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Government loan officer Johnelle Bryant says she encountered Mohamed Atta, believed to have been the ringleader of the Sept. 11 hijackers, as he requested money apparently intended to finance a terrorist plot. Here are more excerpts of Brian Ross' interview with Bryant.

JOHNELLE BRYANT: Yes, sir. I told him that I didn't think that it, he would be able to use the same aircraft for, for both crop- dusting and, and as a charter plane.

BRIAN ROSS:

What'd he say?

JOHNELLE BRYANT: He seemed to assure me that he, he was an engineer, and that it most certainly would. He was very sure about that.

BRIAN ROSS:

So he told you he had studied this, or he knew what he was talking about?

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

Yeah. Evidently he had put a lot of thought into it, yes.

Yes, sir. Yes, sir. He, he, the entire time he was in my office, his, his emotions kept going up and down, and up and down. At one point in time, when I told him that he, we were unable to finance the type of operation he was interested in, he, he kind of jumped back in his chair, and he started accusing me of discriminating against him because he was not a United States citizen. And he was from a foreign country. And so I tried to talk to him very nicely, and calm him back down. And, when we were, we discussed several things. And while I was discussing things with him, one of

every manner I could, to help him make his, his relocation into our country as easy for him as I could make it.

BRIAN ROSS: So he asked you about the picture over your wall...

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

Yes.

BRIAN ROSS:

...Over your desk?

JOHNELLE BRYANT: Yes, when he had asked me about what my qualifications were to hold my position, um, I told him that I, I used to work in Washington, D.C., in the national office as well, and um, he, he saw this picture, which was a going-away gift to me from uh, the people that I worked with in Washington, and he asked me if the autograph at the bottom of it were famous members of parliament. I told him that actually they're really close friends of mine that I worked with while in Washington, D.C., and I explained to him that we don't actually have a parliament, that uh, we have a House of Representatives and senators.

He actually tried to purchase the picture from me and he, he pulled out a wad of cash about that thick around and started throwing money on my desk. He wanted that picture really bad. He said

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that it was a beautiful picture of Washington, D.C., and um, I explained to him that it was a gift and that it was not for sale. And at that point he just more money down on the desk. And, I, I, I told him that, I said, "You don't understand. It's a gift. Thi-this picture is not for sale, not for anything." And so then he said that um,...

BRIAN ROSS:

Why did he want it so badly did he say?

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

He just said that it was one of the prettiest, one of the, the best he'd ever see of Washington. Ah, with the panoramic view, it does catch all the buildings and um, all the monuments in, in one photograph.

BRIAN ROSS:

Did he ask about them?

JOHNELLE BRYANT: Yes. Uh, he, he asked, when I was in Washington how many of, how many places did I get to go visit. And I told him that um, I had, had visited most of the Smithsonians and he asked me which building I worked in and, and my, the USDA building is part of that picture. And I should him the USDA building and he, he started, he said that he wanted to go to Washington um, as a tourist, to Washington, D.C., and, and visit it. And he said he wanted to go visit some ah, places across the nation too, but one specifically was asking me about Washington, D.C., which to him as a tourist he was concerned that he wouldn't be allowed any of the buildings. Um, and since he was not a, a U.S. citizen and I told him that there wouldn't be a problem with that, that there is security inside of most of the buildings, but there's, it would be like I, a metal detector similar to, to an airport where they search baggage.

BRIAN ROSS: When he, when he looked at this aerial view, did he ask about any specific buildings or where things were?

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

Mm-hmm. Uh-huh, he asked about the Pentagon and the White House and I pointed them out. Um.

BRIAN ROSS: He asked about the Pentagon?

JOHNELLE BRYANT: Yes, sir, he did. And he asked about the White House and, and the Capital, um, which this, the photograph encompasses all that as well as all the Smithsonians and the monuments too.

BRIAN ROSS:

And you showed them.

JOHNELLE BRYANT: Right, in fact, he picked out where the Pentagon was, himself.

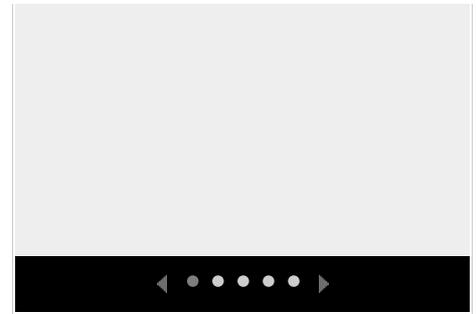
BRIAN ROSS:

In addition to his interest in Washington, Pentagon, the White House, the Capitol, were there other areas of the United States he seemed interested in?

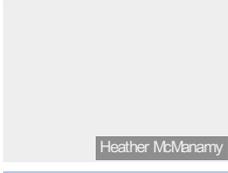
JOHNELLE BRYANT: Yes, sir. When he told me that um, he was more excited about moving to the United States and that he, there were places he wanted to see such as Washington, D.C. He also told me he wanted to go to New York and visit the World Trade Center.

BRIAN ROSS: That's what he said?

JOHNELLE BRYANT:



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Yes, sir. And he asked me if I'd ever been there. And I told him that I had, it had been a couple of years, but yes, I had been there and that, um, if he goes to uh, to New York that I recommend him going to the top to the obs-, observing deck and, if he went, to be sure and go right at sunset because you can take pictures off the top of it at sunset and it's beautiful pictures because that's, that's what I had done. And he asked me again if he would have any problems getting there. Um, and he would say, "Yeah, in his country ah, someone such as myself while I was visiting the country, I wouldn't be allowed to something like that." And, I told him again that I, to my knowledge he as a visitor, um, as long as he had an ID with him that he could go just about anywhere he wanted to. And he asked about the security to get it and I told him it was like at an airport, it was uh, uh, metal detector and most likely they search bags and that's, that's what he would, he would come across in the United States.

BRIAN ROSS:

And, what were the cities he seemed to be interested in?

JOHNELLE BRYANT: Um, Chicago, L.A. and Seattle, and it seems like he mentioned Phoenix because Phoenix is another city that I had only been to as a um, as a layover, changing planes.

BRIAN ROSS:

So he didn't mention any specific location.

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

No sir, just. When, when he asked me about the cities and when he found out I'd either been there, I had not been there or had not been outside the airport, he didn't mention anything else. Um, and I kept thinking that if I was in his shoes and I had just moved to a new country, I'd sold all my belongings to move to a new country and start a new life, I would want to go the major cities of that country and get some idea of the, my surroundings, the geographical makeup of the cities and, and that's what I thought he was doing.

BRIAN ROSS: So you thought he was essentially asking you for some travel tips: where to go in ...

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

Right.

BRIAN ROSS:

In the United States.

BRIAN ROSS:

Right. Did he talk about his own political beliefs, heroes?

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

Uh, yes he did. When he, when he asked me about leaving Washington, D.C., and asked if I'd been banished, um, and I tried to tell him that I hadn't, he, he started talking about um, an organization that uh, back in his country, and he kept referring to his country and I can only assume now that he was referring to Afghanistan. At the time I didn't know if he meant Egypt or Afghanistan, um, that [SIGH] uh, they had an organization in, and he, I couldn't understand, he got really emotional when he talked about it, like really excited about it. And, um, he said that they, they could use people. In other words, that they could use people, um, as, as members. They could use memberships from Americans, um. ...

BRIAN ROSS:

In his ... [OVERLAP] [INAUDIBLE]

JOHNELLE BRYANT: In this organization, um. With, with the type of background that I, that I had,



working with Washington and all this stuff, and he, and when he would mention it, he, his accent came out and I didn't have a clue what he was talking about prior to Sept. 11. I'd never heard of Osama bin Laden. I'd never heard of al Qaeda. I'm sure I'd read about it at one point or time in the paper, but it, it wasn't something that I discussed.

BRIAN ROSS:

Did he give you a name?

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

Yes, he um, I know now that he talking about al Qaeda, but the way pronounced it, it sounded like he was talking about a woman's name. He kept saying uh, it sound like, Akeda, Akeda, "Surely you've heard. Surely you know, Akeda." And I went, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah right." [LAUGHS] I mean, I didn't know what he was talking about.

BRIAN ROSS: But he mentioned.

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

Yes, he mentioned it.

BRIAN ROSS:

Al Qaeda.

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

He, he mentioned Al Qaeda. He mentioned Osama bin Laden. And ...

BRIAN ROSS:

He mentioned Osama bin Laden?

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

Yes, sir. And when he, when he mentioned it. I didn't have a clue what he was talking about and, and...

BRIAN ROSS:

You'd never heard of Osama bin Laden at that point?

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

Not that I'd re-, remember. This was prior, this was nearly 18 months give or take prior to Sept. 11, so no, I didn't know who Osama bin Laden was. Um, to me, it was, you know, he could have been a character on Star Wars for all I knew.

BRIAN ROSS: Could have been Obi-Wan Kenobi.

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

Could have been Obi-Wan Kenobi for all I knew.

BRIAN ROSS: But he mentioned Osama bin Laden to you.

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

Yeah, he said, he mentioned that um, this man would someday be known as the world's greatest leader. I didn't know who he was talking about.

Bryant on Mohamed Atta's appearance:

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

Very intense. His eyes. He had very scary-looking eyes. His eyes were black. So black that he was sitting, probably closer to me, when he sat across from my desk, for about an hour, he was sitting closer to me than perhaps you are. And his, his iris was almost the same color as his pupil. And when I was sitting there speaking with him and making eye contact with him, I had a difficult time seeing the difference between his iris and his pupil, which in itself gave him the appearance of being very, very scary. And then of course with his accent, he, he came across as being very intimidating. He had a, an unusual habit of, when he'd ask a question, and then he was listening to your response, he pressed his lips together. And, actually, the picture that came out in the newspaper, that's exactly what that man looked like. Except for the newspaper does not really show how black that his eyes actually were.

BRIAN ROSS: What were you thinking as you looked at it? Looked at those pictures, and thought back to the man who you had so kindly tried to help.

JOHNELLE BRYANT:

How could someone be so evil? How could somebody be that evil, be that close to me, and I didn't recognize it? But I think prior to Sept. 11, most Americans, I know I couldn't, I can't speak for most Americans, but I could not comprehend. It, it's just a matter of just comprehending someone intentionally taking a commercial jetliner full of human beings, innocent human beings, as far as the terrorists were concerned, and, and using that to kill other innocent human beings. Those people were sick, beyond belief. But the scary thing is, is that they look like you and I. Not necessarily as, as, as an American, but they just look like people. They don't, they don't look like an evil monster.

Part I of Brian Ross' exclusive interview with Johnelle Bryant

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