

NEWS

**HIJACKER IN CITY SEPT. 10 Used navigation tool to pinpoint WTC site**

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The leader of the Sept. 11 hijackers visited the World Trade Center days before the attack to obtain coordinates for a navigation device, law enforcement officials now believe.

Mohamed Atta, who led the 19 hijackers that morning, was in New York on Sept. 10 and perhaps Sept. 9, according to a law enforcement source familiar with the investigation.

The FBI found transactions that show Atta used a credit card in Manhattan the day before the planes crashed into the World Trade Center. Until recently, law enforcement officials could not figure out why he was here.

New evidence has emerged that leads investigators to believe Atta made a last-minute visit to double-check coordinates of the twin towers and plug them into a sophisticated Global Positioning System device bought by the hijackers, the source said.

Investigators suspect Atta's trip to the Trade Center was necessary because they believe the hijackers were too inexperienced to handle the jumbo jets without help. They know the hijackers bought GPS devices in the months leading up to the attack.

The FBI's New York office declined to comment on what the bureau knows about Atta's final hours.

The unusual flight paths of American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 - which traveled from Boston and into the twin towers - indicates the hijackers used the devices to guide them as they flew across the country toward what was about to become known as Ground Zero, the source said.

Federal prosecutors say that on Aug. 25 - three weeks before the attack - one of Atta's co-conspirators, hijacker Ziad Jarrah, bought GPS components.

Flying equipment bought

Atta himself bought flight deck videos for jumbo jets and several unnamed items from Sporty's Pilot Shop in Ohio in November 2000. Sporty's owners said FBI agents investigating the Sept. 11 attacks asked about a Garmin GPS III Pilot, a hand-held device that simplifies aeronautical navigation.

And Zacarias Moussaoui, the so-called 20th hijacker now indicted on terrorism charges in the Sept. 11 plot, also tried to buy a GPS receiver, prosecutors have said.

With the coordinates of the twin towers entered as the desired destination, the devices would tell the hijackers when they were off course as they flew thousands of feet above the ground.

Experts noted that the hijackers could have obtained coordinates of the towers from available maps, but visiting the site with the device would ensure that the specific data were pinpoint accurate.

It's not clear how long Atta was in Manhattan before the attack. The source would not discuss the credit card transactions here except to say they took place in Manhattan.

Sometime on Sept. 10, the FBI believes, Atta traveled to Boston and rented a blue Nissan sedan. He and Abdulaziz Alomari then drove to Portland, Maine.

Seen on video

They checked into a Comfort Inn in South Portland at 5:43 p.m., then visited two bank ATMs and a Wal-Mart, where they were captured on video.

The morning of Sept. 11, they checked out of the motel at 5:33 a.m., arriving at Portland International Jetport in time for a last-minute boarding of a 5:45 a.m. flight to Boston. They arrived at Boston's Logan Airport just in time to board American Airlines Flight 11, departing at 7:55 a.m., fully fueled, with a scheduled destination of Los Angeles.

Sometime during the flight - as the plane headed west over upstate New York - the FBI believes Atta, Alomari and three others hijacked the jet and turned it south - toward the towers of New York.

Graphic: THE LAST DAYS OF MOHAMED ATTA. SEPT. 10

1 Morning: Mohamed Atta uses credit card in Manhattan. FBI believes he visited World Trade Center, then flew to Boston.

2 Afternoon: Rents car in Boston. Atta and fellow hijacker Abdulaziz Alomari drive from Boston to Portland, Maine.

3 5:43 p.m. Check into Comfort Inn in South Portland. Both seen on ATM video by 8:31 p.m.

SEPT. 11

5:33 a.m. Checks out of Comfort Inn.

5:45 a.m. Atta and Alomari seen on video boarding Boston-bound plane in Portland.

4 7:55 a.m. Board American Airlines Flight 11 in Boston, arriving just before departure.

5 8:46 a.m. Flight 11 crashes into north tower of World Trade Center.

PLOTTING A PATH TO TERROR

How a terrorist could use a Global Positioning System receiver to crash a plane into a building.

Obtain the coordinates of a targeted building. The information is widely available, but a terrorist also could visit the target to confirm the coordinates. Enter the coordinates in the hand-held device.

Steer the plane in accordance with the course that the device automatically plots on its built-in map. The map scrolls as the plane flies.

As the plane nears the target, the pilot can see if the plane goes left or right of its course.