

Hijackers got state IDs legally

Florida and federal officials are reviewing policy after the terrorists traveled on state identification.

By STEVE BOUSQUET and ALISA ULFERTS

© St. Petersburg Times, published September 16, 2001

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TALLAHASSEE -- When Mohamed Atta was stopped by a Broward County sheriff's deputy last April, he couldn't produce a driver's license. A week later, he had one.

Atta, who is now suspected of piloting the first jetliner that smashed into the World Trade Center Tuesday, obtained a crucial piece of identification from the state of Florida after his brush with the law. He got a driver's license, a document Floridians flash almost by instinct when they rent a car or board an airplane.

A dozen other Middle Eastern men who lived in South Florida in recent months moved about with Florida licenses or state-issued identification cards as they plotted the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history. Eight of the 13 got their Florida licenses or IDs since May 1 by apparently following the rules and showing the required passports, visas or other papers, a high-ranking state official said Saturday.

"We've looked at every one of them," said Sandra Lambert, director of the Division of Driver Licenses in the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. "They met the letter of the law. We looked at every application very carefully."

FBI agents are now reviewing the paperwork for the Florida licenses and ID cards, and the state is reviewing all antiterrorism measures in the wake of the attacks.

"We are reviewing everything," Gov. Jeb Bush said Saturday.

Two years ago, Florida tightened state law to make it more difficult for noncitizens to get a license in hopes of changing a widely held perception that anyone could get a license here.

The changes, signed by Bush on June 8, 1999, were aimed at reducing identification fraud and stopping illegal immigrants from getting licenses. But several immigrant groups said it wouldn't have much effect because illegal immigrants would keep driving illegally.

A new resident seeking a Florida driver's license must show two forms of ID: one primary, one secondary. For legal immigrants, a primary ID includes a green card, authorization of employment from the Department of Justice or certificate of naturalization. A secondary ID could include a Florida car registration or driver's license from another country.

In the months leading up to the attacks, the terrorists used Florida identification as most people would: to rent a house, check into a motel and possibly at rental car outlets and airport ticketing counters.

Abdul Al Omari, 38, used his Florida driver's license as ID to rent a home in Vero Beach, the landlord said. Waleed Al Shehri, 22, another suspected hijacker on the first plane to hit the World Trade Center,

used his Florida driver's license when he rented a room at the Homing Inn in Boynton Beach on June 21, a hotel manager said. His license, originally issued in 1994, was issued again on May 4 of this year, listing a Hollywood address.

In August, Atta rented cars several times from a Pompano Beach rental agency, according to the New York Times. The last time he rented a car, in late August, he logged more than 1,000 miles before returning it Sept. 9.

"His driver's license and insurance matched up to a Florida address, he had a credit card, he spoke very good English and he carried a briefcase," said rental car agency owner Brad Warrick, who turned over the last car Atta rented to the FBI.

Months earlier, on April 26 at 11 p.m., Atta was stopped in Broward County by a deputy for an unknown traffic stop. Atta gave a Coral Springs address, but he didn't have a driver's license.

He picked the right place to have a brush with the law. It could not be determined Saturday whether he was cited for driving without a license, but he was given a notice to appear in court May 28 in Broward, and a judge issued a criminal warrant for his arrest when he didn't show up.

"It was a routine traffic stop," said Broward County Sheriff Ken Jenne, "but let's say we found flight information there. That would not have been probable cause" to charge Atta with a crime.

And, in a state where big-city judicial systems groan under heavy case loads, the warrant for Atta's arrest was ignored.

Deputies never learned that Atta reportedly was on a U.S. government "watch list" of people tied to terrorist activity.

University of Delaware political science professor Mark Miller, who studies the politics of immigration, said the "watch list" information is usually shared among federal officials at boundary entry points, and may not be passed on to local law enforcement agencies.

"That's something they are going to have to look at," Miller said.

- Times staff writers Wes Allison, Julie Hauserman and Kathryn Wexler and researcher Caryn Baird contributed to this report.

Florida IDs put in the hands of 13 hijackers

Thirteen of the 19 hijackers were issued Florida identification, either driver's licenses or identification cards issued by the state. Of the 13, eight obtained state licenses or identification cards since May 1.

Driver's licenses

MOHAMED ATTA

Issued a Florida driver's license on May 2, 2001.

Previous driver's license: Egypt

HAMZAH SALEH AL GHAMDI

Issued a Florida identification card on June 26, 2001.

Issued a Florida driver's license on June 27, 2001.

Listed a Palm Beach County address.

Previous driver's license: Saudi Arabia

AHMAD AL HAZNAWI

Issued a Florida driver's license on July 10, 2001.

Listed a Lauderdale-by-the-Sea address.

Previous driver's license: Saudi Arabia

NAWAQ AL HAZMI

A man named Nawaf Al Hazmi obtained a Florida driver's license on June 25, 2001, in Palm Beach County. He listed the same address as two other suspected hijackers.

Previous driver's license: California

ZIAD SAMIR JARRAH

Issued a Florida driver's license on May 2, 2001.

Listed a Lauderdale-by-the-Sea address.

Previous driver's license: foreign

ABDULRAHMAN AL OMARI

Issued a Florida driver's license on July 6, 2000.

Listed a Vero Beach address.

Had a duplicate identification card issued July 14, 2000.

Previous driver's license: California.

WALEED AL SHEHRI

Waleed Al Shehri was issued a Florida driver's license on Oct. 5, 1994, state records show. A copy of a driver's license says Al Shehri was issued a license May 4, 2001.

Previous driver's license: foreign.

MARWAN AL SHEHHI

Issued a Florida driver's license in February 1997.

Florida identification cards

SATAM MA AL SUQAMI

Issued a Florida identification card on July 3, 2001.

Listed a Palm Beach county address.

Previous driver's license: Saudi Arabia

AHMED AL NAMI

Issued a Florida identification card on June 29, 2001.

Listed at same Delray Beach condominium as Nawaf Al Hazmi and Saeed Al Ghamdi.

AHMED ALI AL GHAMDI

Issued a Florida Identification card June 25, 1998.

Listed Brevard County address.

SAEED AL GHAMDI

Issued a Florida identification card on July 10, 2001.

Listed a Delray Beach address.

WAIL AL SHEHRI

Issued a Florida identification card.

- Source: Florida motor vehicle records, compiled by Times research library.

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