

Death in Venice (Florida)

By Daniel Hopsicker

Flight School Owner Has Shady Ties

EXCLUSIVE-Venice, FL, Sept. 28, 2001—Authorities are probing the European business associations of a Venice flight school owner, whose school at the Venice airport trained the nucleus of foreign national terrorist pilots, looking for possible links to international organized crime groups, reported by the San Francisco Chronicle on Sunday to be laundering large sums of drug money for major terrorist organizations. Organized crime is said to launder billions for terrorists.

Three of the airliners involved in the September 11 terrorist attack—two in Manhattan, and one wrested to the ground over Pennsylvania—were piloted by terrorists who had trained at two flight schools at the Venice, Florida airport.

Rudi Dekkers was widely interviewed on television after the disaster expressing outrage over the terrorist attacks, and disclaiming any responsibility for the actions of former students. But he may have been lying in his portrayal of his association with the men who became eventual terrorist pilots, when he repeatedly stated they were people who had just basically “walked in” off the street into his school at the tiny Venice airport.

Instead, Rudi Dekkers was actively marketing his flight school in Germany at the exact same time Mohamed Atta and his terrorist cell left Hamburg and moved to Florida, where several immediately enrolled in his school. Both ringleaders, Mohamed Atta and Marwan Alshehri, each believed to have piloted a plane into the World Trade Center Towers, learned to fly at Huffman Aviation flight school in Venice, FL.

Two years ago, Dekkers began an aggressive European “marketing” campaign, just after purchasing the flight school, reported the local Venice Gondolier at the time. “The world is my working place,” Dekkers boasted to the paper. “I won’t forget Venice, but I’m going to market throughout the world, Germany, France, Belgium. That’s our goal, to get people to come in here from all over the world.” The new owner of Huffman Aviation has a global presence

His plans were so successful that they had soon changed the entire makeup of his flight school. Foreign nationals came to account for over 80 per cent of the student pilots enrolled with him. Rudi Dekkers’ flight schools (he has another down the road in Naples) are training 400 foreign nationals a year.

According to German prosecutors, after Atta moved from Germany to train with Dekkers’ flight school in Venice, at least four other members of the same terrorist cell moved there to train as

pilots as well. Could Atta have recruited by Dekkers, and not the other way around? Officials involved in the September 11 investigation said early this week that the key to unraveling the plot might lie in Germany, not the United States.

In press interviews, Dekkers has inferred that student pilots were just showing up at his flight school and thrusting fistfuls of dollars (\$10,000 of them) across his counter. But what if it was the other way around? What if Mohammed didn't go to the mountain, but that the mountain, in the guise of the portly Dekkers, came to Mohammed? If Dekkers was actively marketing in Germany when the terrorists moved to the U.S., he bears closer scrutiny . . .

"Huffman Aviation Inc. has had problems in the last few months with the city of Venice, Sarasota County and the state of Florida, but the school keeps flying," the Venice Gondolier reported.

Rudi wasn't paying his rent out at the airport. Huffman rent is late again, the paper headlined on May 12. "When Huffman Aviation paid three months of overdue rent last Friday, company president Rudi Dekkers said the rent wouldn't be late again. "No, we won't have this any more," he said during an interview last Friday."

Headlines in the Venice Gondolier about Dekkers grew even less flattering as time went by: City threatens lessee with eviction, again.

"Huffman Aviation Inc. is again on notice from the city to catch up on its rent payments or face eviction from the airport," the paper wrote on June 9.

Nothing had changed by mid-summer. Huffman rent late, again, the paper reported in mid-July. "For the sixth straight month, Huffman Aviation Inc. has failed to pay its rent to the city on time."

A month before the September 11 tragedy, Huffman finally paid the rent.

What makes this airing of Rudi's dirty linen of note is that while Dekkers was receiving this humiliating deadbeat coverage he was simultaneously launching a commuter air taxi service in, a venture for which he had been provided both planes and pilots by a Gig Harbor, WA, man purportedly linked to current mob activities in Portland, OR. Richard Boehlke "owns" Harbor Air, or what's left of it, and he was simultaneously actively involved in an alleged massive looting of workers pension funds in Portland. Hardest hit (\$60 million) was the pension fund of the laborers.

While supplying both the planes and the pilots for the new Florida Air, Boehlke's Harbor Air was simultaneously going bankrupt. So were two other of Boehlke's companies, Crossings Aviation, and Crossings Development, a Portland condo deal for which Boehlke borrowed \$17 million, mostly unpaid, through Capital Consultants, a pension fund management company that was in the midst of somehow "losing" \$320 million dollars.

Worst hit were the pension funds of laborers and secretaries. Some were so badly looted that

experts thought some workers would have to extend their careers by another decade to receive the level of benefits they'd have had if their money not been made to disappear in ludicrously bad deals like Richard Boehlke's. *Playing Catch Up in Retirement*.

"Boehlke would do anything for money, he was so desperate," said an aviation executive who had witnessed Boehlke's descent. "I'm surprised he hasn't skipped the country by now, what with all the trouble he's gotten himself into farting around with those Mafia boys down in Portland."

Another recipient of the pension fund largesse is Alvin Malnick, whom *Readers Digest* once called "Meyer Lansky's heir as head of Organized Crime." If one is looking for "international organized crime groups," they don't get much bigger than the mob.

Little known, and even stranger, is the fact that Alvin Malnick, who avows only to being a Jewish lawyer from Miami, has extremely close ties-family ties, actually, to a prominent prince of the Saudi Royal Family.

In fairness it must be stated: whether any of these associations is germane to answering questions about Dekkers' role in recruiting and training foreign national pilots is at this point unknown. But it's a brand new world we have all been living in since September 11, 2001. No one is immune from pointed questions that lead to answers about an international network helping the terrorist cadre that was able to move so freely in our midst.

When President Bush said all evidence pointed to Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda organization as responsible for the attacks, he also equated the Islamic group to the Mafia, stating "Al-Qaeda is to terror what the Mafia is to crime."

Our question is do the two ever meet?

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