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#### THE INVESTIGATION

## Hijackers may have taken Saudi identities

By Kevin Cullen and Anthony Shadid, Globe Staff, Globe Correspondent, 9/15/2001

Evidence surfaced yesterday that some of the suicide hijackers who commandeered airliners originating in Boston, Washington, and Newark on Tuesday may have used aliases and adopted the identities of legitimate Saudi Arabian pilots to gain entry to the United States and access to the flight training they needed to carry out their attacks.

The FBI, meanwhile, has seized a will written by the Islamic radical who some investigators believe was the ringleader of the Boston hijackers, in which he said he planned to kill himself so he would go to heaven as a martyr, according to federal sources.

The will of Mohamed Atta, 33, written in Arabic and dated in 1996, was found in his luggage, which was not loaded onto doomed American Airlines Flight 11. That plane smashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York.

"It was written in such a way that he was going to martyr himself," said a law enforcement source.

Aside from showing the zealotry that drove Atta and the other suicide hijackers, investigators said, the will is more evidence that the planning for the worst act of terrorism ever directed against Americans began at least five years ago. Records show that some of the suicide hijackers arrived in the US for flight training more than five years ago.

The FBI also has identified a second hotel where some of those who hijacked two Boston-to-Los Angeles flights stayed. Federal law enforcement sources say Ahmed Alghamdi and Hamza Alghamdi paid cash for a room at the Days Hotel on Soldiers Field Road in Brighton on Monday, the night before hijacking United Flight 175.

The hotel manager, Adam Sperling, confirmed yesterday that the FBI had been at the hotel Thursday afternoon to pick up a copy of the guest list.

Two of the men who hijacked Flight 11, Wail and Waleed al-Shehri, spent the night before at the Park Inn in Chestnut Hill.

The prospect of the hijackers using aliases has made an already convoluted, difficult criminal investigation even more confusing, as investigators seek to establish who hijacked the planes and how they got into a position to do so.

The Saudi government yesterday said that at least some of the suicide hijackers stole the identities of legitimate Saudi pilots, apparently in an attempt to deflect attention, as they spent more than five years gaining the flying experience needed to take the controls of an airborne commercial jet and fly it into a target.

Responding to yesterday's Boston Globe report that some of the hijackers had exploited Saudi Arabia's standing as America's staunchest Arab ally to gain entry to the United States and access to aeronautics training later used to kill perhaps thousands, the Saudi government broke its silence, denying that any of the hijackers were Saudi nationals.

The Saudi government, presided over by the country's royal family, is close to the Bush family, especially President George W. Bush's father, the former president. The Saudi government is sensitive about the growing evidence that the hijackers used Saudi affiliations to gain the expertise they needed to kill perhaps thousands of Americans.

In an interview in Washington, Gaafar Allagany, the Saudi government's chief spokesman in the United States, said the hijackers probably stole the identity of legitimate Saudi pilots. Allagany suggested the information released by US authorities indicating some of the hijackers were Saudis or had attended flight schools in Florida under the sponsorship of the Saudi national airline is wrong. He said none of the hijackers were sponsored or employed by Saudi Arabian Airlines, which is owned by the government.

The airline's New York office referred calls to corporate headquarters, but that office was closed. Allagany, however, said he spoke to the airline's executives. "If they come to America, they have to come through the office of Saudi Arabian Airlines. They never heard of these names," he said.

But investigators say, and public records show, that some of the hijackers listed Saudi Arabian Airlines as their sponsors while they attended flight schools in Florida.

And a Saudi newspaper editor yesterday said two of the hijackers, brothers Waleed and Wail al Shehri, were the sons of a Saudi diplomat, Ahmed al-Shehri.

Reached by the Globe in New Delhi, where he is third secretary of the Saudi embassy, Ahmed al-Shehri equivocated when asked if the two hijackers were his sons.

"I have no idea. Maybe," said al-Shehri, who worked as an attache at the Saudi embassy in Washington until 1996. "How do I know? We have a half-million Shehris in Saudi Arabia."

Flight instructors in Florida said it is common for students with Saudi affiliations to enter the United States with only cursory background checks. Foreign students, who make up 80-90 percent of students at Florida's 80 or so aeronautical schools, are subjected to far more scrutiny from US State Department officials if they come from Middle Eastern nations that are less friendly with Washington than is Saudi Arabia, instructors said.

FBI director Robert Mueller said in a briefing that he had "a fairly high level of confidence" that the names of 19 hijackers released by the government yesterday were actual names and not aliases or stolen identities.

Mueller conceded that investigators were unaware that potential terrorists had been training at American flight schools. "If we had understood that to be the case, we would have - perhaps one could have averted this," Mueller said.

Mueller also acknowledged that some of the hijackers aboard the four flights were not in the country legally. But he wasn't sure how many or which ones.

The FBI has conducted more than 30 searches throughout the country, issued hundreds of subpoenas, and seized computers, documents, and other evidence, Mueller said. By yesterday afternoon, the FBI had received more than 36,000 leads, he said.

Attorney General John Ashcroft said the FBI has forwarded a list of more than 100 names of individuals it wants to question in the case to the Federal Aviation Administration, the airlines, some 18,000 police departments, the US Border Patrol, and the US Customs Service.

"Now the nature of this list is that it would be changing constantly as people are either removed from it or added to it," Ashcroft said. "But we believe that the individuals on the list may have information that could be helpful to us in our efforts."

In a telephone interview from the Saudi city of Jeddah, Jamal Khashoggi, the deputy editor of the Arabic newspaper Arab News, said he spoke to Abdulrahman Alomari, a Saudi pilot who said the hijackers had stolen his identity as part of their plot. Khashoggi said Alomari went to the US consulate in Jeddah yesterday to report that he was alive and well.

Abdulrahman Alomari was on the passenger list of Flight 11, sitting in business class next to Mohamed Atta, 33, who some investigators now believe was the ringleader of the group of terrorists who boarded two Boston-to-Los Angeles flights. Public records show that Alomari had lived in Vero Beach, Fla., and attended a flight school there.

But in the Justice Department list of hijackers released yesterday, Alomari's first name is spelled Abdulaziz. Federal investigators said they could not explain the discrepancy between the American Airlines passenger list and their list.

Khashoggi said he also spoke to Amer Kamfar, 41, who is being sought by police in Florida as an alleged accomplice to the terrorists. He said Kamfar, a flight engineer for the Saudi airline, spoke to him yesterday from Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

"Kamfar said he doesn't know any of these guys. He's in total disbelief. He said he knew Alomari, that they went to school together," said Khashoggi, whose newspaper supports the Saudi government. "He thinks someone stole his identity, too."

Nonetheless, police in Florida said they were still searching for Kamfar and said he was possibly armed with an AK-47. Public records show that Kamfar lived with Alomari in Vero Beach and that they both went to a flight school nearby, and that Kamfar listed Saudi Arabian Airlines' post office box in Jeddah as his home address on his pilot license.

Al-Hayat, an Arabic newspaper based in London, reported yesterday that Atta was an Egyptian. While Atta has had an Egyptian driver's license, and has lived in the United Arab Emirates, investigators found a Saudi passport in his luggage, which was left behind at Logan Airport when he boarded Flight 11 after taking a flight from Portland, Maine, Tuesday.

Al-Hayat, considered one of the most independent and credible Arabic newspapers, reported that Atta earned an engineering degree in Egypt and was not known to Egyptian authorities as belonging to radical Islamic groups in that country. The newspaper said Atta lived in Hamburg with another Egyptian, Marwan Shahin, before arriving in Florida last July to attend flight school.

But according to German police, and to investigators here probing the suicide hijackings, Atta came to the US with his cousin Marwan Al Shehhi, who was trained as a pilot and was aboard Flight 175 when it smashed into the World Trade Center South Tower 15 minutes after Flight 11 crashed.

Federal law enforcement sources said Atta was wanted for a 1986 attack on a bus in Israel, and German authorities said his terrorist record should have made him ineligible to enter the US. How Atta and Marwan Al Shehhi got into the country remains a subject of dispute among authorities.

Interviews with those who met Marwan Al Shehhi when he was in Florida indicate he left a Deerfield Beach, Fla., hotel two days before the attack, suggesting he drove straight through to Massachusetts to make the Tuesday morning flight at Logan.

Richard and Diane Surma, owner of the Panther Motel Apartments, north of Fort Lauderdale, said Al Shehhi signed out, and were not sure when the other two men left. Al Shehhi and another man initially rented the room for two. A visitor ended up staying with them.

Richard Surma said the men left behind a box cutter, an 8-inch-thick pile of detailed, high-quality aeronautical maps of every state on the East Coast, three martial arts books, and a three-ring notebook with a protractor. Also found was a tote bag from a flying school. The books were on kung fu, jujitsu, and a martial art he couldn't remember. He threw out the maps but kept the martial arts manuals and the protractors.

While watching the horrific events on TV, Diane Surma said to herself, "I bet those guys stayed at our place."

On Wednesday, the Surmas talked to an investigator from the county sheriff's office, who took a look at the material and called the FBI. The FBI confiscated it.

"My wife ran over and said we wanted to show them something. So they came over and it blew their minds," Surma said.

The rooms cost \$45 a night. The men paid cash in advance for each week. There were no signs of problems.

"They were neatly dressed, they made no noise. That's the kind we like," said Richard.

Marwan spoke good English, with either no or only a slight accent, said Diane Surma. She stressed he was nice and polite.

Richard Surma said, "It's not like Hollywood, where you can easily spot the bad guy. They blended in pretty well."

*Globe Staff reporters Shelley Murphy, Matthew Brelis, Michael Rosenwald, and Michael Rezendes in Florida, and Globe correspondent Leila Fadel contributed to this report.*

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