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## FBI seizes records of students at flight schools

By BARRY KLEIN, WES ALLISON, KATHRYN WEXLER and JEFF TESTERMAN

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Federal agents worked furiously Wednesday to determine if the hijackers responsible for the worst attack in U.S. history learned how to fly in Florida.

At an aviation school in Venice, FBI agents seized files on two former students, one from Egypt and the other from the United Arab Emirates. The FBI says both men are suspects in the assault that leveled the World Trade Center and sent shock waves around the world.

Mohamed Atta, 33, may have guided American Airlines Flight 11 into the first of the two towers that later collapsed, killing what officials assume will be thousands of office workers and hundreds of their would-be rescuers, the Boston Globe reported. He has been linked to at least six other suspected hijackers who boarded the two doomed flights at Boston's Logan Airport.

Atta got on the jet off a connecting flight from Portland, Maine. Two bags with Atta's name tags were on the Portland flight, but did not get transferred in time to be loaded on the Los Angeles-bound flight that left Logan Airport at 7:59 a.m., about 45 minutes before it smashed into the World Trade Center tower in New York.



Mohamed Atta, 33, is one of four men under investigation.

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The passenger list for United Airlines Flight 175 shows that a man named Marwan Alshehhi got on that plane that left Boston and slammed into one of the Manhattan skyscrapers, the Globe reported.

Last year, both men paid \$10,000 each for two months of flight instruction at Huffman Aviation in Sarasota County, Rudi Dekkers, the school's owner, said Wednesday. He said FBI agents who came to his school took their student files.

A former employee at the flight school, Charlie Voss, said FBI agents told him the two were involved in Tuesday's attack on the World Trade Center. The men had stayed briefly with Voss while attending flight school in July 2000.

Both men always seemed to have plenty of cash, said Azzan Ali, who befriended them last year when all were students at the aviation school.

They had cell phones, American clothes and a red Pontiac they tooted around in during the two months they spent in Venice. They liked to discuss politics, Ali said, often railing angrily about Israel.

After finishing flight instruction last year, they apparently moved to South Florida. Atta listed an apartment in Coral Springs -- northwest of Fort Lauderdale -- as his address when he obtained a Florida driver's license in May.

A bar manager in Hollywood told FBI agents he saw the two men drinking heavily last week.

Tony Amos, the night manager at Shuckums Bar in Hollywood, told the Palm Beach Post that Atta argued with him over his tab. When Amos asked Atta whether he could pay, Atta got offended and said, "I'm a pilot for American Airlines and I can pay my bill," bartender Patricia Idrissi said.

"They were wasted," said Idrissi, who said she directed the two men to a Chinese restaurant a few doors down.

They later returned and each ordered about five drinks, she said. The bill came to \$48 and the men began arguing in broken English. After the confrontation with Amos, she said, Atta paid her with a \$100 bill from a thick wad of currency in large

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denominations.

They left her a \$3 tip.

But the more than 400 federal agents chasing leads Wednesday in Florida had other targets besides the Venice flight school.

Authorities pored over student records at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, which has trained hundreds of pilots from Arab countries. They also interviewed people in Coral Springs, Dania and Hollywood, and searched homes in two Vero Beach neighborhoods, detaining at least one resident.

"They had more satellite dishes on a home than any I've ever seen," said Rick Poley, who was questioned by the FBI about two student pilots -- both Middle-Eastern -- who lived across the street in south Vero Beach. "They had at least three dishes on one side of the house."

In a neighborhood across town, an estimated 50 FBI agents invaded a residential neighborhood at 5 a.m. and evacuated many of the residents.

They were worried about a bomb in two of the homes. One had been rented for months by Adnar Z. Bukhari, said Bukhari's landlord, Paul Stimeling. He said the other was rented by a man named Alomeri.

The landlord said the men, both described as pilots for Saudi Arabia Airlines who attended the FlightSafety International flight school in Vero Beach, packed their families off to new homes at the beginning of the month. The two men then moved in together.

Neighbors said Alomeri hasn't been seen for a week.

On Wednesday, the FBI seized a number of articles from Bukhari's home and took him into custody.

According to a government receipt left in the home, agents seized unidentified black bags, vacuum cleaner bags, compact discs, manila folders, notes, books of "an unknown language" and a man's white robe.

Left behind were stacks of family photos, dishes, pots and pans, and stacks of clothing. Also left in the home was a document showing Bukhari, 40, received a \$2,408-a-month stipend from Saudi Arabia Airlines

while attending FlightSafety.

Wayne Meliti, who lives across the street, said the two families had a total of nine children. He said they "blended in very well" in a neighborhood of small children, neat lawns and decorated mail boxes.

"Their kids went to school and were very nice," he said. "They always waved and said, 'Hi.'"

In early September, the children said farewell to neighborhood playmate Chelsea Harp, 12. They gave her letters and drawings and urged her to write to them at their new address.

It was in Saudi Arabia. Among the items seized by the FBI was that Saudi Arabian address.

At a second Vero Beach neighborhood, residents said FBI agents asked about Amer Kamfar, 41, who is listed as a pilot and a flight engineer to fly turbojets. A Miami television station, WPLJ, reported Wednesday night that the FBI was looking for Kamfar.

Also coming under scrutiny Wednesday was Embry-Riddle, an independent school that claims to be the oldest, largest and most prestigious school specializing in aviation and aerospace.

Embry-Riddle has a fleet of 150 instructional aircraft and an advanced flight-simulation center. It also has a sizable number of international students, many of them from Arab countries.

Six percent of last year's enrollment, or almost 400 students, moved to Daytona Beach from Saudi Arabia.

That's what attracted investigators to the campus. They wanted to look at student records to see if they could make any connections to the hijackers or other known terrorists.

They also wanted to check a tip about an illegally parked car that sported a large sticker of a man who resembled Osama bin Laden, the fugitive terrorist many think was responsible for Tuesday's attack. The agents seized the car, then released it.

Authorities were hoping for better luck with the student files, and the university was happy to oblige.

"We are quickly responding to each and every

request," said Embry-Riddle spokeswoman Lisa Ledewitz.

She declined to discuss those requests, referring questions to the government. FBI officials did not return calls seeking comment.

Some of the foreign students at Embry-Riddle have been screened by the U.S. government. Ledewitz said the names and applications of every international student who applies for a spot in the school's aeronautical sciences program is sent to the State Department for approval.

She said she doesn't know what government officials are looking for, or why the process is limited only to students in that one program, which is among the school's most popular.

Ledewitz said Embry-Riddle has received several complaints about the number of foreign students on its campus since Tuesday's attacks.

But because the university trains so many commercial pilots, it is likely that at least one of the innocent pilots killed Tuesday was an alumnus, she said.

"Our people are shaken," Ledewitz said.

- Times staff writer David Adams and researchers John Martin, Cathy Wos and Caryn Baird contributed to this report, which also includes material from the Palm Beach Post.



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