



# Antiterrorism Historical Vignette

## Anthrax Attacks

**Attack Summary:** The 2001 anthrax attacks in the United States occurred between 18 September - 9 October 2001, resulting in the death of five people and infection of 17 others. In addition, thousands of people possibly exposed were placed on antibiotics to treat for anthrax infection. In total, as many as seven letters containing spores of *Bacillus anthracis* (an organism that causes the anthrax disease) were mailed from New Jersey to news agencies in New York and Florida, and to Senate offices in Washington, DC. Although scientists and law enforcement agencies disagree on whether or not the anthrax was of “weaponized” quality, most agree the letters to Senators Daschle and Leahy contained a highly refined, pure form of anthrax strain capable of killing thousands of people. A Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) led criminal investigation remained open until 2008 when the FBI declared Dr. Bruce Ivins, a scientist at Fort Detrick’s bio-defense lab, responsible.

---

### Key Lessons:

- The anthrax attacks demonstrate the capability and willingness of individuals or groups to develop and use biological agents to support radical, criminal or terrorist objectives.
- Symptoms of biological agent contamination are difficult to diagnose because they can resemble common medical conditions. Indications of a biological attack may not be immediately apparent.
- The level of knowledge, expertise, and experience in microbiology and the types of sophisticated laboratory equipment required to make highly potent, transportable anthrax takes time and experimentation to develop.
- Effective mail handling and inspection procedures increase the opportunity to identify, isolate, and report suspicious packages.

### AT Principles:

- Be aware of terrorist tactics, techniques, and procedures throughout your community and the surrounding area. Knowledge of prior attacks can help identify a threat early and minimize its effects.
- Established civil-military partnerships can support effective response, analysis and investigation.
- Recovery from biological attacks can be long and costly. After the 2001 anthrax attacks, contamination cleanup cost over \$1 billion with one post office closed for more than three years.

### Notes for Commanders:

- Terrorist threat/incident response (TTIR) plans should include mass casualty care as well as quarantine and containment procedures for chemical and biological substances.
- Management and dissemination of threat information is vital to inform the local community and reduce fear.
- All emergency responders (police, fire and medical) should be trained and resourced to preserve evidence of biological attack (such as envelopes or packaging materials).
- Consider appropriate security measures to prevent or contain impact from internal threats.
- Hoaxes are a disturbing consequence of attacks that receive high media coverage; ensure broad awareness to contain and manage response activities.

***Army Antiterrorism Principles: Assess, Detect, Defend, Warn, Recover***

---

**Always Ready. Always Alert.**

*Because someone is depending on you.*