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Remains of 2 Sept. 11 hijackers identified

From Jonathan Wald
CNN New York Bureau
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NEW YORK (CNN) -- New York medical examiners using DNA samples have identified the remains of two of the 10 suicide hijackers who crashed jetliners into the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, officials said Thursday.

The FBI provided the medical examiners' office with DNA profiles of the 10 hijackers, said Ellen Barakove, a spokeswoman for the New York Medical Examiner's office. Examiners "a few days ago" matched two of the profiles to remains collected after the twin towers' collapse, she told CNN.

Examiners could not say which of the hijackers' remains had been discovered because the FBI did not identify which of the DNA samples belonged to which hijacker, she said.

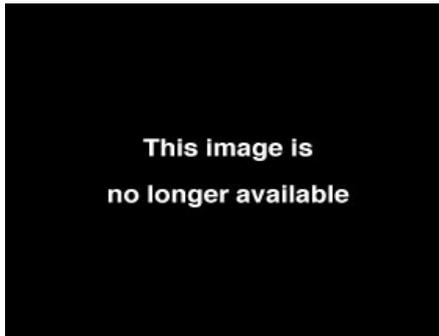
The samples came from items recovered from locations such as the scene of the crashes, a hotel or other places where the hijackers stayed, said a law enforcement official.

The matches could be beneficial to the investigation into the attacks by revealing more about what the hijackers were like and where they had been, said an FBI spokesman in New York.

Dr. Lawrence Kobilinsky, professor of forensics at New York's John Jay College of Criminal Justice, believes the discovery is "extremely significant."

"This is the first confirmation that these individuals were on those planes. Now we have their genetics, we can use this information to follow them. Perhaps we can hook them to other individuals," Kobilinsky said.

Examiners requested the profiles from the FBI last summer and received them "a few weeks ago," said Barakove.



Of the 19,935 separate human remains recovered from Ground Zero, 6,289 have been identified.

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New York officials are attempting to identify the hijackers' remains because "the families of victims in the attacks do not want the hijackers' remains mixed together with those of the victims in any future memorial that may be created," she said.

"We meet with family groups every so often," said Barakove, "and they raised the possibility of attaining the hijackers' profiles from the FBI."

Remains are "indefinitely" being stored near the Medical Examiners' Office in a location that examiners call Memorial Park. "They will probably go into a permanent memorial at the World Trade Center site, but this matter is still under consideration," Barakove said.

Medical examiners have so far identified remains from 1,465 of the 2,792 people reported killed in the attacks. Those figures do not include the hijackers.

Of the 19,935 separate human remains recovered from Ground Zero, 6,289 have been identified. City officials said that in several instances more than 200 separate pieces belonged to one person.

"Nobody in history has had to deal with the number of remains that came from the disaster but we will go on trying to identify remains until we can go no further," Barakove said.

Fifty percent of the remains have yielded complete DNA profiles and 25 percent have yielded partial profiles, officials said.

Medical examiners in New York are currently testing a new means of identification which would require shorter strands of DNA. The results of the tests are expected "within weeks," officials said.

"All samples are being dried and preserved so that if technology improves we can go back and try to identify those that we can't right now," Barakove said.

Genetic profiles of five people from the Pentagon crash scene and four from the scene in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, that did not match any of the passengers' profiles have been handed over to the FBI, said a spokesman for the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology. The FBI has not given the institute any DNA to match up in those crashes, said the spokesman.

At the Pentagon, there were 184 victims of the September 11 attacks -- 125 people in the building, 53 passengers and six crew members on board the third hijacked plane, not including the five hijackers.

In Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where the fourth hijacked plane crashed, there were 40 victims -- 33 passengers and seven crew members, not including the four hijackers.

Producer Kevin Bohn and Correspondent Jamie Colby contributed to this report

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