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Police: River closing a hoax

By Shelly Whitehead, Post staff reporter

The mysterious reports of six armed men who tried to shut down the Ohio River in Cincinnati early Wednesday morning has been unraveled to be probably nothing more than the result of panic by boaters in the aftermath of Tuesday's terrorist attacks.

The Coast Guard started receiving reports about 1 a.m. Wednesday of six armed men in military dress and Coast Guard-style jackets stopping boat operators and telling them the Ohio River was shut down in Cincinnati.

Authorities said a commercial river towing company and one pleasure boat operator reported that six armed men traveling in a pontoon boat told them the river was closed and they would have to return to their ports.

The reported incidents occurred between Silver Grove and Ludlow. But this morning, authorities say all of the reports ended up being embellishments of marine band radio traffic picked up by boaters on the river early Wednesday.

Still, all day Wednesday federal, state and local authorities took part in a 17 miles sweep of the river coordinated by Kenton County Emergency Management officials who were acting on information that all the reports were firsthand encounters with the armed men.

"It took a good part of the morning into early afternoon," said Kenton County Emergency Management Agency Deputy Director Bary Lusby.

"There was a black duffel bag that we found empty on the Cincinnati side of the Taylor-Southgate bridge, hanging from the catwalk. And we found some packages and bags. . . . We checked out everything, but we found no credible threat of anything."

Lusby said early Thursday they confirmed that the reports were actually embellishments of radio traffic picked up by boaters.

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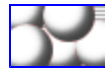
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