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## FAA Probed, Cleared Sept. 11 Hijacker in Early 2001

Friday, May 10, 2002

Associated Press

**WASHINGTON** — Federal aviation authorities were alerted in early 2001 that an Arizona flight school believed one of the eventual Sept. 11 hijackers lacked the English and flying skills necessary for the commercial pilot's license he already held, flight school and government officials say.

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A Federal Aviation Administration inspector even sat next to the hijacker, Hani Hanjour, in one of the Arizona classes, checked records to ensure Hanjour's 1999 pilot's license was legitimate but concluded no other action was warranted, FAA officials told The Associated Press.

Hanjour is believed to have piloted the plane that crashed into the Pentagon on Sept. 11.

The Arizona flight school manager told authorities the FAA inspector called her when Hanjour's name became public after the hijackings and declared "your worst nightmare has just been realized," officials said.

The operations manager for the now-defunct JetTech flight school in Phoenix said she called the FAA inspector that oversaw her school three times in January and February 2001 to express her concerns about Hanjour.

"I couldn't believe he had a commercial license of any kind with the skills that he had," said Peggy Chevrette, the JetTech manager. She also has been interviewed by the FBI.

*(Story continues below)*

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Marilyn Ladner, a vice president for the Pan Am International Flight Academy that owned JetTech before it closed in the aftermath of Sept. 11, said the flight school expressed its concerns and believes the FAA official observed Hanjour's weaknesses firsthand.

"We did have skill level concerns and a bit of language fluency concern and we did mention it to our FAA training center official," Ladner said.

The FAA official "did observe Hani's limited knowledge of flying" and "did check his flight credentials. He did tell us they were valid, so he did follow up on our concern," she said. Hanjour did not finish his studies at JetTech and left the school.

FAA officials confirm their inspector, John Anthony, was contacted by Pan Am in January and February about Hanjour and, at the request of the school, checked Hanjour's commercial pilot's license to ensure it was valid.

But they said he observed nothing that warranted further action or suggested Hanjour would eventually hijack a plane. The inspector considered Hanjour just one of many students that schools routinely seek FAA reviews on, officials said.

"There was nothing about the pilot's actions to signal criminal intent at the time or that would have caused us to alert law enforcement," FAA spokeswoman Laura Brown said.

A few months later, another Pan Am school in Minnesota contacted the FBI about concerns about a different Arab student who also raised concerns by seeking jetliner training. That student, Zacarias Moussaoui, was immediately arrested in August and has emerged as the lone defendant charged with conspiring with the hijackers.

The Arizona school's alert is the latest revelation about the extent of information the government possessed before Sept. 11 about the hijackers or concerns about a terrorist strike.

Last week, AP reported the FBI in Arizona raised concerns in July 2001 that a large number of Arab students were training at a U.S. flight school and urged FBI headquarters to check all schools nationwide for such students — advice that wasn't followed until after Sept. 11.

The FAA's Brown said Anthony was taking some of his own training at JetTech in January 2001 and coincidentally sat in the same classroom with Hanjour for one course. But she said Anthony didn't note any major language problems.

Chevrette, the flight school manager, said she told Anthony she believed Hanjour could not write or speak English fluently as required to get a U.S. commercial pilot's license.

"The thing that really concerned me was that John had a conversation in the hallway with Hani and realized what his skills were at that point and his ability to speak English," Chevrette said.



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Chevrette said she was surprised when the FAA official suggested the school might consider getting a translator to help Hanjour.

"He offered a translator," Chevrette said. "Of course, I brought up the fact that went against the rules that require a pilot to be able to write and speak English fluently before they even get their license."

Chevrette said Hanjour's English was so poor that it took him five hours to complete a section of a mock pilot's oral exam that is supposed to last just a couple of hours.

There was no answer this week at Anthony's home phone and FAA officials said he was out of town and unavailable to be interviewed. But Brown, the FAA spokeswoman, said Anthony did not observe any serious language problems and did not suggest a translator for Hanjour.

Chevrette said she contacted Anthony twice more when Hanjour began ground training for Boeing 737 jetliners and it became clear he didn't have the skills for the commercial pilot's license.

"I don't truly believe he should have had it and I questioned that. I questioned that all along," she said.

Chevrette reported to federal authorities and her own bosses at Pan Am that in September, when Hanjour's name became public as one of the hijackers, the FAA inspector called her and said "your worst nightmare has been realized," officials said.

The FBI has reconstructed Hanjour's path through the United States in painstaking detail.

Agents have questioned and administered a lie detector test to one of Hanjour's instructors in Arizona who was an Arab American and had signed off on Hanjour's flight instruction credentials before he got his pilot's license.

That instructor, who also is a pilot for a U.S. airline, told AP that he told authorities that Hanjour was "a very average pilot, maybe struggling a little bit." The instructor added, "Maybe his English wasn't very good."

The instructor said he has passed an FBI polygraph exam and is not under investigation.

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