

January 26, 2004



## Al-Qaeda's OKC-9/11 Ties

*by William F. Jasper*

Al-Qaeda ties to the OKC bombing were not mentioned in the state trial of Terry Nichols, yet evidence used by federal prosecutors in recent cases makes the ties obvious.

Zacarias Moussaoui, dubbed the "20th hijacker" by federal prosecutors, would have been released from federal custody before the 9-11 attacks if not for the heroic persistence of field agents in the FBI's Minneapolis office. Agent Coleen Rowley and members of her FBI team carried on a running fight with top FBI and Justice Department officials who tried to stop the Minnesota investigation and prevented a search of his laptop computer until after his fellow conspirators crashed their hijacked planes on September 11.

Moussaoui, a French citizen of Moroccan descent, was arrested by the local FBI agents after investigating a tip from Minnesota flight school operators who were suspicious over the nature of his requests for training on a 747 simulator. He has admitted to being a member of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda terrorist group, but denies that he was part of the 9-11 conspiracy. His trial has been delayed by his erratic behavior and numerous appeals.

There are many important, unanswered questions concerning Moussaoui. For instance: Why have federal officials pointedly ignored publicly available facts showing that most of the \$64,000 he received from al-Qaeda sources was spent in the Oklahoma City area, where he attended the Airman Flight School in nearby Norman and had ties to a top suspect in the 1995 bombing of Oklahoma City's Murrah Building? The largest chunk of Moussaoui's funds, \$35,000, was provided by al-Qaeda paymaster Yazid Sufaat, one of the principal hosts of the secret al-Qaeda planning meeting for 9-11 in Malaysia. Moussaoui, according to federal authorities, was operating under the direction of al-Qaeda mastermind Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, who met in the Philippines with his nephew, World Trade Center bomber Ramzi Yousef, during the same time period that Yousef was meeting with Terry Nichols.

September 11 hijacker Ziad Jarrah's ticket (United Airlines Flight 93) was purchased from a computer terminal at Oklahoma University in Norman. Moussaoui was a frequent visitor to the OU campus, worked out at the OU gym and recruited OU student Hussain Al-Attas. September 11 hijacker Mohammed Atta, a member of al-Qaeda's cell in Hamburg, Germany, visited the same Norman, Oklahoma, flight school that Moussaoui attended.

Fellow Hamburg Cell hijacker Marwan Al-Shehhi also came to the Oklahoma City area, where he got a speeding ticket in 2001. According to the testimony of the owner of a small motel in Oklahoma City, Moussaoui, Atta and Al-Shehhi all

came to his motel together to rent a room about six weeks prior to the 9-11 attacks. Six years earlier, Oklahoma City bombing conspirators Timothy McVeigh and Nichols also were guests at the same motel, along with several Middle Eastern men, weeks prior to the OKC bombing.

### **Terrorist, Informant or *Agent Provocateur*?**

Perhaps the most important and purposely neglected "coincidence" concerning Moussaoui is his connection to convicted felon Melvin Lattimore, a convert to Islam who now goes by the name Majahid Abdulquaadir Menepta. The unwillingness of federal authorities to hold Lattimore/Menepta as a 9-11 suspect in the case is stunning. Equally stunning is the fact that he was never arrested as a suspect in the Oklahoma City bombing. Here are some key facts concerning Menepta tying him to the biggest terrorist events in U.S. history:

- Lattimore/Menepta's credit card was used to help finance the 1993 World Trade Center bombing directed by Ramzi Yousef.
- Federal ATF Agent Jeffrey Whitney has testified in court that one day after the Oklahoma City bombing, an FBI informant told FBI superiors that Menepta should be considered a top suspect in the Oklahoma attack.
- Several employees at Travelers Aid, one block from the Murrah Building, identified Menepta as entering the Travelers Aid office with three other men the day before the Oklahoma City bombing. Two of the men accompanying Menepta were identified as closely resembling associates of McVeigh, and one of the witnesses positively identified the vehicle that the group drove away in as McVeigh's beat-up Mercury Marquis.
- Menepta was a member of a militant mosque in St. Louis and is now a member of a radical mosque in Norman, where he says he saw Moussaoui on a daily basis. According to Oklahoma news accounts, Menepta and Moussaoui were roommates in Norman, while Moussaoui attended flight school.
- Menepta's roommate, Al-Attas, drove Moussaoui from Oklahoma to Minnesota to begin flight school there. When Al-Attas was arrested, Menepta drove to Minnesota and posted \$5,000 bail for his release.
- When Menepta and Al-Attas returned to Norman on August 21, 2001, more than *three weeks before* 9-11, agents from the Oklahoma City FBI office knocked on their apartment door. According to the agents, several men fled the apartment and exited the building before the agents could react. Also, according to FBI documents, 9-11 hijacker Salem Al-Hazmi was seen in Menepta's Norman apartment in April 2001.

- Menepta was arrested one month after the 9-11 attacks as a material witness and possible co-conspirator. Menepta vigorously defended Moussaoui as a "scapegoat."
- Menepta was prosecuted for illegally possessing weapons as a convicted felon. (He had been convicted of robbery in 1971 and served four years in prison.) He was sentenced in 2002 to 15 months in prison and is now back on the street.

*The New American* interviewed Gloria Smith, a manager at Travelers Aid in Oklahoma City, who is positive that Menepta/Lattimore is one of the men who came into her office the day before the Oklahoma City bombing. The men had asked for gasoline money or vouchers and had become loud and argumentative when the receptionist explained that they would have to first provide a valid driver's license. Mrs. Smith stepped out of her office to reinforce her besieged receptionist and to emphasize the company policy requiring photo I.D. before aid could be given. The men left in a huff, and Mrs. Smith watched them through the office window as they got into the car and drove off.

She told *The New American* that the man who had done most of the talking, and who had long, reddish-blond hair, "flipped me 'the finger'" as he got into the car. He had also cursed her in the office, just a few feet from her face, so she had good reason to remember him. She is fairly certain, she says, that the man is James Rosencrans, based on photos she has examined of Rosencrans. Mr. Rosencrans is a former associate of Timothy McVeigh and the Kingman, Arizona, neighbor of Michael Fortier, McVeigh's fellow bombing conspirator who turned witness for the government in exchange for leniency for himself and his wife, Lori Fortier.

Of two things Mrs. Smith is "very certain": The black man in the group who came to her office is Menepta, and the car they drove was McVeigh's Mercury Marquis. She says she got a good look at Menepta. And, she notes, as soon as McVeigh's car appeared on television news broadcasts, she knew instantly it was the one that had been in her parking lot. She recalls: "I said to the receptionist when they pulled out, 'No wonder they didn't give I.D., there's not even a tag on the car.'" When McVeigh was arrested the next day, shortly after the bombing, there was no license plate on the vehicle.

Mrs. Smith and other employees at Travelers Aid were interviewed several times by the FBI, in Mrs. Smith's case about 10 times. One of the things that she says has troubled her most about the investigation is that rather than simply asking her and the other witnesses what and who they saw, on several occasions the agents were very insistent on convincing the witnesses that they could not have seen a black man (Menepta) with the suspects.

At any rate, the FBI Travelers Aid interviews, recorded in written form on the FBI's "302s," should have shown up in the documents that the government was

required to turn over to the defense teams in the McVeigh and Nichols trials. They never were turned over, and now they seem to have disappeared.

It's understandable that Nichols' defense team would not want to open up the Oklahoma City-Middle East connection, since so much of it leads to their client. But why have federal officials gone to such extraordinary lengths to obstruct every effort to expose these connections? And why are they protecting Lattimore/Menepta? Is he a terrorist, a federal informant, an *agent provocateur* — or all of the above