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How the hijackers sailed through security

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Hani Hanjour, foreground, believed to have piloted American Airlines Flight 77 when it crashed into the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, is shown on surveillance video passing through the security checkpoint at the Dulles International Airport on September 11. Hanjour sent two carry-on bags through the X-ray machine and passed through a metal detector without setting off alarm. — AP

WASHINGTON, JULY 22. Some of the hijackers who crashed a passenger aircraft into the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, twice set off alarms as they passed through metal detectors that morning at Washington's Dulles International Airport, but security screeners did not appear to question them about utility knives that investigators believe they were carrying as part of the takeover plot, according to newly disclosed surveillance videotape.

The video represents the only footage known to exist showing any of the September 11 hijackers boarding their final flights that fateful morning. It shows most of the hijackers in Washington were pulled aside to undergo additional scrutiny after alarms went off at metal detectors but then were permitted to board American Airlines Flight 77.

Checked and passed

The video also shows an airport screener hand-checking the baggage of one hijacker, Nawaf al-Hazmi, for traces of explosives before letting him continue onto the plane with his brother, Salem, a fellow hijacker. Al-Hazmi had been added to a U.S. government terrorism watch list just weeks earlier. The disclosure of the video came just before the release of the final report by the September 11 commission.

Details in the grainy video are difficult to distinguish. But an earlier, preliminary report by the commission describing activities at Dulles is consistent with the men's procession through airport security as shown on the video.

No knives or other sharp objects are visible in the video. Investigators have said the hijackers at Dulles were believed to be carrying utility knives either personally or in their luggage, which at the time could legally be carried aboard planes if the blades were less than 4 inches long and were not considered "menacing." There is no indication on the video that security screeners questioned the hijackers about any knives.

All 58 passengers — including the hijackers — and six crew members, along with 125 employees at the Pentagon, died when the flight crashed into the Pentagon at 9-39 a.m.

Alarms

The video shows hijackers Khalid al-Mihdhar and Majed Moqed, each dressed conservatively in slacks and collared shirts, setting off metal detectors as they pass through security around 7-18 a.m. Moqed set off a second alarm, and a screener manually checked him with a handheld metal detector. The pair were known to have travelled together previously and had paid cash to purchase their tickets aboard Flight 77 on September 5, 2001, at the American Airlines counter at Baltimore's airport.

Al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi had been known to be associated with al-Qaeda since early 1999 by the National Security Agency, and were put on a terrorism watch list on August 24, 2001.

Only Hani Hanjour, believed to have been the hijacker who piloted Flight 77, passed through Dulles security that morning without being subjected to a secondary security check, according to the video. Moments after Hanjour passed alone through the security checkpoint, wearing dark slacks and a short-sleeved shirt, the final two hijackers, the al-Hazmi brothers, both wearing slacks and Oxford shirts, walked through the checkpoint.

Tickets examined

Nawaf al-Hazmi, described by investigators as the right-hand accomplice of hijacker-planner Mohammed Atta, set off two metal-detectors, and a screener manually checked him with a handheld device. Nawaf and his brother, each wearing slacks and Oxford shirts, were directed to a nearby counter, where staff members appeared to examine their tickets closely while another screener checked Nawaf's carry-on bag with an explosive trace detector. Each was cleared to board Flight 77.

"Even after setting off these alarms, the airlines and security screeners failed to examine the hijackers' baggage, as required by federal regulations and industry-mandated standards, or discover the weapons they would use in their attack," said the lawyer Ron Motley of the law firm representing the families of some of the victims who are suing the airlines and the security industry over their actions relating to the September 11 attacks.

Surprise

Elaine Teague, suing over the death of her 31-year-old daughter, Sandra, said she had previously been shown the footage by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. But the terrorists' faces had been digitally disguised. Ms. Teague said she was surprised at how relaxed security was, given that airlines had received three warnings from the Federal Aviation Administration. One such warning, issued in June 2001, cited "unconfirmed

reports that American interests may be the target of a terrorist threat from extremist groups."

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