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Hijacker Khalid al-Mihdhar, wearing the yellow shirt, foreground, is seen passing through the security checkpoint at Dulles International Airport in Chantilly, Va. Sept. 11, 2001, just hours before American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon in this image taken from a surveillance video and obtained by the Associated Press. Associated Press

Video shows Pentagon hijackers being allowed to pass through airport screening

Web posted Thursday, July 22, 2004 | Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- Security screeners at Washington Dulles International Airport who allowed some hijackers to board the flight that crashed into the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001, drew criticism Thursday from the commission investigating the terror attacks.

A surveillance video obtained by The Associated Press showed that security screeners did not appear to question the hijackers about utility knives investigators believe they were carrying as part of the takeover plot.

The 9/11 commission report cited one expert describing efforts by airport screeners as "marginal at best," and said hijackers who set off metal detectors shouldn't have been permitted to proceed until the suspicious items were found.

The video represents the only footage known to exist showing any of the Sept. 11 hijackers boarding their final flights that fateful morning. It shows most of the hijackers in Washington were pulled aside to undergo additional scrutiny after alarms went off at metal detectors but then were permitted to board American Airlines Flight 77.

The video also shows an airport screener hand-checking the baggage of one hijacker, Nawaf al-Hazmi, for traces of explosives before letting him continue onto the plane with his brother, Salem, a fellow hijacker. Al-Hazmi had been added to a U. S. government terrorism watch list just weeks earlier.

Thursday's commission report said the al-Hazmi brothers were flagged for additional scrutiny because one of them could not understand English, and "because the agent found both of the passengers to be suspicious."

But the commission report noted that, "the only consequence of their selection was that their checked bags were held off the plane until it was confirmed that they had boarded the aircraft."

The flight was crashed into the Pentagon roughly two hours afterward.

Details in the grainy video are difficult to distinguish. But an earlier, preliminary report by the commission describing activities at Dulles is consistent with the men's procession through airport security as shown on the video.

No knives or other sharp objects are visible on the surveillance video. Investigators have said the hijackers at Dulles were believed to be carrying utility knives either personally or in their luggage, which at the time could legally be carried aboard planes if the blades were less than 4 inches long and were not considered "menacing." There is no indication on the video that security screeners questioned the hijackers about any knives.

All 58 passengers - including the hijackers - and six crew members, along with 125 employees at the Pentagon, died when the flight crashed into the Pentagon at 9:39 a. m. on Sept. 11.

The video shows hijackers Khalid al-Mihdhar and Majed Moqed, each dressed conservatively in slacks and collared shirts, setting off metal detectors as they pass through security around 7:18 a.m. Moqed set off a second alarm, and a screener manually checked him with a handheld metal detector.

The pair were known to have traveled together previously and had paid cash to purchase their tickets aboard Flight 77 on Sept. 5, 2001, at the American Airlines counter at Baltimore's airport.

Al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi had been known to be associated with al-Qaida since early 1999 by the National Security Agency, and were put on a terrorism watch list on Aug. 24, 2001.

Only Hani Hanjour, believed to have been the hijacker who piloted Flight 77, passed through Dulles security that morning without being subjected to a secondary security check, according to the video.

Moments after Hanjour passed alone through the security checkpoint, wearing dark slacks and a short-sleeved shirt, the final two hijackers, the al-Hazmi brothers, both wearing slacks and Oxford shirts, walked through the checkpoint.

Nawaf al-Hazmi, described by investigators as the right-hand accomplice of hijacker-planner Mohammed Atta, set off two metal-detectors, and a screener manually checked him with a handheld device.

Nawaf and his brother were directed to a nearby counter, where they appeared to closely examine their tickets while another screener checked Nawaf's carryon bag with an explosive trace detector. Each was cleared to board Flight 77.

The Associated Press obtained the video from the Motley Rice law firm, which is representing some victims' families who are suing the airlines and security industry over their actions in the Sept. 11 attacks.

"Even after setting off these alarms, the airlines and security screeners failed to examine the hijackers' baggage, as required by federal regulations and industry-mandated standards, or discover the weapons they would use in their attack," lawyer Ron Motley said.

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Hijacker Hani Hanjour, center foreground, believed to have piloted American Airlines Flight 77 when it crashed into the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001, is shown on surveillance video passing through the security checkpoint at Dulles International Airport Sept. 11, 2001 in this image taken from a surveillance video and obtained by the Associated Press. Hanjour sent two carry-on bags through the X-ray machine and passed through a metal detector without alarm. Associated Press



Hijackers Nawaf al-Hazmi, wearing a blue shirt, and his brother, Salem al-Hazmi, in the white shirt, wait at the security checkpoint at Dulles International Airport in Chantilly, Va. on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, as a screener checks Nawaf's carry-on bag for explosives. This image was taken from surveillance video obtained by The Associated Press. Nawaf set off two metal detectors before another screener checked him manually with a handheld device. Both were permitted to board the plane, which hours later crashed into the Pentagon. Associated Press



This image made from surveillance video from Washington's Dulles Airport, obtained by the Associated Press, shows two of the five hijackers on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, man in blue shirt, left, and white shirt, right, leaving a security checkpoint before boarding American Airlines flight 77 that later crashed into the Pentagon. Associated Press



In this image from a surveillance video from Washington's Dulles Airport the morning of September 11, 2001, and obtained by the Associated Press, one hijacker out of the five hijackers that boarded American Airlines Flight 77 is being pulled aside to undergo additional scrutiny after setting off metal detectors but then permitted to board the fateful flight that later crashed into the Pentagon. Four out of the five hijackers who boarded Flight 77 were pulled aside to undergo additional scrutiny. Associated Press



This image made from surveillance video from Washington's Dulles Airport, obtained by the Associated Press, shows two of the five hijackers on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, man in blue shirt, left, and white shirt, second from left, leaving a security checkpoint before boarding American Airlines flight 77 that later crashed into the Pentagon. Associated Press

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