

# INSIDE 9-11

## WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

*BY THE REPORTERS,  
WRITERS, AND EDITORS OF  
DER SPIEGEL MAGAZINE*







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9-11

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*Der Spiegel Magazine*

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To the victims, heroes, and survivors of September 11.

The world will not forget.

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## FOREWORD

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Significant days in world history are like turning points of fate; people remember them for years and even decades later, telling each other over and over again where they were, and what they were doing and thinking at a specific moment in time. Those who turned on their television on the morning of September 11 around 9 A.M. Eastern time and saw United Flight 175 crash into the South Tower of the World Trade Center—the North Tower of which was already burning from the explosion caused by American Airlines Flight 11—and who later saw both towers collapse will never forget those images. People will still be talking about September 11 at this century's end.

What they will say will of course be determined by what happens in the intervening years. It may be that September 11, 2001, will be seen as no more significant than the night of April 15, 1912, when the *Titanic* sank. How good that would be. It may be that September 11 will enter history as the day mankind first began to learn how the nations of the world could eliminate the sources of terror. That would be even better. It may be that September 11 will be seen as the beginning of a long and increasingly violent battle between irreconcilable forces. That would be history's most terrible judgment.

Nothing will ever be the same—these words were repeated everywhere after September 11, so widely that they lost meaning. In fact much is the same as it was before the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Yet a great deal of what we knew or assumed before the attack is no longer of much use. And those unaware of what they don't know are useful tools to terrorists.

Terrorists want to spread fear through violence, and thus to force us to think about things we haven't thought about. In this, the September 11 hijackers have succeeded: we now think about Islam and about terror. We understand that Muslims living in Arab countries may view globalization as Americanization, may feel debased by arrogance, marginalized by prevailing economic trends, and isolated from the world. We understand that Islam is a religion that has appealed to the world's dispossessed, and that Muslim extremists have learned how to channel frustration into rage and rage into action.

When the Islamicist movement first gained power in Iran in 1979, some of us thought it of no great concern because we understood nothing about religion. When terrorists tried to topple the World Trade Center in 1993—failing because they misunderstood how the buildings were constructed—we might have dismissed it as an act of insanity. Seven times (that we know of) over the succeeding years, Muslim extremists have tried to blow up airplanes, tunnels, or ships, in an effort to kill as many people as possible. They have succeeded three times. In the other four the attacks were discovered in time.

By 1996 Osama bin Laden stopped concealing the true targets of his attacks: America and its allies, soldiers, and citizens. The goal was first to clear Saudi Arabia and its oil fields of American military personnel, then to take over Pakistan and its atomic arsenal, and finally to make the world tremble in fear and terror until the Islamicist agenda dominated public life in many nations.

The attack was an attack on our way of thinking. New questions emerged from the ruins in New York and Washington. We now know that a troop of unobtrusive yet fanatically committed Islamic terrorists roams the world, willing to sacrifice their lives for what they believe. The questions are, How can we stop them from growing in number and from viewing us as their enemy? What has gone so badly wrong with life in their native lands? Is it a matter of too much globalization, or too little? How quickly will we understand that no two Muslim countries are alike? Did the attack create an opportunity for globalization? Or will it turn the United States into the world's policeman?

The questions seem endless. But a tragedy of the dimensions of September demands new

answers. Such terror is very different from the social revolutionary terrorism of the twentieth century. ~~Acts of religious terror are not done for the sake of farmers, workers, students, or oppressed and hopeless peoples; they are done in the name of God. But God will not reply to them, *This is not what had in mind.* Allah does not make demands, and so terrorists who kill in His name need not negotiate with any earthly power. Their goal is to eliminate the unfaithful, not to convert them. But is that the extent of what the hijackers wanted? Did they, could they, think about the consequences of their deed?~~

By looking at the hijackers' stories, and listening to what people have to say about them, this book seeks some answers. The terrorists were not raving lunatics, or starving, or desperate. They did not emerge from caves. They were, as we all are, children of globalization. They spoke several languages and they knew something of the world.

They differed in the degree of intensity of their religious beliefs but were united in their world view. That view was that the West had been corrupted by greed, sin, and selfishness. And that the Islamic world was an oasis of faith and culture—but an oasis threatened and humiliated by the West, and by the United States in particular. They misunderstood the West as they misunderstood Islam; in one they saw only destruction, in the other only decline.

They took themselves for the servants of God. As His earthly deputy, Osama bin Laden was the perfect agent to enthrall them: educated, rich, worldly, charismatic, fanatic—not someone who had to fight; someone who *chose* to fight. You could find his likeness among some of the nineteen hijackers: holy warriors for whom jihad was something like what doing drugs, or body piercing is to Western youth.

Who among the hijackers was merely following orders? Who formulated the plan to commit mass murder? Where did the money for the nearly two years of preparation come from? All this remains unclear. Even the videotape of bin Laden found in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, raises more questions than it answers. The tape has the feel of a staged performance, as if in this conversation with his dinner guest, the Saudi Arabian comrade-in-arms Ali Saeed al-Ghamdi, bin Laden is trying to show that all along he had been the one pulling the strings of the September 11 attack. Yet he seems to know less about the operation than those who did it. For example, he says he had already learned on September 6 that the planes were going to hit the World Trade Center on September 11. However, the hijackers began buying their tickets for these flights as early as August 26.

The theater of destruction offered to the world on September 11 was larger than structural engineer bin Laden could ever have dreamed. Shock is of course one goal of terrorism; the greater the number of people in shock, the better. That is why the attacks of September 11 are to date the most perfect act of terror in history. First you attract the media to a place like the World Trade Center with the crash of the first plane, then you deliver unforgettable images of terror twenty minutes later with the second plane. It was an idea that almost could have been thought up by the Hollywood screenwriters from whom the Bush Administration sought advice about potential terrorist scenarios after September 11.

Describing in detail the preparation and execution of an act of such cold-blooded calculation may help us understand exactly what sort of enemy threatens us.

Giving the stories of those who survived it consoles us. They show how the will to live and pure chance can foil the most successful terrorist plot. The stories of the emergency personnel—the firemen, policemen, security officers, emergency medical workers—offer us hope. They show how duty and courage can redeem a day that seemed to so many as the beginning of the end.

The lives of thousands of people—secretaries, stewardesses, window washers, stockbrokers, chefs, bond traders, janitors, carpenters, and computer technicians—from over sixty-two countries intersected on September 11. Three thousand died, but more than three times that number survived.

The task of disentangling the threads of fate of so many people has been both tense and arduous.

Interviews with the families and friends of the perpetrators, with survivors from the World Trade Center, New York City firefighters, airport security personnel, and with police investigators in several countries were just as important as the evaluation of thousands of documents: tapes of the radio messages between the cockpits of hijacked planes and air traffic controllers, tapes of cell-phone conversations carried on from within the planes, of emergency calls to the police and fire department including those made from within the World Trade Center. The background of the Al Qaeda network was illuminated by new evidence from investigative and intelligence agencies around the world.

The reconstruction of the events of September 11 has been a collaborative effort, involving reporters, editorial staff, researchers, fact checkers, and production editors. The authors would like to thank Udo Ludwig, Erik Schelzig, Holger Stark, Georg Bönisch, Erich Follath, Heike Kalb, Bettina Stielke, and our colleagues in New York, Sabine Schenk, Kerstin Linke-Müller, and Angelika Wrube for their research and contributions. Without the work of fact checkers Klaus Falkenberg, André Geicke, Stephanie Hoffmann, Angela Köllisch, Wilhelm Tappe, Peter Wahle, and production editors Lutz Diedrichs-Schneider, Hermann Harms, Anke Jensen, and Manfred Petersen, this book would be full of mistakes. Our gratitude extends as well to Claudia Jeczawitz, Christiane Gehner, Matthias Krug, Michael Rabanus, Martin Brinker, Michael Walter, Ludger Bollen, Cornelia Pfauter, Jens Kuppi, and Claudia Conrad, and to Helma Dabla and Runhild Höfeler.

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The dedication contains our final and most important expression of recognition and gratitude.

—CORDT SCHNIBBE



**A Chronology**



# Attack from the North

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## New Jersey, September 11, 4:40 A.M.

Jan Demczur did not need an alarm clock. He had a schedule, a plan. The day, the month, the year—his life—were divided into panes of glass. For the last ten years Demczur had been working his way through the World Trade Center as a window washer. He cleaned nonstop, over and over again from the beginning, even weekends. All part of his plan. Demczur had come a long way but hadn't yet reached his goal. Some day he wanted to be a real American. That was why he had to get going so early.

Jan Demczur was forty-eight years old. He had a Polish accent, a Polish face, and an American house, only half of which belonged to him. He had two daughters and a wife, still sleeping. It was Tuesday and he would start on the 48th floor, like every Tuesday. He had plans for the month, for the week, and for the day. All worked out by himself. *They* provided the panes of glass; *he* worked out the plan. He'd been working this job for ten years; he didn't need to waste time.

Demczur went into the bathroom and shaved. Then he got dressed. Outside, Interstate 78 was already humming, but now, just before 5 A.M., you still noticed the breaks between cars headed for or emerging from the Holland Tunnel. Another twenty minutes and the breaks of silence would give way to a constant, noisy din. Demczur's small house was only a few blocks from the highway. It was noisy here, but a tree grew right outside the window.

At 5:20 Demczur pulled the front door shut behind him. No one heard. Everyone was asleep.

## Portland, Maine, About 5:00 A.M.

Mohamed Atta woke up for the last time to the sound of small aircraft in a motel 105 miles northeast of Boston and 280 miles northeast of New York City. Cessnas and Pipers had been buzzing around the two runways of the nearby Portland airport since 5 A.M.

Atta's (no-smoking) room in the Comfort Inn was furnished with fake Andalusian furniture, dark dressers, elaborate bedside tables, carved bedposts, easy chairs, and blankets in bright summery colors.

To the right of the door were the toilet and tub, to the left a small wash alcove set into the wall, a poisonous neon light flickering above it.

*Do not leave your house unless you are washed and clean, for the angels will forgive you if you are clean.* That was what it said in the terrorist "primer" later found in Atta's suitcase.

If Atta followed the primer's commandments, he shaved that morning, threw water over his face, washed up for the last time. Did he undo the waxed wrapping and use the one-ounce wafers of motel soap, one for the face, the other labeled "deodorant"? Did he smell of fruity Comfort Inn Botanical Shampoo on September 11?

At 5:33 A.M. he handed in his pale blue key card at the reception desk. At his side was his night roommate, Abdulaziz Alomari. They didn't have breakfast, but hurriedly left the motel. Waiting outside was a blue Nissan Altima from Alamo Rental Cars in Boston, with Massachusetts plates, number 3335VI.

Minutes later, the four-door Nissan pulled into the Portland airport's parking garage.

At 5:43 A.M. Atta and Alomari were in the lower level of the elongated steel-and-glass building, checking in for US Airways Flight 5930 to Boston, a flight operated by Colgan Air.



At 5:45 they passed through security one flight up: an X-ray image of their bags unsettled no one

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### **New Jersey, 5:30 A.M.**

For Jan Demczur, it was a ten-minute walk through his neighborhood to the PATH train that would take him from New Jersey to New York. The driveway in front of his garage was still glistening and wet. That would be forgotten in the course of the day. The forecast was for good weather. Demczur breathed in the morning air. For a few years the weather hadn't mattered so much because now he worked exclusively inside. It was his reward for seniority; he had worked for American Building Maintenance longer than any of the other fifteen window cleaners at the World Trade Center.

Turnover at work was high. Most of the window cleaners had arrived only recently in America. There were Yugoslavs, Albanians, Turks, and the Irish, but only one Pole. Two of them worked the window washing machines located on the towers. Years ago Demczur had had that job too. You got a good view up there, but otherwise it was boring. Only the two top stories and the nine lowest had to be done by hand, since the machines didn't reach there. But Demczur didn't have to get out there anymore. For the last three years he had worked only inside the North Tower—he had specialized.

At this hour of the day the PATH train to New York was nearly empty. At 5:50 Demczur got off at the World Trade Center, five stories below ground level. He took the escalator up. He was almost alone. The stores in the underground shopping passage were still closed. At 5:54 he swiped his card in the time clock on Lower Level One, North Tower. He took the elevator to the 3rd floor where, like the other window cleaners, he had a locker that held his work things and his tools—pail, rags, detergent, and squeegee. A few of his coworkers were there, though not all. They started work at different times and often one would oversleep. Demczur ran into Rako Cami, an Albanian who worked the machine on the roof of the South Tower, and Fabian Zoto, who cleaned the windows on the observation deck every morning before the first visitors arrived. The regular operator of the machine on the North Tower was on vacation and his substitute seemed to have overslept again.

It wasn't easy finding reliable workers. They talked for only a minute; it was still early. Demczur combed his hair again, to the side, the way he'd parted it since he was a boy.

### **Portland, Maine, 6:00 A.M.**

After a fourteen-minute wait at Gate 11, Mohamed Atta and Abdulaziz Alomari boarded the nineteenth seat propeller-driven Beech 1900, destination Boston.

The plane took off at 6:04, only slightly late, and headed out into the half light over Casco Bay. Atta and Alomari sat next to each other, surrounded by unsuspecting commuters. At 6:17 the beaches began to glitter. It would be a clear day—cloudless, warm, windless.

*The sky smiles, my young son,* it was written in the "primer." *Open your heart, welcome death in the name of God.*

It was only late afternoon of the day before that they had driven from Boston to Maine. At Logan Airport they had climbed into their rental car, taken Route 1A from the big airport traffic circle, leaving behind them the car showrooms, furniture stores, Laundromats, Dunkin' Donuts, Wendy's, and myriad convenience stores—America zipping past like one great supermarket.

The trip through Massachusetts and New Hampshire into southern Maine takes an hour and a half on the six to eight lanes of I-95. Their Nissan merged into the quiet stream of traffic. Driving along unhurriedly, they crossed Piscataqua Bridge, located about halfway between Boston and Portland, and

reached South Portland shortly after five. Atta and Alomari registered at the Comfort Inn, 90 Maine Mall Road, at 5:43 P.M. ~~Because they were leaving again very early the next day, they paid the \$149 for the room in advance. Their last evening began.~~

They spent it like people who have a long life ahead of them and lots of time to kill. They drove their car along highways flanked by bluish, shimmering supermarkets, hamburger drive-ins, and car dealerships. Sometime between 8 and 9 they were spotted at a Pizza Hut on the Maine Mall Road. Their last meal.

At 8:31 P.M. the surveillance camera inside the Fast Green ATM in the parking lot at Uno's Chicago Bar & Grill caught pictures of them: In the foreground Alomari can be seen making faces, feigning an expression of helplessness, then laughing broadly as if enjoying himself.

Atta stood behind him, a short man with a flat face who in the video always seems bored, gray, and washed-out. Both were filmed through a strip of mirror above the ATM panel. They look like two buddies getting money on a Saturday night for a bout of drinking—average types, regular guys, maybe at worst small-time crooks.

Atta made his last purchase between 9:22 and 9:39 P.M. at the Wal-Mart on Payne Road in Scarborough, south of Portland. Video cameras show him going in and out through the store's glass doors. He was wearing a black-and-white polo shirt, and when he left he was carrying a plastic bag.

No other security camera took their picture that night, no eyewitness reported seeing them. At some point they returned to the Comfort Inn. At 10:23 a waning moon rose in a clear, starry night.

*The evening before you perform your deed: Shave all excess hair from your body, perfume your body. Recite the verses about forgiveness. Remember that this night you must listen and obey because you will confront a grave situation. Get up during the night and pray for victory; then God will make everything easy and protect you.*

It took fifty minutes for the prop plane to reach Boston. The flight was smooth; there were breakfast rolls encased in plastic, coffee, soda. Atta and Alomari might have been tourists, sales reps, sports officials. Their covers worked. For years they had used the disguise of assimilated, secular Muslims. Atta was wearing a bright blue short-sleeved shirt; Alomari's shirt was beige. Both carried medium-sized shoulder bags; their hair was cut short, no beards, no jewelry.

*As soon as you board the airplane and have taken your seat, remember that which you were told earlier. God says that when you are surrounded by several nonbelievers, you must sit quietly and remember that God will make victory possible for you in the end.*

For years already Atta and Alomari had had an appointment with God. Their education had been difficult and challenging. Now the time had come. There was no turning back.

How did the attackers live for so long undiscovered in the hated country of the godless? How did they get in and get out, and where did they stay? Who trained them as pilots? What were they looking for in the decrepit motels at the end of the Las Vegas strips? Why did they pick fights over bills of less than \$50 in greasy bars just before the Big Day? What would have become of the attackers without the document forger of Falls Church, Virginia? Could Josh Strambaugh, Deputy Sheriff of Broward County, Florida, have averted the whole nightmare way back on April 26, 2001, when he pulled over Atta in a red Pontiac, by arresting him for driving without a license?

## **Newark, New Jersey, June 3, 2000**

Fifteen months before Mohamed Atta slammed that jet into the North Tower of the World Trade Center, he stepped onto American soil for the first time at Newark Airport; it was a warm, sunny Saturday. Atta, thirty-three, was Egyptian, son of a Cairo lawyer who had raised him to hate Jews. Th

FBI assumes that Atta spent several days in Prague before his departure. It is thought that while there he met with an Iraqi agent.

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Marwan al-Shehhi, presumed pilot of the plane that crashed into the South Tower, entered America on May 29, 2000, aboard a Sabena Airlines flight from the United Arab Emirates via Belgium. Like Atta, he landed at Newark. And, like Atta, he was in possession of an HM1 student visa that permitted him to attend a flying school. Al-Shehhi, twenty-three, was born in the United Arab Emirates, the son of an Islamic preacher. He arrived in Germany as an eighteen-year-old on a military scholarship, studied German at the Goethe Institute in Bonn, visited a schoolmate, and later moved to Hamburg.

Ziad Jarrah, the presumed pilot of the plane that would crash in Pennsylvania, arrived in Atlanta Georgia, on June 27. Jarrah was twenty-seven, Lebanese, from a respectable background: a popular guy who liked to drink and study hard.

Jarrah also held a student visa, and the people who met him during the coming year found that he bounced through life, like someone from whom a burden had been lifted, like someone who no longer needed to ask deep questions about the meaning of life.

The three men knew one another from Hamburg, where they had learned German and studied civil engineering, electronic engineering, and airplane construction. There they had become fanatic Muslims. There their plans had crystallized—plans to take part in something the likes of which the world had never seen before.

*When your work is done and everything has gone well, everyone will take each other's hands and say that this was a deed done in the name of God.*

Before they entered the United States, all three reported to German authorities that their passports were missing. Any suspicious stopovers in “rogue states” were thus expunged from their passports and personal profiles—a good idea, since the three had not come to seek their slice of the American dream.

Shortly after arriving, they got in touch with Hani Hanjour, the presumed pilot of the plane that would crash into the Pentagon. The thirty-two-year-old Hanjour was from Saudi Arabia and had first come to the States nearly ten years before.

Fifteen months before the attack, the most important members of the four terror teams, the four pilot ringleaders, were all in the United States. Atta, Jarrah, and al-Shehhi remained on the East Coast in Miami. Hanjour spent most of the coming year out west, in California and Arizona. Their assignment for the next few months: learn how to fly a plane.

## **Venice, Florida, August to December 2000**

Mohamed Atta and Marwan al-Shehhi parked their car on the grass of Huffmann Aviation. Straight ahead lay the flat, one-story building. In the middle was the reception desk, to the left the offices of the flight instructors, to the right a narrow hallway leading to the Cockpit Café, which always smelled of coffee and hamburgers. Through windows of the Cockpit visitors could watch student pilots taking off and landing. Nobody was surprised that two men with Arabic names were registering for flying lessons. That's not unusual here.

The flight training needed before you can apply for a commercial pilot's license costs about \$9,000. It takes four months and assures a lot of foreign students a good job back home. By the time they pass the exam, student pilots have spent somewhere around 250 hours at the control stick of an airplane and are entitled to fly an Airbus or a Boeing. Rudi Dekker, flight instructor and owner of Huffmann Aviation, is proud of the fact that pilots from around the world are trained in the United

States.

~~Atta and al-Shehhi began their training on a Cessna 152, a single-engine propeller-driven plane that is common to flight schools. The Cessna 152 is a good-natured plane; it forgives most student errors and one would have to be pretty inept to get into serious trouble.~~

Atta learned. He learned how to turn on the main switch, activate the starter, speed up, and pull the stick back after 250 yards and take off. He learned how to turn left, bank right, how to descend and how to land again. He struggled through the maze of symbols on flight maps and charts, learned the correct way for a pilot to talk with air-traffic controllers—how to report in and sign off—how to interpret a weather report, and he did it all without making a fool of himself.

In the course of his training Atta moved up from the Cessna 152 to a Piper Warrior and finally to a two-engine plane. Like the rest of the flight trainees, Atta read three thick books on flight theory.

Rudi Dekker didn't particularly like Atta. He often walked moodily among the airplanes, making it clear to everybody that he wasn't there to make friends. After a while his sullen face got on Dekker's nerves. He took Atta aside and advised him to change his attitude.

In October Atta and al-Shehhi switched for three weeks to Jones Aviation Flying Service in Sarasota. Once again Atta came across as unpleasant and aloof. Flight instructor Tom Hammersley says, "Atta always knew better." The terrorists went back to Huffmann. There, Anna Greaven found reasons not to like Atta either. She was also a student and often flew with him. Most of the time she felt like waving her hand in front of his face to pull him out of the frightening rigidity that gripped him while flying. He reminded her of a robot. Al-Shehhi seemed the exact opposite. Greaven compares al-Shehhi to a clumsy bear, always laughing, following Atta around like a bodyguard.

At the start of their training Atta and al-Shehhi lived with a couple named Voss. The Vosses' house is on the outskirts of the city, and it's obvious from just looking at it that the only thing Charles and Drucilla—Dru for short—want in life is peace.

In front of their house—a collection of thin-walled rectangles covered by a flat roof—stands a snow-white plaster fountain. Cherubs dance at the foot of it. Charles and Dru Voss are proud of their fountain. At night floodlights illuminate it. Snow-white pebbles cover the ground behind the fountain and around the house like a line of defense. More white plaster statues guard the front door. They, too, are illuminated.

Atta and al-Shehhi lived in a long rectangular wing connected to the rest of the house by a narrow passageway. One of their windows looked out onto the fountain and its cherubs. They stayed there only briefly. Charles Voss became upset about a flooded bathroom; also, his tenants walked through the house with dripping wet hair. After a week he asked them to look for a room elsewhere. Four months after they started flight training, Mohamed Atta and Marwan al-Shehhi received their pilot licenses.

Meanwhile, in Venice, Ziad Jarrah had learned to fly. He started his training at the Florida Flight Training Center, a flying school as small and unassuming as Rudi Dekker's. He too learned to fly in a Cessna 152.

Arne Kruithof, the owner of Florida Flight Training, liked Jarrah. Kruithof says he would have had no hesitation about flying with Jarrah. He was always on time, usually in a good mood. He was helpful to others when they had problems, and when they were depressed he would cheer them up.

His fellow students took pictures of him: Jarrah laughing, Jarrah solving a tricky navigation problem, Jarrah partying and infecting everyone else with his bonhomie. In one group photo he stands at dead center, like a man around whom everything else revolves. Evenings the students and flight instructors often sat together in the 44th Squadron, a bar right next door.

Kruithof believes it's important that pilots feel comfortable around other people. After all, they have to spend an enormous amount of time crammed with them in the tight quarters of a cockpit. To

his students he holds forth on the importance of teamwork, the pilot as role model, the need for self-discipline, and why beer cans lying around a student pilot's room is not acceptable.

Hanging on the wall behind the worn brown sofa in the lounge is a fax sent to Kruithof by a European airline. It's only one page long but asks a lot of questions: Is the applicant dependable? Can he work as part of a team? Can he take criticism? Can he get things done? What are his weaknesses?

Kruithof receives such inquiries regularly. He is not only a flight instructor; he also provides evaluations and recommendations when his students apply to an airline for a job in the cockpit. Kruithof quickly reached his assessment of Ziad Jarrah: "the perfect candidate."

Jarrah's mission in America, like that of the other conspirators, was a difficult one. He had to be prepared to live for more than a year in the land of the enemy. He had to be ready to obey his enemy and cheerfully accept instruction in all the skills he and his fellow assassins needed to accomplish their mission. He had to get to know his enemy, to party with him, laugh with him—and at the end of it all still be able to kill him.

Jarrah, too, passed his flight test without difficulty.

### **Scottsdale, Arizona, August to December 2000**

Hani Hanjour, the presumed pilot of the plane that smashed into the Pentagon, had problems learning how to fly.

Hanjour lived in Scottsdale, Arizona, while in flight training at CRM Airline Training Center. The school has an excellent reputation.

Hanjour had every kind of problem—with takeoffs, landings, midair turns. He was nervous and distracted, couldn't concentrate. After three months of intensive instruction he still didn't have the private pilot's license that trainees normally obtain after four to six weeks. Finally, with a great deal of luck and many flying hours behind him, Hanjour managed to pass the commercial pilot examination.

A delicate-boned Saudi with the eyes of a puppy and a sparse mustache, Hanjour first came to the United States on October 3, 1991. He went to Arizona, where he finished a language program. He returned to Saudi Arabia at the beginning of 1992, only to come back to the United States in 1996—this time for good. At first he lived with the Khalils, an Arab-American family in Hollywood, Florida. The Khalils knew little about their houseguest and suspected nothing about his motives for coming to America. Adnan Khalil teaches English at the local college; his wife, Susan, is a friendly middle-class housewife who at the time was taking care of their three-year-old son, Adam.

Susan Khalil, then forty-five years old, helped the helpless Hanjour fill out applications for various flight schools. He hardly spoke a word of English and was constantly blushing beet-red. Adnan, affable and cheerful, cooked opulent Arabian-style meals for Hanjour and encouraged his houseguest to watch television to improve his English. But it didn't help. It seemed to Susan as though Hanjour were withdrawing into his shell. America intimidated him. His helplessness was most evident when he was with women.

It was easier for him to relate to little Adam. For hours he romped and played with the boy, teaching him Arabic words and letting him ride on his back. As often as he could he went to the Dar Ulum Mosque, located in a converted supermarket, a gray, unattractive building at 7050 Pines Boulevard. Susan Khalil, a practicing Protestant, was amazed at her houseguest's inflexible piety. She told her husband, "That poor boy must have a serious problem. I wonder what it could be."

## Opa-Locka Airport, Near Miami Beach, December 29, 2000

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A week after Atta and al-Shehhi received their pilot's licenses, they rented six hours on a Boeing 727 simulator at SimCenter, Inc., in Opa-Locka, north of Miami. Mostly they practiced making midair turns, showing no interest whatsoever in takeoffs and landings. Considering the 250 flight hours they had to their credit, they had become adequate pilots. This was the last time, according to all available evidence, that Atta and al-Shehhi sat in a Boeing simulator.

Nine months before the attack, the pilots seemed to have overcome their biggest challenge: how to fly a plane. To stay in training they would repeatedly rent planes—in Florida, Georgia, and Maryland.

Now began the next phase of the undertaking: preparation for the hijacking and remaining inconspicuous while waiting for the fateful day.

Arrangements for financing the attack were in place. According to the FBI and CIA, the approximately half a million dollars for the operation would come via messengers and wire transfers—mostly from the United Arab Emirates, but also from other countries, such as Bahrain. It arrived in many small installments so as not to arouse suspicion. On July 4, 2000, for example, just under \$10,000 was deposited in account number 573000 259 772 that Atta and al-Shehhi had opened at the SunTrust Bank in Florida. The money came from someone named Isam Mansur in the United Arab Emirates. On August 30, there was another deposit of \$19,985. This time the money came from “Mr. Ali.” On September 18, \$69,985 was deposited, this time from “Hani.” Altogether the money in the account amounted to just under \$110,000.

Hamza Alghamdi, one of the terrorists on board the plane that flew into the South Tower, opened an account in Hollywood, Florida, into which a hitherto unknown accomplice deposited money using traveler's checks purchased in Bahrain—sometimes \$3,000, sometimes as little as \$1,000. And, through an account at HSBC Bank in the Emirates that belonged to pilot al-Shehhi, some \$100,000 was deposited between July and November of 1999, almost all by wire transfer.

Small amounts. Different accounts. Different points of origin. No regular pattern. Perfect.

To take care of daily concerns, the leaders counted on their “logistics men,” as the FBI called them after the fact—men who took care of lodging, clothing, food: Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf Alhamzi. The two were supposed to become pilots as well but didn't have the right stuff.

Al-Mihdhar, a short, wiry, and agile man, probably came from Yemen. Alhamzi, powerfully built, was from Saudi Arabia. Alhamzi's father, Mohammed Salim al-Hamzi, owned a supermarket in Mecca and was prosperous enough to be able to offer his son a trouble-free future.

Both men had been in the United States since January 15, 2000. Before that they were in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, where they met with intermediaries of Osama bin Laden.

The group in Kuala Lumpur was suspected of having organized the suicide bombing attack on the United States destroyer *Cole*. A videotape of their meeting in Kuala Lumpur had been recorded by the Malaysian secret service and in a roundabout way eventually landed in the hands of the CIA; it led to al-Mihdhar and Alhamzi's being put on the United States Immigration Department's “watch list.” But this was done much too late—not until August 21—twenty months after al-Mihdhar and Alhamzi were already in the United States and only twenty-one days before September 11.

## San Diego, December 2000

The two logistics men lived in San Diego, California, in the tastefully modest Parkwood Apartments, 26401 Mount Ada Road. Alhamzi's telephone number is still listed in the San Diego telephone book:

(858) 279-5929. The Parkwood Apartments are close to the bustling commercial strip of San Diego, and al-Mihdhar's apartment is located on the ground floor—just as the Al Qaeda handbook prescribes.

This 180-page-long terrorist manual written in the name of Allah makes everything clear from its first page: *Islamic governments have never and will never be established through peaceful solutions and cooperative councils. They are established as they always have been by pen and gun, by word and bullet, by tongue and teeth.*

Lesson 4 in the handbook gives a detailed twenty-two-point explanation of a proper terrorist apartment. It must not be near a police station or other government office. Curious neighbors must not be able to see inside. It must have locks that can be changed. And above all, it has to be on the ground floor to allow escape in case of a surprise raid. Terrorists in training are also urged to conduct business during normal working hours so as not to arouse the suspicion of neighbors.

In this, al-Mihdhar and Alhamzi would not be altogether successful.

First they aroused suspicion at Sorbi's Flying School because they were so adamant about learning to fly but did not show the slightest knack for it. They offered flight instructor Richard Garza additional money to train them to fly jets. Garza refused and became suspicious, but he didn't report them to either the CIA or FBI.

In the meantime a few of their neighbors at Parkwood Apartments were starting to wonder about the two men's behavior. There was no way to conceal the fact that even after months of living there al-Mihdhar and Alhamzi still had no furniture, instead sleeping on mattresses on the floor. Yet they were seen constantly walking about with briefcases, cell phones glued to their ears. Sometimes a limousine would come pick them up. But before anyone could call the police, al-Mihdhar and Alhamzi moved out.

The fact that, contrary to Al Qaeda terrorist instructions, they then sought lodging in an Islamic neighborhood may indicate that either they were increasingly nervous or felt pressed for time.

After the training of the four suicide pilots was successfully completed, it was up to al-Mihdhar and Alhamzi to prepare for the arrival of the other terrorists. The FBI divides them into three groups: "pilots"—Atta, al-Shehhi, Hanjour, and Jarrah; "logistics men," like al-Mihdhar and Alhamzi; and finally the "strongmen"—men without special talents other than being capable of killing as many of the crew or passengers as necessary or inciting fear as necessary to keep everyone else on board in check.

Did these men need to know all the details of the suicidal plan? It is doubtful. In the view of the leaders it was probably safer and more practical to let the killers on board think this was simply a "normal" hijacking. The fewer who knew, the lower the risk that one or the other of the "strongmen" might have a slip of the tongue or lose his nerve at the thought of impending death.

## **Dubai, United Arab Emirates, March 2001**

It is not yet known who signed up the twelve men, whether the purpose of Atta and al-Shehhi's twelve trips (to, among other places, Madrid, Prague, and Amsterdam) was personally to recruit strong, battle-tested men, or if they were supplied through agents of Al Qaeda. One thing is certain: that the "strongmen" entered the United States between March and June 2001, in small groups, from Dubai.

The killers included Salim Alhamzi from Mecca, Saudi Arabia, probably a brother of logistics man Nawaf Alhamzi. He and Hanjour and the logistics men al-Mihdhar, Majed Moqed, and Nawaf Alhamzi would be on the plane that smashed into the Pentagon. Moqed was the son of a Bedouin tribal prince from near Riyadh and attended law school at King Saud University.

The other arrivals were: Ahmed Alghamdi from Baljurshi in the Saudi province of Baha, who

called his family for the last time a few months before September 11 and asked them forgive him his sins and to pray for him; and another Saudi, Mohald Alshehri, who attended the Islamic University in Abha for one semester and then moved to Riyadh, eventually disappearing into Chechnya. These two arrived on May 28 in Miami on a flight from Dubai via London. Hamza Alghamdi, also from Baljurshi, arrived on May 2 via London and Washington, D.C.

Along with the Saudi Fayeze Ahmed these three strongmen would crash into the South Tower of the World Trade Center under their leader and pilot al-Shehhi.

On board American Airlines Flight 11, which Atta would fly into the North Tower, were Satam al-Süqami from the United Arab Emirates; the brothers Waleed and Wail Alshehri—the older one a physics teacher; the younger a student with psychological problems. The Alshehris were two of eleven sons of a successful businessman from the city of Khamis Mushait. In addition there was Abdulaziz Alomari, also from Saudi Arabia. He was the last to arrive in the United States, probably under an assumed name and using a stolen passport.

The plane that would take off forty minutes late and later crash in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, had only three strongmen on board. While Ziad Jarrah took over the cockpit, these three men would fight a life-or-death battle with the passengers: Saeed Alghamdi, who arrived in Orlando, Florida, on June 2 from the Emirates; Ahmed al-Haznawi; and Ahmed Alnami. We have a little more information about Alnami, who was twenty-three, than we do about the others. He made a pilgrimage to Mecca in August 2000 and then disappeared. His father and mother have little to say about their son—except that he turned into a religious fanatic two and a half years before, becoming an imam, a prayer leader at the mosque in Asir, which is a high honor for someone so young.

Fifteen of the nineteen terrorists were from Saudi Arabia; most were the sons of well-to-do families, sons of supermarket owners and tribal princes.

They came from the kingdom that houses and protects the holy places of Islam and is at the same time a filling station for the Western economy. A fifth of America's oil imports come from Saudi Arabia. As the leader of the OPEC cartel, the Saudi government also ensures stable oil prices.

No wonder that the ruling Saud clan has business links that reach into the highest political ranks in the United States. At the same time, Saudi Arabia has invested billions of dollars into Islamic wars of liberation the world over. A rift cuts through the country, even through individual families. Most of the fathers and mothers of the conspirators had no notion what their sons were up to.

Nowhere else could Arab terrorists obtain entry visas to the United States with such ease. Michael Springmann, former head of the American consulate in Jiddah, said, "My job was supplying visas to terrorists." During his time at the consulate the terrorists involved were those whom the CIA and Osama bin Laden recruited together, first for training in the United States, then to go into action in Afghanistan against the Soviets. The terrorists saw it as only right and just to twist such a grand old tradition to their own purposes.

## **Florida, Spring and Summer 2001**

Managing the logistics for nineteen men who don't look like average Americans, who don't all behave like Americans—and yet who aren't supposed to be conspicuous—is no simple matter. They need places to sleep and to eat breakfast; they need clean socks, driver's licenses, medicine for diarrhea; and they have to pray five times a day. They must not drive through red lights, come down with appendicitis, or get into fights.

The four leaders, with help from their logistics men, developed a highly obfuscating choreography of changing apartments with a single goal: invisibility.



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