

Feds sweep N'woods town

Scores of agents search 'survivalist's' property for explosives

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MANITOWISH WATERS — Residents here say they haven't had this much excitement since police got into a shootout with Chicago gangster John Dillinger in 1934.

The FBI and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives had scores of agents in this Vilas County community on Friday as they searched the family home of Denys Ray Hughes, a 58-year-old Army veteran who is facing federal charges alleging he possessed explosive materials in two states.

More than a dozen homes in Manitowish Waters were evacuated from about 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. after investigators found a suspicious substance on the Hughes property, Vilas County Sheriff John Niebuhr said, but investigators later determined the substance wasn't dangerous to the public and allowed residents to return to their homes.

Hughes was arrested

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John Hanson
town chairman

Tuesday in Vilas County on suspicion of having explosives. He was turned over to federal authorities, who charged him with possessing destructive devices and a silencer. His preliminary hearing is scheduled for Tuesday in federal court in Madison.

Authorities also searched Hughes' apartment in Phoenix this week, where they found the silencer and a 6-inch galvanized pipe bomb,



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The Oneida/Marathon County Bomb Squad and ATF agents search a property Friday in Manitowish Waters.

said Tom Mangan, spokesman for the ATF.

Hughes made an initial appearance Thursday in federal court on charges stemming from an Arizona complaint that accuses him of possessing pipe bombs and manufacturing a silencer, Mangan said.

Mangan said Hughes told investigators that he was a survivalist or a militiaman. Authorities don't believe he has ties to any terrorist group or organization.

Hughes used to live in Manitowish Waters with his mother, who owned a resort and a strip club that has

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since been torn down, said Fred Theisen, owner of Little Bohemia Restaurant. A Vilas County Sheriff's Department spokesman said Hughes was in the process of moving back to Manitowish Waters.

Town Chairman John Hanson said he knew Hughes when the two were younger, "but I haven't had contact with him for 40 years. ... I wasn't aware that he was coming back until recently." Hanson added that Hughes kept to himself when he was in town.

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The investigation started after Hughes was stopped July 8 for a traffic violation in Russell County, Kan., where officials found glass containers, firearms, reloading supplies and books referencing bomb-making in his car and passed the information to the ATF.

Vilas County sheriff's deputies later arrested Hughes.

Business owners in Manitowish Waters said Friday about a hundred FBI and ATF agents were in town. Helen Woolf, owner of Timber Wolf Lumber and Hardware, was interviewed by ATF agents to see

if Hughes ever had bought chemicals from the store that could have been used to make a bomb. Woolf said she had not sold any material like that to him.

"Frankly, (the investigators) are very secretive," she said. "The people who do know information have kept everything very confidential."

The resort town has about 675 permanent residents and thousands more people who make their homes there during the summer.

As for Little Bohemia

Restaurant, legend has it that Dillinger used to hide there. The FBI nearly captured Dillinger and his gang at the restaurant in April 1934. Following a shootout, Dillinger and his gang escaped in a boat.

The bullet holes from the gun battle still are in the windows and walls of the back dining room.

"It's been very interesting out here lately," Woolf said.

*The Associated Press
contributed to this report.*



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