

A Trainee Noted for Incompetence

By **JIM YARDLEY** MAY 4, 2002

Although the authorities say none of the 19 hijackers on Sept. 11 were tied to an F.B.I. intelligence alert issued by an agent in Arizona two months earlier, one hijacker, Hani Hanjour, had come to the Federal Aviation Administration's attention earlier last year, when he trained in Phoenix.

Mr. Hanjour, who investigators contend piloted the airliner that crashed into the Pentagon, was reported to the aviation agency in February 2001 after instructors at his flight school in Phoenix had found his piloting skills so shoddy and his grasp of English so inadequate that they questioned whether his pilot's license was genuine.

Records show a Hani Hanjour obtained a license in 1999 in Scottsdale, Ariz. Previous and sometimes contradictory reports said he failed in 1996 and 1997 to obtain a license at other schools.

"The staff thought he was a very nice guy, but they didn't think his English was up to level," said Marilyn Ladner, a vice president at the Pan Am International Flight Academy, which operated the center in Phoenix. Ms. Ladner said that the F.A.A. examined Mr. Hanjour's credentials and found them legitimate and that an inspector, by coincidence, attended a class with Mr. Hanjour. The inspector also offered to find an interpreter to help Mr. Hanjour, she said.

"He ended up observing Hani in class," Ms. Ladner added, "though that was not his original reason for being there."

Company officials briefed members of Congress about the case, including Representative James L. Oberstar, Democrat of Minnesota, who made public

some of its general details in December.

The aviation agency did not return a call for comment.

Pan Am International, one of the largest pilot schools in the nation, also operated the flight school in Eagan, Minn., near Minneapolis, where the instructors' suspicions led to the arrest of Zacarias Moussaoui, the man whom the authorities have said was intended to be the 20th hijacker.

Ms. Ladner said the Phoenix staff never suspected that Mr. Hanjour was a hijacker but feared that his skills were so weak that he could pose a safety hazard if he flew a commercial airliner.

"There was no suspicion as far as evildoing," Ms. Ladner said. "It was more of a very typical instructional concern that 'you really shouldn't be in the air.' "

A former employee of the school said that the staff initially made good-faith efforts to help Mr. Hanjour and that he received individual instruction for a few days. But he was a poor student. On one written problem that usually takes 20 minutes to complete, Mr. Hanjour took three hours, the former employee said, and he answered incorrectly.

Ultimately, administrators at the school told Mr. Hanjour that he would not qualify for the advanced certificate. But the ex-employee said Mr. Hanjour continued to pay to train on a simulator for Boeing 737 jets. "He didn't care about the fact that he couldn't get through the course," the ex-employee said.

Staff members characterized Mr. Hanjour as polite, meek and very quiet. But most of all, the former employee said, they considered him a very bad pilot.

"I'm still to this day amazed that he could have flown into the Pentagon," the former employee said. "He could not fly at all."

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