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Hijacker list raises more questions

By Jamal Khashoggi, Deputy Editor in Chief —

JEDDAH, 20 September — Arab News has obtained the photographs of the accused in the terrible hijacking operations which traumatized the United States on Tuesday and unveiled the vulnerability of the US security system. The pictures have been collected from the visa files at US embassies, the US immigration department and schools where the alleged hijackers studied.

The photographs and the information gathered by news reporters, both inside and outside the Kingdom, help shed light on several new points. These add to the unfolding picture of what happened during Tuesday morning's tragedy.

The new information also helps clear clouds of suspicion hanging over the Saudi pilots who were trained in the US and whose names and photographs unfortunately resemble those of some suspects. In the rush to reveal information, these were published without due authentication. According to a US source, the FBI committed some errors in its inquiries at the beginning of the investigation. First, it asked about pilots or trainees at airlines whose names resembled those of the hijackers. This was on the presumption that the hijackers should be pilots or experts in aviation. This led to the confusion about the names of pilots Saeed Al-Ghamdi who turned up in Tunis, Abdul Rahman Al-Amri who was in Jeddah and Waleed A. Al-Shehri, who showed up in Rabat. These three men have been cleared of any association with the alleged hijackers.

The latest details, which are corroborated by the FBI's rectified information, point to the presence of four aviation experts in the list of 19 suspects. The investigations also confirmed that these individuals studied in American aeronautical schools. It is still possible that some of the current suspects did not have any connection with the hijackings but were simply passengers on the planes. In parentheses beside the names are alternate spellings from the FBI.

American Airlines Flight 11 which took off from Boston and smashed into the World Trade Center at 8.45 a.m., was commandeered by the suspected Egyptian, Muhammad Atta, about whom there is plenty of information. He took seat 3C in the first class section and was assisted in the hijacking by Wael Al-Shehri (Wail Alshehri) whose seat was 2A in the same class. His brother Waleed Al-Shehri took a seat next to him. According to local reports, the brothers disappeared from Khamis Mushayt in the south of the Kingdom last December.

The other suspects on the plane were Abdul Aziz Al-Omri (Abdulaziz Alomari), whose name was given as Abdul in the flight manifest and Sattam Al-Saqmi (Satam Al-Suqami) in seat 10B. Arab News' report about the presence of the Saudi pilot Abdul Rahman Al-Omri in Jeddah, safe and sound, made the FBI withdraw his photo and amend the name of the hijacker.

The second plane, United Airlines Flight 175, crashed into the World Trade Center at 9:05 a.m. According to available information the plane was controlled by Marwan Al-Shehhi of the United Arab Emirates.

The FBI believes that Al-Shehhi was helped in the hijacking operation by Fayez Ahmad (Fayez Ahmed). According to local information, a youth called Fayez Ahmad Al-Shehri left his home in Asir last Eid Al-Adha saying he intended to join a holy war or relief operation. The FBI does not have any more information about him nor could we obtain his photograph. The other suspected hijacker on that flight is Ahmad Al-Ghamdi (Ahmed Alghamdi), seat 9D. It has been learned that a young man carrying that name from Beljuraishi, in the south of the Kingdom, studied at the Engineering Faculty in the Umm Al-Qura University. He left his studies in order to participate in jihad in Chechnya last year, according to his father Ibrahim Al-Ghamdi. There are some questions about Ahmad Al-Ghamdi's identity. When his photo was shown to an acquaintance, the man said it was the photo of Ahmad Al-Haznawi

Al-Ghamdi (Ahmed Alhaznawi), a suspect in the hijacked plane that crashed in Pennsylvania. This means the FBI has yet to provide a physical description for the alleged hijacker Ahmad Al-Ghamdi.

The man sitting next to Ahmad Al-Ghamdi on the plane was Hamza Al-Ghamdi about whom FBI has not obtained any significant information. There is local information about a young man called Hamza Saleh Al-Ghamdi, age 20, who left the Kingdom eight months ago for jihad in Chechnya. The final suspect on flight 175 was Muheed Al-Shehri (Mohaid Alshehri) who was in the first class section, seat 2B. There is no local information available about him. The FBI says it was possible that he lived in Delray Beach, Fla.

The third doomed plane, American Airlines Flight 77 took off from Washington DC and struck the Pentagon at 9:39 a.m. According to the FBI the plane was controlled by Hani Hanjour. The basic information known about him is that he was 29 years old, an expert in aeronautics who got his pilot's license in 1999. His friends say he left the UAE last December and his family did not have any more information about him after that time.

The suspects who helped him were Khalid Al-Mehdar, seat 12B, about whom no local information is available. The FBI learned that he could have been staying in Los Angeles or New York and it is thought that his birth date was 5/12/75. American security sources say that Majed Mashan Majeed (Majed Moqed), seat 12B, is a Saudi though no local or other information is available about him. Nawaf Al-Hazmi (Nawaq Alhazmi) and his brother Salim (Salem Alhazmi) were sitting in seats 5F and 5E in the front of the plane and both gave the same date of birth in their visa application, 2/2/81. According to locally available information, the elder brother, Nawaf, 25, left the Kingdom four years ago, telling his parents that he was going for jihad. He later contacted them from Pakistan saying he was on his way to Chechnya. He had only an intermediate school education. Salim, 21, left school about one and a half years ago and informed his parents from Pakistan that he was also going to Chechnya on jihad. Yesterday in Makkah, Muhammad Al Hazmi was shown the pictures of the two accused hijackers and he stated that they were not his sons, Nawaf and Salim.

According to the FBI, Lebanese national Ziyad Jarrah (Ziad Jarrahi) took control of United Airlines Flight 93 which crashed in Stony Creek, Pa. There are several reports about his personality.

Locally there is some information available about a youth called Ahmad Abdullah Al-Naami, 23, from Asir, in the south of the Kingdom. He was a student at the Shariah College of King Khaled University in Abha and disappeared 15 months ago after he performed Umrah. The last time he telephoned his family was four months back. His relatives said he did not have any knowledge of flying while security sources in the US claim he was a pilot. There is some local information about Ahmad Al-Haznawi Al-Ghamdi from Beljuraishi. He left for jihad and his father, an imam at the local mosque, did not have any information about him after that. The photo the FBI is circulating as being that of Ahmad Al-Ghamdi on UA Flight 175 is now thought to be the photo of Ahmad Al-Haznawi Al-Ghamdi.

The last of the suspects is Saeed Al-Ghamdi who has been mixed up by the FBI with the Saudi Arabian Airlines pilot, who carries the same name and has been located in Tunis. The FBI does not have any worthy information about him except that he used the same telephone number and address as Al-Haznawi, Jarrah and Al-Naami.