



# Multiple identities of hijack suspects confound FBI

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Two weeks after the terrorist attack that killed an estimated 7,000 people, investigators still are not sure who all the hijackers really were.

The 19 terrorism suspects used stolen identities, multiple identities and fake names, obfuscating their trail so successfully that even thousands of federal agents are having difficulty sorting it out.

On Thursday, Attorney General John Ashcroft and FBI Director Robert Mueller released a stack of photographs and a laundry list of aliases, and reached out for help in tracking the true identities of the suspects.

“It should be noted that attempts to confirm the true identities of these individuals are still under way,” the FBI said in a statement.

Many of the suspected terrorists, it is becoming increasingly clear, swapped identities as part of their preparations for the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, according to a Sun-Sentinel review of documents, interviews and published reports.

At least six of the suspected terrorists had two sets of driver’s licenses issued by Florida — which could have allowed two or more people to use the same identity. Once they had licenses, the terror suspects rented cars and traveled on domestic airline flights without the scrutiny faced by travelers who show a foreign license or a passport.

They used our libraries, worked out in our health clubs, ate next to us at restaurants and restaurants, and flew little planes over our houses. They chose landlords who didn’t require background checks. They changed apartments before anyone could take much notice of their activities.

In the case of several of the South Florida-based suspects, they got duplicate licenses issued after they simply filled out change of address forms. A second license was sent, as is routine, with the request to the license holder to destroy the previous ID.

Some of the suspects apparently used the stolen identities of at least five Saudis who worked in the airline industry as pilots, mechanics and flight attendants — people who would have had increased access in airports, a Saudi government official told the Sun-Sentinel.

The stolen and phony IDs have created problems for investigators. “Obviously that’s been a concern,” said Judy Orihuela, spokeswoman for the FBI in Miami.

“We are fairly certain of a number of them,” FBI Director Robert Mueller said at a news conference Thursday, though he wouldn’t specify which.

Some have been linked to the terrorist network operated by Osama bin Laden, Mueller said.

Mueller said the FBI believes the names and photographs released Thursday match those on the manifests of the four hijacked planes. But questions remain over whether those are the true names of the hijackers.

“What we are currently doing is determining whether, when these individuals came to the United States, these were their real names or they changed their names for use with false identification in the United States,” said Mueller.

The FBI has only identified nine of the suspected hijackers who they would even assign a possible country of origin. Eight were Saudis, the other an Egyptian.

“It is our hope that the release of these photos will prompt others who may have seen the hijackers to contact the FBI with any information they may have that would be helpful to the investigation,” said Attorney General John Ashcroft.

The release of the photos, which come from passports, driver’s licenses and other documents identified with the suspected hijackers, marked a change for authorities. Until now they’ve kept the pictures under wraps so potential witnesses and others could get a fresh look at the men.

It is easy to convert a forged document into a legitimate state ID, said Lt. David Myers, who runs the fraudulent ID section of the Florida Division of Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco. He is a national expert on fake IDs and the use of counterfeit documents to obtain IDs.

“There’s 242 valid state-issued ID documents in the United States right now,” he said.

Once an ID is in someone’s hand, there’s little chance it will be detected as a fake, or a valid one obtained under false pretenses, Myers said.

“Do you think that airline lady knows when I hand her my Idaho license that it’s no good anymore? There’s no record. There’s no nothing,” he said. “We pay 53 cents for that document, yet we’re putting all of our trust into that document.

“The United States has the lowest standard of ID documents of probably any country in the world.” Most nations, he went on, have national ID cards, with information collected in a central database.

For most of their time in the U.S., the 19 lived in places where they wouldn’t draw much attention — areas that attracted transients and were outside the view of the intelligence

operatives, said Whalid Phares, a Florida Atlantic University professor.

Phares, a terrorism expert and author of numerous books and papers on Islamic fundamentalism, said it was likely that most of the suspects set up in southern states because federal agents were more likely to be paying attention to Mexicans and Cubans.

“It’s not going to provide 100-percent protection,” he said, but it would allow some comfort.

A study of their movements, as traced so far, shows they lived together in small groups, or cells. Their actions were probably controlled by someone who was not among them, — someone who has yet to be identified, said Larry Johnson, former deputy-director of counter-terrorism for the U.S. State Department and now a security consultant in Maryland.

“These guys were just committed zealots and willing to give it up for the cause without really being key members of the network,” Johnson said. “They were told what to prepare for, what to train for. They were not the ones calling the shots.”

They were, however, extremely well organized, Johnson and Phares said.

“We don’t have anything in history to compare with this,” Johnson said. “The only thing that comes close to it is a former Soviet intel [intelligence] operation.”

To investigators on several continents, who have pursued hundreds of thousands of leads, it seems clear the plot was laid out before the terror suspects ever entered the U.S. and began forming their cells to put into motion the nightmare of Sept. 11.

Their trail zig-zagged from their homelands in the Middle East to Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Britain, Malaysia and, ultimately, the United States.

They moved constantly — staying at cheap hotels and transient apartments, rarely for more than two months at a time — in California, Arizona, Oklahoma, Maine, Nevada, Maryland, Massachusetts and New Jersey, while keeping the base of their operations in South Florida.

Of the 19 suspected terrorists, 15 used South Florida addresses in the months leading up to the attacks, according to witnesses, published reports and such documents as rental agreements and driver’s licenses. A man with the same name as a 16th hijacker stayed in Miramar in 1996.

An examination of their movements — pieced together from investigators, media reports from around the world, witnesses and public records — reveals how a handful of conspirators organized themselves into small groups, avoided detection by blending into the background of ordinary life, and then executed their synchronized shock attack on America.

### **Manila, the Philippines**

A plot resembling the Sept. 11 attacks emerged in January 1995, when Philippine authorities investigated a Manila apartment fire. The flat turned out to be a bomb-making nest, rented by Abdul Hakim Murad and Ramzi Yousef — terrorists associated with bin Laden.

From interrogations and coded files from the suspects’ computer, Philippine intelligence officials learned of a plan that then seemed outlandish:

Conspirators wanted to kill the Pope on a visit to Manila, bomb 11 U.S. passenger jets over the Pacific Ocean (killing an estimated 4,000 passengers heading to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Honolulu and New York City), and crash a plane into CIA headquarters in Langley, Va.

Murad, a pilot, brought a bomb aboard a Philippine Airlines jet in 1994 in a dry run. A Japanese businessman was killed.

Details of their scheme came out in a 1996 trial in federal court in New York, resulting in the conviction of Muran, Yousef and a third man, Wali Khan Amin Shah. All three men were sentenced to life in prison. Yousef later was convicted of being the mastermind behind the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.

### **Hamburg, Germany**

In a city of 1.7 million people with a quarter-million foreigners, Egyptian-born Mohammed Atta, his nephew Marwan al-Shehhi from the United Arab Emirates, and Lebanon native Ziad Jarrah could have been any three foreign students in 1999 and 2000.

In Germany — a melting pot of nationalities that Johnson said makes it a haven for terrorists — they attracted little attention.

Atta had dropped out of sight in the middle of his eight years at the Technical University of Hamburg-Harburg, where he began studying urban planning in 1992.

By all accounts, the Atta who returned in 1999 had a newly found devotion to Islam. He sported a long beard and founded an Islamic student group.

And he had his younger nephew in tow.

At the same time, Jarrah had an apartment in Hamburg and was studying for a pilot's license.

Atta, al-Shehhi and Jarrah reported their passports stolen in 1999 during a trip to Bavaria in southern Germany, the German newspaper Bild reported.

“They presumably wanted to get rid of visa entries from Iraq and Afghanistan to make it easier to travel to the United States,” the newspaper quoted an Interior Ministry spokesman.

Atta completed his studies at the end of spring semester of 2000, and was soon on the move.

He got his visa from the U.S. consulate in Berlin on May 18, 2000. He landed in Newark, N.J., on June 3.

### **Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**

Three men were captured on surveillance video in January 2000.

One was arrested in connection with the bomb attack on the U.S.S. Cole in Aden, Yemen, on Oct. 12, 2000. U.S. officials believe the attack, which killed 17 sailors and wounded more than twice that many, to be the work of bin Laden.

The CIA said other two men were Khalid al-Midhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi — both of whose

names appear on the FBI list of suspected terrorists on American Airlines Flight 77, the plane that crashed into the Pentagon.

### **The American West and Southwest**

Al-Midhar and al-Hazmi arrived in the U.S. in early 2000, setting up in San Diego.

In February, the two paid \$3,000 cash for a 1988 Toyota Corolla. They were spotted at a local flying club in May with someone named “Hani,” possibly Hani Hanjour, another of the suspected terrorists.

A man with Hanjour’s name had received some flight training in Scottsdale, Ariz., in 1996 and 1997 but didn’t receive a pilot’s license. He asked for advanced training in 1999, saying he got his license elsewhere, but the school rejected him.

In San Diego, al-Midhar and al-Hazmi met Abdussattar Shaikh, a local Muslim leader and retired professor. He rented them a room in his house from September through December, although al-Midhar was gone much of that time.

Shaikh told the San Diego Union-Tribune he thought he was offering shelter to two young men who were in the country to learn English.

Al-Midhar, he said, could barely speak English and appeared standoffish. Al-Hazmi had a better command of the language, Shaikh said, and became quite friendly.

### **Oklahoma to Florida**

Flight school operators in Norman, Okla., said they briefly met Atta and al-Shehhi while the pair were scouting their operation. After a short stay in the U.S. heartland, the two decided on a flight school in multi-ethnic Florida.

They picked Huffman Aviation in Venice.

Living in nearby Nokomis, uncle and nephew spent July through November, getting a feel for airplanes.

Also in Venice was Jarrah, registering a car in November. In December Atta and al-Shehhi relocate to Florida’s East Coast and trained in Opa-Locka. At the SimCenter, they paid \$1,500 to use a Boeing 727, and experienced being at the controls of a commercial jet.

### **Europe**

On Jan. 4, Atta took the first of many trips to Europe, flying from Miami to Madrid, returning about a week later.

Then, neighbors and investigators said, Atta and al-Shehhi returned to Hamburg, moving back to Atta’s old apartment.

As many as 11 of the terror suspects were in London at various times this year, The Times of London reported.

## **South Florida**

Many of the suspected hijackers started to appear here by April.

Using a Mail Boxes Etc. address in Hollywood, al-Shehhi got his Florida driver's license on April 12. He got a duplicate license two months later.

He and his uncle, Atta, were living in an apartment in Coral Springs. On April 26, Atta got a traffic ticket in Tamarac and gave the Coral Springs address. He was cited for driving without a license.

On April 23, Jarrah rented a small apartment at 1816 Harding St. in Hollywood. He stayed for two months.

A man calling himself Waleed al-Shehri rented a room on April 28 at the Bimini Motel on Ocean Drive in Hollywood. He got his Florida driver's license May 4 — and a duplicate the next day.

Al-Shehhi arrived at Miami International Airport on May 2 on a flight from Amsterdam, according to the Boston Globe. It is not clear where he'd traveled in Europe or what he was doing.

Atta got a Florida driver's license on May 2, using the Coral Springs address. Jarrah got a license that same day, saying he lived in Lauderdale-by-the-Sea. He got a duplicate on July 10 — the same day that a man calling himself Ahmed al-Haznawi got his Florida license, using the same Lauderdale-by-the-Sea address.

(Al-Haznawi got a duplicate of his license on Sept. 7.)

On May 13, al-Shehhi and Atta moved into an apartment on Jackson Street in Hollywood. They stayed a month.

## **Phoenix**

On June 23, a man using the name Hani Hanjour and three other unidentified men began a series of sessions in a flight simulator at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport.

Sawyer Aviation, a Phoenix flight school, told the Arizona Republic the men spent hours in the simulator until July 29.

## **South Florida**

On June 21, Waleed al-Shehri and two other men, Wail al-Shehri and Satam al-Suqami, rented a room at the Homing Inn on Federal Highway in Boynton Beach, staying until July 26.

On July 3, both Wail al-Shehri and al-Suqami got driver's licenses using the motel's address.

In Delray Beach, meantime, al-Shehhi rented an apartment for Atta and himself in the gated Hamlet Country Club off Atlantic Avenue. They stayed there from June 13 to Aug. 12.

Using an address on Dotterel Road in Delray Beach, a man calling himself Ahmed al-Nami got

a driver's license on June 29.

Nawaf al-Hazmi, who'd been captured on the CIA surveillance tape with the Cole suspect and al-Midhar before going to San Diego, got a Florida driver's license using a fictitious address in Delray Beach.

Hamza al-Ghamdi, a man living at the Delray Beach Racquet Club, got his Florida license on June 27 and then received two duplicates, most recently in August.

### **Las Vegas**

Atta took two quick trips in the summer to the glitzy gambling city, staying in a budget motel.

At least four other hijacking suspects in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks stayed in Las Vegas, the Associated Press reported. In addition to Atta, authorities have evidence that al-Shehhi, Hanjour, Nawaf al-Hazmi and Jarrah visited Las Vegas between May and August, the wire service said, quoting an anonymous source.

That would place at least one man from each of the hijacked planes in that city.

### **Europe**

On July 9, Atta flew from Miami to Madrid. He spent 11 days in Europe before returning to the U.S. Spanish intelligence officials said his rental car had more than 1,200 miles on it, the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* reported.

Intelligence officials have said Atta was meeting with suspected members of bin Laden's organization at a hotel in Salou, Spain July 17 and 18 and at other locations around Spain. He returned to the U.S. on July 19.

At some point in the summer, Atta and al-Shehhi checked into a hotel in Zurich. They bought knives and box-cutters used in the hijackings, according to the Swiss newspaper *SonntagsBlick*.

Former counter-terrorism official Johnson theorized why they were there:

"If you're going to Switzerland you'll be talking about financial activities," he said.

### **The Eastern Seaboard**

In August, the CIA alerted the FBI to be on the lookout for al-Midhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi because of the suspected connections to the Cole bombing. That month, Nawaf al-Hazmi and Hanjour reportedly rented at least three cars from Borough Jeep Eagle Chrysler Plymouth in Wayne, N.J. In suburban Washington, Hanjour, Salem al-Hazmi, Majed Moqed, Ahmed Saleh al-Ghamdi and Abdulaziz al-Omari applied for licenses at the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles office in Arlington.

In Bowie, Md., Hanjour flew three training flights in early August with instructors from Freeway Airport. But the instructors said he flew too poorly to rent a plane — even though a Saudi man of that name had a FAA commercial pilot's license.

Later in August, Jarrah checked into the Pin-Del Motel in Laurel, Md. Less than a mile away, at

least two other suspects were in a room at the Valencia Motel, where they stayed Aug. 23 to Sept. 11.

Five days later, Nawaf al-Hazmi checked into the Pin-Del Motel.

Al-Midhar, Majed Moqed, Nawaf al-Hazmi, Salem al-Hazmi and Hanjour all visited a Gold's Gym in Greenbelt, Md.

### **South Florida**

Atta and other suspected hijackers looked into crop dusters in Belle Glade in August, according to people at the airport. Some say they saw him there as early as February.

Atta rented cars from Warrick's Rent-A-Car in Pompano on Aug. 6 and Aug. 15. On Aug. 29, he and al-Shehhi exchanged a car that had some problems, returning the newer one Sept. 9.

In Lantana, Atta practiced flying in a rental plane at Palm Beach County Air Park.

In Deerfield Beach, al-Shehhi checked into the Panther Motel on Ocean Boulevard on Aug. 26 with another man. They were sometimes joined by a third. They stayed until Sept. 9.

On Aug. 26, Waleed M. al-Shehri and Wail al-Shehri bought tickets for American Flight 11 for Sept. 11. They gave a Mail Boxes Etc. address in Hollywood.

The next day, Mohand al-Shehri and a man the FBI now says is Fayez Rashid Ahmed Hassan al-Qadi Banihammad bought tickets for United Flight 175 on Sept. 11. They used a Delray Beach Mail Boxes Etc. address.

One day later, Hamza al-Ghamdi and Ahmed al-Ghamdi, using another Mail Boxes Etc. address in Delray Beach bought their tickets for that same flight. The next day, Atta and al-Omari got tickets at the same time for Flight 11 on the American Airlines Web site, using the same frequent flyer number. Al-Omari gave a Mail Boxes Etc. address in Hollywood.

That same day, al-Shehhi bought a ticket for Flight 175 and al-Suqami bought one for Flight 11. Al-Midhar, Moqed, Nawaf al-Hazmi, Salem al-Hazmi and Hanjour bought tickets for the Pentagon-bound plane through the online travel agency Travelocity and giving a Mail Boxes Etc. address in New Jersey, according to CNN.

The hijackers paid as much as \$4,500 for a first-class one-way ticket, according to an FBI memo obtained by the German magazine Der Spiegel.

### **Boston**

The first of the suspected hijackers arrived Sept. 6. The Boston Globe reports a car rented by one of them was seen at the Logan International Airport garage. The car was seen again at Logan on Sept. 9 and 10th, the newspaper reported.

On the 10th, Atta and al-Omari drove a rental car to Portland, Maine, where they awaited a flight back to Boston early the next morning. Security experts have suggested they wanted to avoid being seen arriving with the other suspected terrorists at the airport. The other eight Boston suspected hijackers spread out to hotels around the Boston area.



## **South Florida**

On Sept. 7, Atta, al-Shehhi — and by some reports, a third man — drank and played video games at Shuckums, a Hollywood bar and grill.

According to a waitress and the night manager, they quarreled over the \$48 tab.

## **Maine, Boston, Newark, Washington**

A video camera in the Portland, Maine, airport caught two men racing to get on a 5:45 a.m. flight to Boston on Sept. 11. Authorities have identified them as Atta and al-Omari.

They arrived, as the other suspects did, just before the end of boarding for their connection in Boston. A bag that Atta had checked did not make the connection to Flight 11.

In it were airline uniforms, a video on commercial aircraft and a five-page handwritten document in Arabic that included Islamic prayers, instructions for a last night of life and reminders to bring “knives, your will, IDs, your passport.” And the words: “Make sure that nobody is following you.”

Also on board were al-Suqami, Waleed al-Shehri and Wail al-Shehri.

At Washington’s Dulles Airport, American’s Flight 77 took off at 8:10 a.m. The passengers included al-Midhar, Moqed, Nawaf al-Hazmi, Salem al-Hazmi and Hanjour.

In Boston, United’s Flight 175 took off at 8:14 a.m. In their seats were al-Shehhi, Banihammad, Ahmed al-Ghamdi, Hamza al-Ghamdi and Mohand al-Shehri.

At Newark Airport, United’s Flight 93 departed at 8:44 a.m., with Saeed al-Ghamdi, al-Haznawi, al-Nami and Jarrah on board.

At 8:45 a.m., Flight 11 crashed into the World Trade Center’s north tower.

Twenty minutes later, Flight 175 exploded on impact with the WTC south tower.

At 9:39 a.m., Flight 77 hit the Pentagon.

At 10:10 a.m., Flight 93 crashed in Stony Creek Township, Pa.

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See also: [\*\*At Least 7 of the 9/11 Hijackers are Still Alive\*\*](#)

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***What Really Happened***