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Web site: Al Qaeda IDs 20th 9/11 hijacker

Saudi militant named in statement

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(CNN) -- Al Qaeda identified a Saudi militant, who was killed in 2004, as the 20th hijacker in the September 11, 2001, attack on the United States, according to a statement published Tuesday on an Islamist Web site.

"Turki bin Fheid al-Muteiri -- Fawaz al-Nashmi -- may God accept him as a martyr (was) the one chosen by Sheikh Osama bin Laden to be the martyrdom-seeker number 20 in the raid on September 11, 2001," the statement said.

Al-Muteiri was not able to join the other hijackers in time for those attacks, the date of which had been pushed forward, the group said without elaborating.

"The (Sept. 11) operation was brought forward for some circumstances that brother Mohamed Atta explained to the general leadership, through brother Ramzi Binalshibh, God free him," the statement added.

Binalshibh, suspected of coordinating the 9/11 attacks, was arrested in 2002 in Karachi, Pakistan. He was once a roommate with Atta, the leader of the September attacks and the hijacker of American Airlines Flight 11 which crashed into the World Trade Center's north tower.

In June 2004, Al-Muteiri was one of four militants killed by Saudi forces during a raid on a residential compound for foreign companies in the oil city of Khobar. The attack killed 22 civilians, including several Westerners.

In its statement, Al Qaeda said it would publish a video of that attack and described the militants as "martyrs." The group has used the Web site for posting statements in the past.

The group's Internet posting also absolved Zacarias Moussaoui of any role in the attacks, according to The Associated Press. "Brother Zacarias Moussaoui had nothing to do with the September 11 attacks, as Sheik Abi Abdullah (bin Laden) mentioned in his last tape," the group's statement said, referring to a May 24 audiotape, the AP reported.

Another Saudi suspected

U.S. investigators have said they believe Mohammed al-Qahtani, another Saudi, was tapped by al Qaeda to be the 20th hijacker.

According to Time magazine, Atta was waiting for al-Qahtani outside the airport in Orlando, Florida, in August 2001, when an immigration officer detained al-Qahtani and denied him entry to the United States.

Al-Qahtani was captured in Afghanistan four months later and is being held at the U.S. military base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Nineteen men commandeered four commercial airliners on September 11, 2001, piloting two into the World Trade Towers and one into the Pentagon. A fourth plane, United Airlines Flight 93, crashed in a Pennsylvania field.

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With the exception of that flight, each plane was hijacked by five men.

Some officials have speculated that al-Qahtani may have been the missing hijacker on Flight 93. Initially, Moussaoui was believed to have had that role, one which he had claimed.

Moussaoui pleaded guilty last year to terrorism conspiracy and is the only person convicted in the United States for having a role in the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Last month, Moussaoui recanted the guilty plea, calling it a "complete fabrication," and explained that "solitary confinement made me hostile toward everyone, and I began taking extreme positions to fight the system." ([Full story](#))

But the judge in the case said Moussaoui's request to set aside his guilty plea was "too late" under federal rules and must be rejected.

He was spared the death penalty but sentenced to six life sentences, to run as two consecutive life terms, in the federal supermax prison at Florence, Colorado.

Nearly 3,000 people died in the attacks.

CNN's Caroline Faraj contributed to this report.

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