

Hijack Suspects' Profile: Polite And Purposeful

Neighbors Remember Quiet Lives, Determination in Flight School

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Two of the suspected hijackers in Tuesday's suicide attacks on New York and Washington had lived in Hamburg, where they organized a terrorist cell before moving to Florida for flight training and final practice in the cockpit.

Another suspect, who sometimes roomed with them, is believed to be the son of a Saudi diplomat with a former home in Vienna, Va., according to people who knew them in the Washington area and Florida.

Some of the suspects and their associates in Florida sent their families back to the Middle East shortly before this week's attacks. Then they hurriedly purchased expensive furniture to ship home -- or, alternatively, threw out all their belongings.

Certain shadowy ties, certain patterns of geography and behavior, are beginning to emerge now that federal investigators have identified at least 18 men who are suspected to have died as hijackers on four airplanes Tuesday. The investigators have not publicly named any of them. Nor have they said how many suspected accomplices have been arrested and how many remain at large.

But law enforcement authorities on two continents, as well as landlords, neighbors and business people who knew the suspects, depict a group of polite and purposeful men.

Several who are remembered in Germany as Islamic fundamentalists who wore traditional Arab garb switched in the United States to typical western attire and were noticed drinking alcohol in bars. Neighbors found them polite, if often withdrawn.

On three days in mid-August, Mohammed Atta rented a four-seat, single-engine plane from a private company at the airport in Palm Beach, Fla. Investigators believe that he was the hijacker who took over the controls of American Airlines Flight 11 -- the first to crash -- and smashed it into the World Trade Center's north tower. He told the owner of the company, Palm Beach Flight Training, that his goal was to log 100 hours in the air as soon as he could.

Atta was one of several suspects who had a pilot's license, or told people they were affiliated with airlines. Sources at the Immigration and Naturalization Service said yesterday that at least two of the hijackers may have entered the country on M-1 visas to attend flight schools.

At least one who is believed to have died on the American flight from Boston, Abdulrahman Omari, and one who remains alive, Amer Mohammed Kamfar, had been roommates for several months in Vero

Beach, Fla. They listed as their previous employer Saudi Flight Ops, a firm that performs maintenance for Saudi Arabian Airlines at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport.

Kamfar's involvement in the attack became murkier last night, as a Saudi newspaper reported that Saudi Arabian Airlines officials had said an employee with that name was at home in Mecca and suggested that someone else may have taken his identity or his passport.

But as the role of some suspects became more ambiguous, the involvement of others came into clearer view.

In Hamburg, police conducted a raid on the second-floor apartment on a residential street that had been the home of Atta, 33, and Marwan Shehhi, 23, who reportedly died on the United Airlines flight from Boston that plowed into the trade center's south tower. Police there also arrested a Hamburg airport worker, originally from Morocco, and searched for associates, some of whom may already have left Germany, according to Hamburg's Interior Minister, Olaf Scholz.

The chief federal prosecutor there, Kay Nehm, said that Atta and Shehhi had organized a terrorist cell in the northern city, which has been the site of arrests over the years of Islamic extremists believed to be associated with Osama bin Laden, the prime suspect behind this week's attacks.

Atta and Shehhi had been enrolled at times in the local Technical University. Neighbors said they regularly hosted groups of up to 20 Arabic men late into the night.

"These people were of Arabic background and lived in Hamburg and were Islamic fundamentalists," Nehm said. "And they formed a terrorist organization with the aim of launching spectacular attacks on the institutions of the United States."

According to German news accounts, the residents of the apartment at times also included Waleed Shehri, 25, who was trained to fly large aircraft such as the American Airlines flight from Boston on which he died. Property records show that Shehri most recently lived at the same address in Daytona Beach as Ahmed Shehri, a former second secretary of the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington. Both men formerly lived in Vienna, Va. simultaneously.

Yesterday, Hamid "Avis" Keshavarznia, who had been the suspected hijacker's landlord in Vienna, recalled that elder Shehri worked for the Saudi Embassy.

A Saudi Arabian official who asked not to be identified said that the embassy did not know if Waleed Shehri was the son of the former embassy official. Echoing the caution of the Saudi airline, he said Saudi officials are concerned that the terrorists may have used forged documents and stolen the identities of innocent people.

Two other pilots from Saudi Arabia, Adnan Bukhari and Ameer Bukhari, also have been mentioned

widely in media reports in connection with the terrorist strikes.

Adnan Bukhari, 40, was detained by the FBI on Wednesday at his home in Vero Beach while agents searched the residence. He had been receiving flight engineering training at the Flight Safety International school there for months. CNN's Web site quoted his lawyer as saying he was cooperating with the FBI and denied any involvement in the terrorist attacks.

"He left the house voluntarily and at the time he was being cooperative with federal authorities," said Capt. Mary Hogan of the Indian River County Sheriff's Department, which assisted the FBI in the search. "He was taken to FBI offices in Miami."

Ameer Bukhari, a student pilot, was killed on Sept. 11, 2000, precisely one year to the day before Tuesday's suicide attacks, in a mid-air crash while trying to land a small plane at an airport in St. Lucie County, Fla.

There are some connections between Adnan Bukhari and the suspected terrorists. Kamfar once listed him as a personal reference on an apartment rental application. And his neighbor in Vero Beach was Omari. Omari, also a student pilot, had moved his family into the home several months ago because his wife and Adnan Bukhari's wife, who don't speak English, are good friends, according to Omari's landlord, Llonald Mixell.

After the FBI searched the Omari home, agents left a list of materials seized, including hair samples and air conditioning filters, Mixell said, adding that he dissuaded them from seizing the light bulbs, apparently for fingerprints.

Adnan Bukhari's wife returned to Saudi Arabia Aug. 30, and the family's lease on the house ended the next day, landlord Paul Stimeling told the Associated Press. But Bukhari asked for a two-week extension, then for another two or three days.

Two employees at Rooms To Go, a furniture store in Vero Beach, said Bukhari made a hasty purchase as news of the bombing was breaking on a television in the showroom. Bukhari bought a \$1,795 living room set within five minutes and said the furniture needed to be exported to Saudi Arabia immediately.

Kamfar and his family also disappeared quickly from their Vero Beach home. According to a neighbor, "they took all their stuff and put it out by the trash: clothes, furniture, pots and pans."

Meanwhile, on Aug. 16, Atta arrived at Palm Beach Flight Training to rent a plane, and quickly demonstrated his competence to a company pilot on a test flight. He returned the following afternoon, then again two days later. Each time, he had a different passenger.

According to the company's office manager, Andrew Laws, the only thing that struck workers as unusual was that each of Atta's outings lasted exactly 90 minutes. Each time, he paid the \$133 fee in cash.

Last Friday night, Atta, Shehhi and an unidentified man spent 3 1/2 hours at a sports bar, Shuckums, in Hollywood, Fla. While Atta played video games, the other two had about five drinks each and appeared resistant to paying the \$48 tab. The manager, Tony Amos, recalled yesterday that he inquired whether they could not afford the bill. Shehhi "looked at me with an arrogant look," Amos said. "He pulled out a wad of cash and put it on the bar table and said, 'There is no money issue. I am an airline pilot.' "

Such brashness, however, seems to have been uncharacteristic. The owner of a car rental company in Pompano Beach, Fla., from which Atta rented cars three times during the last month, said that he and Shehhi, who always accompanied him, were uncommonly polite. "He had very little accent and acted like he was a businessman," said Brad Warrick of Warrick's Rent-A-Car. "He always had a briefcase and books in the trunk."

After renting a Chevy Corsica for a week, Atta switched to a Ford Escort because it cost \$10 less, Warrick recalled. Both vehicles have now been impounded by the FBI. At one point, Warrick said, Atta called from Venice, Fla., to say that the oil light had flickered on.

When he returned the car Sept. 9 -- two days before the attacks -- Atta reminded him about the oil light. "The only thing out of the ordinary," Warrick said, "was that he was nice enough to let me know that the car needed an oil change. That was odd since he was planning to die in a matter of days."

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