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THE TRAIL OF THE TERRORISTS



The routes 19 terrorists took to Sept. 11 circle the globe, hit close to home and give clues as to how they did it, if not why.

By SYDNEY P. FREEDBERG

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It started in a walkup apartment in the German port city of Hamburg with an urban planner, an aspiring pilot and a timid German-language student. Dutiful sons of the middle class, they worked together, studied in a circle together and recited the Koran together.

They were terrorists in waiting, investigators say, "sleeper agents" who came together but stayed below the radar until they were activated.



The hijackers' trail

You will need the free [Flash player](#) to view this interactive graphic.

Who are the the terrorists?

- FLIGHT 11
World Trade Center, north tower
- FLIGHT 175
World Trade Center, south tower
- FLIGHT 77
The Pentagon
- FLIGHT 93
Pennsylvania

Who are the terrorists?

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As the antiterrorism police track the movements of the men who took over the cockpits, the labyrinth seems to grow in size and complexity with each passing hour.

The suspects have been trailed from Germany to Malaysia to San Diego to Hollywood, Fla. They left behind bank accounts, e-mails, rental car contracts, gym memberships and lease agreements for apartments.

They bounced around from motel to motel, country to country, sometimes listing commercial mail boxes when they needed a permanent address to obtain identification. Records with conflicting dates of birth and spellings of Arabic names sometimes seem to put them in two places at once.

It's a moving target for the investigators.

Did one cell of hijackers know what the others were up to? Did they have inside help? Who indoctrinated them in terrorist techniques? Why did at least 13 hijackers end up in Florida? Did they share a single contact for money? How did two hijackers on a terrorist watch list manage to evade U.S. authorities?

Even some of the most basic assumptions made early in the inquiry are being discounted by new information: There is mounting evidence that some of the suicide hijackers originally named by the FBI used multiple identities or faked their identities -- some possibly stolen from legitimate pilots.

Two weeks after the most devastating attack in U.S. history, here is a snapshot of how it happened:

From the Middle East to Germany

1985: Mohamed Atta, a shy 17-year-old from Kafr el-Sheikh in the Nile Delta, Egypt, enters the engineering department at Cairo University. His dad, a well-to-do lawyer, says his son never cursed. He never drank. He said his prayers without complaint.



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From the AP national wire
From the AP world desk

"I am the one who convinced him to learn German because it is the language of engineering of the world," his father told ABC News in Cairo.

October 1992: With encouragement from his father, Atta obtains a visa to study at the Technical University of Hamburg-Harburg in Germany. His field of expertise: history and preservation of Islamic cities.

1994: He goes on an archaeological dig in Syria.

1995: He goes to Egypt with a professor and a German student. Friends describe him as intelligent, idealistic, religious but not fanatical. They lose touch with him after Atta says he wants to make a trip to Mecca.

1996: Ziad Jarrahi, then 19, leaves Lebanon for Gleisfeld, Germany, where he studies German. He then moves to Hamburg to study aircraft construction. Born in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, close to the Syrian border, Jarrahi, also known as Ziad Jarrah, grew up middle class like Atta. Cleanshaven, Jarrahi likes western things. He's not interested in politics. He parties. He has a girlfriend studying to be a doctor in the German town of Bochum.

1997: Marwan al-Shehhi, believed to be Atta's 19-year-old nephew, begins studying German at the University of Bonn under the name Marwan Lekrab. Studious like Atta, al-Shehhi grew up in a poverty-stricken town in the United Arab Emirates, but his family's two-story villa with ornate windows stood out. He spent many hours in the mosque with his father, who called the faithful to prayer five times a day.

1998: Al-Shehhi returns to the Middle East for his father's funeral. When he gets back to Germany, he grows disenchanted and turns to Atta for direction.

1998: Atta, sporting a long, thick beard, resurfaces in Hamburg to work on his dissertation about the development of Aleppo, a Syrian trading city. He shares an apartment with Said Bahaji, a German of Moroccan descent. German media identify Bahaji and Atta as key logistical leaders in what is to become a terror cell.

January 1999: At the university in Hamburg, Atta helps Bahaji form an Islamic prayer group. The university provides space, computers, e-mail. Atta has a home page on the university's server. With two clicks, you can get to the home page for Hamas, the Palestinian terrorist group. Atta also frequently visits

the home page of Syria online.

About a dozen men study together, and at Atta's walkup apartment, they pray, recite the Koran and condemn Western dress, music, alcohol -- anything that corrupts the purity of Islam. A German prosecutor says later they share one goal: "To attack the U.S. in a spectacular way through the destruction of symbolic buildings."

1999: Jarrahi, a mediocre student, gets a pilot's license in Hamburg. German authorities believe Atta recruits him.

1999: Atta also takes in his nephew, al-Shehhi, who transfers to Hamburg from the university in Bonn.

1999: Atta, al-Shehhi and Jarrahi report their passports missing, according to a German media report. By getting new passports, the men are able to remove evidence that they already have visited countries such as Afghanistan or Iraq -- places that would have set off alarm bells for U.S. visa processors. The men get their visas.

June 3, 1999: Atta arrives in Newark, N.J., from Prague, on a temporary visitor's visa, issued in Berlin.

July 1999: Jarrahi suddenly announces to his friends that he is dropping out of school. The Associated Press says he asks one of his best friends, "Will you miss me?"

Plotting abroad

1999: Satam al-Suqami and Ahmed Alghamdi brace for the millennium. The New York Times reports the two were linked to a former Boston cab driver who authorities suspect in a plot to blow up tourist sites. The cab driver is believed to be an operative of Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden. The millennium day plot is foiled by Jordanian authorities.

December 1999: Khalid al-Midhar and Nawaq Alhamzi, believed to be operatives of Osama bin Laden, meet with two top operatives of bin Laden in a hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The meeting is captured on film by Malaysian security services. The operatives are later suspected of plotting to bomb the USS Cole.

Early 2000: A German newspaper reports that Atta buys a large quantity of chemicals, which can be used

for making bombs, in Frankfurt, Germany.

Flight training in the U.S.

April 2000: Alhamzi shows up at the National Air College Flight School in San Diego. He wants to fly a plane. But the school questions his limited knowledge of English and he gets only one lesson.

May 2000: Alhamzi is joined in San Diego by al-Midhar. They ask about learning to fly Boeing jets at Sorbi's Flying Club in San Diego. They're told they must master Cessnas and Pipers first. "You can't just jump right into Boeings," the instructor says. "You have to start slower." When the instructor takes them up, al-Midhar has trouble with the basics. At times, he becomes afraid and prays to Allah.

May 29, 2000: Al-Shehhi arrives at Newark Airport on a tourist visa, issued in the United Arab Emirates. He hooks up with Atta to check out flight schools.

June 2000: Atta and al-Shehhi visit Airman Flight School in Norman, Okla. -- the same school previously attended by another man who is suspected of being a bin Laden operative. They say they want to be pilots. They end up in Florida instead.

July 3, 2000: Atta and al-Shehhi sign up for flight training at Huffman Aviation in Venice, Fla., 60 miles south of the Tampa Bay area. Cost: \$18,000 for Atta, \$20,000 for al-Shehhi. They pay with checks drawn from a SunTrust Bank branch in Venice. They rent a room with twin beds -- \$17 a night -- from Charlie and Dru Voss of Venice for about a week. They arrive in a rental car, but later that week they buy a used Pontiac Grand Prix. Then they move 10 miles north to Nokomis, where they rent a furnished two-bedroom home about five miles from the airport. They put down a \$550 deposit and sign the lease in neat script.

About July 2000: An alleged hijacker originally identified as Fayez Ahmed, whose birth name is believed to be Fayez Ahmad Al Shehri, leaves home in the Asir region of Saudi Arabia and tells his family he's joining the International Islamic Relief Organization.

September 2000: Back in San Diego, al-Midhar and Alhamzi become boarders in the home of a local Islamic leader, who helps Alhamzi open a bank account and post a personal Internet ad in English seeking a Mexican wife.

October 2000: Al-Midhar leaves San Diego, saying he's returning to his wife and kids in Saudi Arabia.

October 2000: Jarrahi, the Lebanese man with the German girlfriend, turns up in Venice, Fla., to bone up on his flying.

Oct. 12: The USS Cole is attacked by suicide bombers in Yemen.

Dec. 21, 2000: Atta and al-Shehhi are issued pilot licenses.

Dec. 29, 2000: Atta and al-Shehhi cross the state to Opa-Locka, just north of Miami, for a dry run on a simulator for big jets. At SimCenter Inc., each spends three hours on a full-motion 727 simulator. They concentrate on turns. Each pays \$1,500, cash.

December 2000: A man originally identified as Ahmed Alnami, whose birth name is apparently Ahmad Abdullah Alnami, 23, goes missing from his home in the Asir region of Saudi Arabia, his family tells Al Watan, a Saudi newspaper. His father says he never returned from a pilgrimage to Mecca.

December 2000: Hani Hanjour, a native of Taif in Saudi Arabia, leaves for the United Arab Emirates.

December 2000: A man originally identified as Wail Alshehri, whose birth name is Wael Alshehri, leaves the town of Khamis Mushayt outside Abha in Saudi Arabia. He has a psychological problem and goes to Medina to seek help from religious officials, according to Al Watan. With Wail is his brother, Waleed M. Alshehri. Their father, who says his sons had thought about joining Muslim fighters in Chechnya, says he never hears from them again. Investigators are checking whether a number of hijackers went to Chechnya.

Logistics

Jan. 4, 2001: Atta flies from Miami to Madrid for a week. Spanish authorities suspect he meets other terrorists or financiers involved in the hijacking plots.

Jan. 11, 2001: Al-Shehhi follows Atta to Spain.

March 11, 2001: They empty out the apartment in Hamburg.

April 12, 2001: Al-Shehhi obtains a Florida driver's

license -- an item needed to make money transactions, among other things. Eventually, checking accounts are reportedly opened at SunTrust branches in Florida in the names of unspecified hijackers. Atta and Abdulaziz Alomari, believed to have played a leadership role in the attacks, rent two safety deposit boxes at a Florida bank branch.

April 26, 2001: A Broward sheriff's deputy stops Atta for a traffic violation, but Atta can't produce a license. The deputy writes him a ticket ordering him to appear in court on May 28. He skips the appearance. Fellow hijackers start gathering in Florida.

Sleepers are activated

April 2001: Jarrahi rents an efficiency in Hollywood. He also rents a commercial post office box in Hollywood, about two miles from a box rented by al-Shehhi.

May 2001: Jarrahi pays \$80 for a membership at US-1 Fitness Club in Dania, telling the owner he wants to learn martial arts and how to fend off knife attacks. He studies two to three times a week.

May 2001: A Middle Eastern man comes to the Bimini Motel in Hollywood and asks the owner if he has a room for two of his friends. They converse in German. Two days later, a Saudi man identified as 21-year-old commercial pilot Waleed Alshehri checks into the Bimini, along with another man.

Alshehri will ultimately be assigned to ride on Flight 11, which crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center. Two others, Hanjour and Alomari, also believed to have pilot training, use Hollywood addresses, though it isn't clear if they really live there. Hanjour will be assigned to ride on Flight 77, which crashed into the Pentagon. Alomari will go on Flight 11.

May 2001: One county north, in Palm Beach's Delray Beach, three suspected hijackers rent a \$900-a-month condo near the Atlantic Ocean. They are identified as Saeed Alghamdi, 25, believed to be a Saudi who will ride on Flight 93; Ahmed Alnami and Hamza Alghamdi, believed to have pilot training. Two will ultimately ride on Flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania, and the other, on Flight 175, which struck the south tower of the World Trade Center.

Overseas investors own many of the condo units.

Neighbors say the men in Apartment 1504 keep to themselves and never make eye contact. Some complain about loud tapping noises in the wee hours of the morning.

June 2001: Nawaq Alhamzi, one of the men tied to the Cole suspects, rents a Chrysler with a man who signs the rental contract, "Hani Saleh Hassan." He is believed to be Hani Hanjour, the 29-year-old Saudi. To make transactions, Alhamzi gets a Florida driver's license and opens a post office box at a Mail Boxes Etc. in Fort Lee, N.J. He uses the mail drop with Salem Alhamzi, a fellow Flight 77 traveler. Six of the suspected hijackers have some reported connection to New Jersey, officials believe.

June-July 2001: Other hijackers obtain Florida driver's licenses or ID cards, some claiming post office boxes in Delray Beach as residences, others claiming they live in motels in Boynton Beach. Investigators are now checking whether the addresses may have been passed on relay style as hijackers entered the country.

July 2001: Because of a bureaucratic breakdown, al-Midhar, the other man with links to the Cole bombers, slips into the United States, giving his address as the "Marriott Hotel."

July-September 2001: Ahmed Alhaznawi, 20, moves to Lauderdale by the Sea, two blocks from the beach, where he rents a duplex with Ziad Jarrahi. They give German passports as proof of identification. Saudi-born Alhaznawi drives Jarrahi's sporty Mitsubishi Eclipse, bought a year before in Venice.

July 2001: Atta flies to Spain for 12 days, renting a car and visiting the northeastern Catalan resort of Salou.

Summer 2001, dates unknown: More logistics

With al-Shehhi, Atta travels to Zurich, where, according to Swiss media accounts, they buy cardboard cutters and pocket knives.

British authorities believe London is a transit point for some of the hijackers.

Authorities in Malaysia say several suspects come to Kuala Lumpur in the months before the attacks.

Quoting unnamed intelligence sources, newspapers report that Atta meets in Europe with an Iraqi

intelligence agent.

A man using a name similar to Mohamed Atta uses a bad credit card to purchase the official U.S. Air Force magazine from the General Accounting Office. He lists an address in Egypt.

Squads shape up

July 31, 2001: Three hijackers from Flight 11 -- Wail Alshehri, Waleed Alshehri and Satam al-Suqami -- get \$60 short-term memberships at Jim Woolard's World Gym in Boynton Beach.

August 2001: Jarrahi, who will be assigned to Flight 93, renews his membership at the gym in Dania. When asked by gym instructors if he wants another two-month membership, he explains he needs only one. He bones up on jujitsu. Other hijackers also work out in gyms in South Florida.

Aug. 2, 2001: Abdulaziz Alomari and Ahmed Alghamdi go to a driver's license office in Arlington, Va., to obtain state identity cards, along with Hani Hanjour, Salem Alhamzi and Majed Moqed.

August 2001: Atta and others are seen in Belle Glade asking about crop dusters.

Aug. 19, 2001: Atta hones his flying skills, renting a four-seat Piper from the Palm Beach County Airport in Lantana, for three consecutive days. It costs \$88 per hour.

August 2001: Refusing to provide an address, Hanjour takes a few spins with flight instructors over Freeway Airport in Bowie, Md. When he asks to go solo, the school declines to rent him a plane partly because of his poor flying skills.

Late August 2001: A public librarian in Delray Beach remembers the name Mohald Alshehri on sign-up sheets to wait to use a computer. The FBI is examining data on computers at that library and others in Broward County, as well as computers at libraries in Fairfax County, Va.

Booking flights

Aug. 25, 2001: Nawaq Alhamzi books a flight on American Airlines Flight 77, using a Visa card through the online travel agency Travelocity.

Aug. 27, 2001: In Broward, Fayez Ahmed and Mohald Alshehri pay \$4,500 each to book first-class seats on United Airlines Flight 175. They have the tickets mailed to a commercial post office box.

Aug. 28, 2001: In Hollywood, Atta books a first-class seat on American Airlines Flight 11. He orders the paperless ticket via the AA Web site, accessing it with a frequent flyer number he had just established. He books the flight the same day and in the same way as Abdulaziz Alomari. Six of the men, four on the American flight and two on United, apparently provide the same phone number when buying their tickets.

Aug. 29, 2001: Ahmed Alghamdi, Hamza Alghamdi and Mohamed Atta appear to have used a computer at the same Kinko's copy store in Hollywood to book their flight tickets. Ahmed Alghamdi and Hamza Alghamdi give a post office box in Delray Beach.

August 2001: The two hijackers with links to bin Laden, Khalid al-Midhar and Nawaq Alhamzi, are placed on a terrorist watch list, barring their entry into the United States. But authorities quickly establish the men already are in the country and a search fails to turn up either man.

Hijackers go east, north, west

Sept. 1, 2001: Suspected hijackers from Flight 77, which hit the Pentagon, start gathering in Laurel, Md. Al-Midhar, Salem Alhamzi, Majed Moqed, Nawaq Alhamzi and Hani Hanjour pay cash for motel rooms. Ziad Jarrahi of Flight 93 has earlier been in Laurel, looking around an adult book store, among other things.

The hijackers eat a lot of pizza. Neighbors of Room 353 in the Valencia Motel get curious because the men never return greetings. They drive off every day with a lot of big stand-up wheelie bags and carry-on luggage, then come back and leave again with a lot of luggage. The hotels are just a few miles from the home of Moataz Al-Hallak, a well-known Syrian-born cleric.

Sept. 2, 1991: Three hijackers -- al-Midhar, Moqed and Hanjour -- pay cash for one-week memberships at Gold's Gym in Greenbelt, Md. They are joined a couple of times by Nawaq Alhamzi and Salem Alhamzi, who buy one-day passes.

Sept. 5, 2001: Two men, believed to be Hanjour and Moqed, are captured on camera at an ATM in

Maryland.

Sept. 5, 2001: Al-Midhar and Moqed pick up their tickets, booked earlier using the same frequent flyer number, for American Flight 77 at Baltimore/Washington International Airport near Baltimore.

Sept. 7, 2001: Saeed Alghamdi and Ahmed Alnami, both on the Newark-San Francisco flight that crashed in Pennsylvania, fly from Fort Lauderdale to Newark on Spirit Airlines flight 1460. The tickets were booked earlier at a travel agency in Lauderdale by the Sea. Each pays \$139, cash.

Final goodbyes

Sept. 8, 2001: Witnesses say Atta plays video games while al-Shehhi and another man sip vodka and orange juice at Shuckums Oyster Pub and Seafood Grill in Hollywood. The bartender remembers Atta because they get into a dispute over the bill.

Sept. 9, 2001: Al-Shehhi, scheduled on United Airlines Flight 175, shaves the lower half of his goatee, leaving only a moustache. He returns a rental car and checks out of the Panther Motel in Deerfield Beach with Jarrahi, scheduled for United Flight 93.

Sept. 10, 2001: Atta arrives in Boston, where he rents a Nissan Altima, then drives to Portland, Me. He and the man identified as Abdulaziz Alomari, both bound for Flight 11, spend the night at the Comfort Inn in Portland.

Sept. 10, 2001: Hamza Alghamdi and Ahmed Alghamdi, both bound for Flight 175, share a hotel room in a Boston suburb.

Sept. 11, 2001: An airport security camera captures Atta and the man identified as Alomari boarding a commuter flight from Portland to Boston.

Sept. 11, 2001: With his "brother," Salem Alhamzi, Nawaq Alhamzi arrive at Dulles Airport near Washington. They wait in a coach class line to pick up first-class tickets. The agent tells Time magazine that both men answer the standard security questions. They board Flight 77.

Sept. 11, 2001: The rest of the hijackers make their way to Dulles, Logan in Boston and the Newark airport to board Flights 77, 11, 175 and 93.

Piecing together the network

The hijackers leave a nest of clues about the people who housed them, and the way they got their money.

Motel owners in Florida discover, among other things, notebooks with Arabic writing, maps of the East Coast, and a knife in a dresser drawer.

In Hamburg, investigators seize a suitcase with "airplane-related" documents from an apartment occupied by Jarrahi's girlfriend. They take her into protective custody.

In a bag left behind in Boston, antiterrorism police find Atta's suicide note, written years ago.

The suspected terrorists also leave behind a web of names that sometimes don't add up. After the FBI released their names two weeks ago, a man with the name Salem Alhamzi called a Saudi paper to say he is not a dead hijacker. He still is alive and working in a government petrochemical plant. He says he has never been in the United States and fears for his life.

Investigators are checking disputed identities of at least three other hijackers: Abdulaziz Alomari, Nawaq Alhamzi and Saeed Alghamdi. In addition, they say that Khalid al-Midhar, the man on the terrorist watch list, may still be alive.

* * *

- This timeline is based on reporting in Florida by St. Petersburg Times staff writers Wes Allison, Thomas C. Tobin, Dong-Phuong Nguyen, Adam C. Smith and Nancy Paradis. It was compiled with information supplied by the Associated Press, the New York Times, the Washington Post and other Times wires. Research was done by staff writer Sydney P. Freedberg and researchers Caryn Baird, John Martin, Barbara Oliver and Cathy Wos.



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