be an indifferent populace. Bringing an end to this, however, would remove an avenue of terror for the Administration to manipulate.

I'm reticent to mention that correlation as I'd like to think some things are sacred. President Bush thinks otherwise, however; like a white, powdery Osama bin Laden, anthrax has again [become a hot topic](#) leading into the midterm elections. And hey, isn't it handy that the now-downgraded anthrax could conceivably be made in an Al Qaeda kitchen? Never mind that five years down the road, the 9/11 attacks and the anthrax scare serve as stark reminders of the president's impotence at bringing terrorists to justice, Bush "stopped this al Qaeda cell from developing anthrax for attacks against the United States." 'Nuff said.

I do not know what Philip Zack has done to deserve such special treatment from the FBI, nor do I know where the missing anthrax samples disappeared to for the better part of a decade. Maybe it's because he's not the Arab demon policymakers need to fuel animosity against "Islamofascism." Maybe he has friends in high places. Honestly, the reason isn't relevant. The fact remains that Philip Zack stole weapons-grade anthrax and the FBI refuses to pursue him.

Next week marks the five-year anniversary of Bob Stevens' death. Stevens, a photo editor for Boca Raton-based tabloid *The Sun*, [was the first casualty from exposure to anthrax](#). Let's honor his memory not with empty words and meaningless pontification, but by putting the man responsible away for life.