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AFTER THE ATTACKS: THE UNIVERSITY

AFTER THE ATTACKS: THE UNIVERSITY; Training Site Is Questioned About Links To Hijackers

By JIM YARDLEY
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DAYTONA BEACH, Fla., Sept. 11— For those not in the aviation industry, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University is not a household name. But this university that trains one of every four commercial pilots in the United States today found itself caught up in the manhunt for people involved in the attacks on New York and Washington.

In a tense day in which local police officers investigated a bomb threat on the campus, Embry-Riddle officials faced questions about whether the university had unwittingly trained at least one hijacker. University officials issued a statement saying they were cooperating with the Federal Bureau of Investigation but refused to say whether federal agents had searched for evidence on the campus. At least two students said an F.B.I. vehicle was seen on the campus within hours of the attacks on Tuesday. The F.B.I. would not confirm that it had been in contact with Embry-Riddle.

"At this point, we hope and pray that the university has not been a victim of this madness," said Lisa L. Ledewitz, the university's spokeswoman, noting that university officials were remaining silent so they would not impede the federal investigation.

The apparent focus of the investigation here is Mohammed Atta, who also has been a subject of federal search warrants in South Florida and who is reported to have had training at another flight school in Florida, Huffman Aviation in Venice. Mike Sheridan, police commander in Port Orange, a town neighboring Daytona Beach near Embry-Riddle, said his officers helped F.B.I. agents search an apartment today where real estate records show a person named Mohammed Atta lived within the past few years.

Neighbors recalled that two "Middle Eastern men" had lived in the apartment a few years

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ago but could not remember their names. The men moved to a nearby address where one neighbor, Frank Tetrone, said he did not know their names but that they had told him they were students at Embry-Riddle. Mr. Tetrone said one man drove a Mercedes and was often critical of the United States.

"He would tell me he just didn't like it," Mr. Tetrone said, estimating that the men had moved a few years ago. "He said it was too lax. He said, 'I can go anywhere I want to, and they can't stop me.' "

Law enforcement agencies were also looking at other potential suspects in the area. The Daytona police said one man was questioned and had his car impounded. The car had a photograph of a Middle Eastern leader, thought incorrectly to be Osama bin Laden. The police said the man was released and is not a suspect at this time.

At Embry-Riddle, questions about possible connections to the hijackers came as many people were grieving the loss of life in the attacks. Ms. Ledewitz said one or more of the United Airlines and American Airlines pilots who died in the crashes "were likely" trained at the university, but she offered no details. "Our grief is intense," she said.

Ms. Ledewitz said the Daytona Beach campus, near the airport, has about 5,000 students, 15 percent from foreign countries. Ms. Ledewitz said foreign students underwent a background check before they were admitted.

"We do not enroll any international students into our aeronautical science degree program who have not been approved by the U.S. State Department," she said, acknowledging that she did not know what background check was administered.

Local police confirmed that they had responded to a bomb threat at the university today; it was a false alarm. Local news media have reported that university officials told the 250 Middle Eastern students on campus to keep a low profile because of growing anger in the community. One man on local television had a handmade sign accusing the school of training terrorists.

Much of the flight training at the university is conducted on simulators. Students with some experience can usually be trained to fly a commercial jetliner within a year, said David Esser, chairman of the aeronautical science department. Ms. Ledewitz noted that Embry-Riddle had trained war heroes and astronauts as the largest aeronautical science degree program in the country.



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