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Affidavit adds hijack details

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Newly unsealed FBI documents filed in U.S. District Court in Portland reveal new details about the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, including the contents of two suitcases checked by the hijackers at Portland's airport and a flight attendant's frantic cell phone call moments before the crash.

The information, contained in an FBI affidavit, also provides more details on the movements of hijacking suspects Mohamed Atta and Abdulaziz Alomari, as well as how swiftly investigators acted to identify and trace them.

news photo

Staff photo

Sgt. Pete Bellegarde of the Maine National Guard keeps watch Friday at Portland International Jetport. Bellegarde and three other guardsmen have been assigned to patrol the airport to "supplement current security," said Capt. Bill Riley, state commander of Airport Security Operations.

The two men had caught an early morning flight from Portland to Boston Sept. 11 before boarding the American Airlines jet that slammed into the World Trade Center's north tower.

The court documents detail how an airline employee at Logan Airport received a cell phone call from a flight attendant aboard American Airlines Flight 11 shortly before it crashed at 9:08 a.m.

The flight attendant told the unidentified employee that several men of Middle

LUGGAGE LEFT BEHIND

Items recovered and identified from two pieces of luggage checked in by Mohamed Atta include:

- Letters of recommendation and education-related documents, with the names Mohamed

Eastern descent seated in the area of rows 9 and 10 were armed with knives, had assaulted passengers and were hijacking the plane, the FBI affidavit stated.

Atta, who is believed to have piloted the plane when it crashed, was assigned seat 8D, according to the documents. Alomari, the second hijacking suspect, was in 8G. Three other hijackers also boarded the jet at Logan.

The FBI cited its interview with the American Airlines employee in the affidavit supporting its request for a search warrant for a blue rental car that Atta left at Portland International Jetport on the morning of the hijacking.

The affidavit and a list of items found in the 2001 Nissan Altima, with the Massachusetts license plate 3335VI, were among court documents unsealed Thursday at the request of government lawyers.

Special Agent James Lechner, assigned to the Portland FBI office, filed the affidavit the day after the attack. U.S. Magistrate Judge David Cohen unsealed it.

The affidavit also reveals the contents of two pieces of luggage hurriedly checked by Atta and Alomari at the Portland jetport. The luggage was found by investigators at Logan Airport, after it apparently was not transferred onto Flight 11.

Mohamed Elamir Awad Elsayed and Mohamed Mohamed Elamir Awad Elsayed Atta.

- A hand-held electronic flight computer.
- A simulator procedures manual for Boeing 757 and 767 aircraft.
- A copy of the Koran, the Muslim holy book.
- Two videotapes on "air tours" of the Boeing 757 and 747.
- A slide rule flight calculator.
- A handwritten document in Arabic titled "In the name of God all mighty, Death Certificate."

Source: Affidavit filed in U.S. District Court, Portland, and unsealed on Oct. 4, 2001

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The green Travel Gear bag and a black Travelpro bag, which had been checked by Atta, included a slide-rule flight calculator, a hand-held electronic flight computer, a simulator manual for Boeing 757 and 767 aircraft, and two videotapes of "air tours" of jumbo jets.

The luggage also contained a copy of the Koran and a handwritten document in Arabic titled "In the name of God 'all mighty,' Death Certificate."

By the morning after the attack, the document had been preliminarily translated. According to the affidavit, it was written on April 11, 1996, by "Muhammed the son of Muhammed Elamir awad Elsaayed."

Muhammed Elamir awad Elsaayed is one of the many aliases Atta was known to use. The document gave detailed instructions on handling the author's body and possessions after his death.

The phone call by the flight attendant and the discovery of the rental car and luggage enabled investigators to act quickly. They identified and traced the Visa credit card numbers used to buy the airplane tickets of Atta and Alomari.

Investigators also say they found thousands of dollars were charged to the same accounts for rental cars, plane tickets, cash and other items in the Miami and Ft. Lauderdale areas of Florida, where the pair were known to have lived in the months before the attack.

The purchases were made on a SunTrust Visa credit card between July and Sept. 6.

Agents traced Alomari to Vero Beach, Fla., where the property manager knew Alomari and told investigators she had intended to call them, according to the affidavit. Alomari also had a friend who was taking flying lessons, she told investigators. That friend was Atta.

Interviews with an Alamo Rent A Car manager at the Portland jetport showed the two men rented the Nissan Altima in Boston on Sept. 9.

The search of the rental car yielded little to indicate the men's deadly intentions. Evidence collection specialists recovered a Chips Ahoy cookies package, a toothpick, the rental agreement and maps, in addition to fingerprints, hair and other trace evidence.

According to details provided Thursday by the FBI, Atta and Alomari drove to Maine and checked in at the Comfort Inn in South Portland at 5:43 p.m. Sept. 10. Police are investigating a report that the two went to a nearby Pizza Hut between 8 and 9 p.m. They went to a cash machine at 8:31 p.m. and another ATM 10 minutes later.

They obtained directions at a gas station and then drove to Wal-Mart on Payne Road in Scarborough, where Atta entered at 9:22 p.m.

Atta can be seen in a Wal-Mart surveillance video, wearing a small black satchel around his waist.

He is pictured at the entrance, in the electronics section and at the exit, carrying a small bag with his purchase. The FBI would not say what he bought or whether it was central to the crime.

In each of the surveillance photos he is wearing a bold, two-tone sport shirt.

The men checked out of their hotel at 5:33 a.m., entered the jetport parking garage at 5:40 a.m. and checked in at the U.S. Airways counter three minutes later. The two passed the passenger screening checkpoint at 5:45 a.m., barely making their US Airways flight from Portland to Boston, which left at about 6 a.m.

Why Atta, who is believed to have orchestrated the attacks, and Alomari chose to start in Portland is still unknown.

The FBI's plea for more information is yielding fresh leads, with many residents calling in new tips about the pair. Also, Portland police have given FBI agents six months of surveillance video from the jetport. So far, police say they have no evidence the men had been in Portland before the afternoon of Sept. 10.

Knowing the men's precise movements could help determine whether they met here with accomplices.

"We want to try to get people to think if they saw these guys somewhere else or if they saw them talking to somebody else," said Gail Marcinkiewicz, the FBI's Boston spokeswoman.

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