

Was the CIA running a terrorist flight school?

By Daniel Hopsicker

November 7, 2001

Your “legend” is your cover story, in intelligence parlance; the lie that holds together long enough to let you skip the country . . .

The legends of Rudi Dekkers as “flight school owner” and Mohamed Atta as “fanatic Islamic fundamentalist” have been fraying at the edges since the collapse of the World Trade Center.

Still, they may have lasted long enough to do the job for which they were intended. With a war on, no one seems to be losing sleep over the fact that the version of events currently being peddled about the Sept. 11 disaster relies on what one law enforcement source wryly calls “the Magic Dutch Boy” theory.

In the Kennedy assassination, “the Magic Bullet” theory allowed the FBI to apply Lee Harvey Oswald’s “lone nut gunman” tag. The current “lone nut cadre theory” of the FBI for the Sept 11 disaster, goes this latest reasoning, will only fly through use of a similarly-twisted logic trail, one now being called “the Magic Dutch Boy theory.”

It goes like this:

Both of the pilots who guided planes into the twin towers of the World Trade Center had trained at Rudi Dekkers’ Huffman Aviation when they first got to America. Dekkers, a Dutch national, had only recently purchased the flight school located at the small out of the way Venice, Florida, Airport.

The terrorist duo practicing touch and goes in the humid September air on Florida’s Gulf coast were soon joined by a third student terrorist pilot, the one on UAL Flight 93. He signed up at the Florida Flight Training Center almost next door to Dekkers’ Huffman Aviation, making it a terrorist trifecta out at the unsuspecting Venice Airport.

Just like Dekkers’ Huffman Aviation, this second flight school had also just changed owners. And the new owner of this flight school, too, turns out to be a Dutch national. His name is Arne Kruithof from Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

The magic Dutch boy theory says that the appearance of these two foreign nationals, both Dutch, purchasing flight schools at the same time at the same airport is merely a “magical” coincidence . . .

Because if the appearance of a second Dutch national purchasing a flight school right as the terrorist cadre show up isn’t just a strange coincidence belonging on Ripley’s Believe it Or Not . . . then they’re hiding what looks unmistakably like a covert intelligence operation down in Venice.

It being Florida, that means the CIA is reputed to be active in the state.

“Two Dutch boys buying adjacent flight schools which shortly thereafter get ‘overrun’ by terrorists is one damn Dutch boy too many,” stated our law enforcement source. “It’s untidy.”

Was the CIA running a covert, or black, operation out of the Venice Airport? Might they have been training pilots for bin Laden in an effort to penetrate his organization that went more-than-just-slightly-horribly awry?

Will we someday be adding “Magic Dutch Boy” to the “Magic Bullet” Wing of the Secret History Museum?

The local Venice Gondolier two days after the disaster ran a huge black headline reading: “Evil in our own backyard.”

Underneath it they had placed a picture of Rudi Dekkers facing a phalanx of TV cameras out at the Venice Airport. The irony of the juxtaposition did not go unnoticed.

“At first everyone just thought it was kind of amusing,” an aviation employee at the airport said, “because it made Dekkers look like he was the ‘evil’ in our backyard, which the newspaper probably didn’t mean.”

Pause. “And then it hit me. Dekkers had purchased his aviation school at just about the time the terrorist pilots moved into town and began their lessons.”

Is Rudi Dekkers just an innocent aviation executive whose flight school received the most unfortunate business publicity since Ryder Trucks at the time of the Oklahoma City bombing? Or is there a darker reality lurking behind his widely promoted public persona?

Reporters swarmed the Venice airport in the days after the identity of the terrorist pilots and their relationship with the local flight schools became known. An analysis of their stories reveals that there were two different versions of events being given by flight school representatives; versions that were in disagreement even on basic chronology, such as which of their schools the terrorists attended first.

A flight instructor at Jones Aviation Flying Service, Inc., which operates from the Venice-adjacent Sarasota Bradenton International Airport, told the Associated Press that Atta and Al-Shehhi arrived in “September or October” and asked to be given flight training.

Jones Instructor Ivan Chirivella said the two came to Jones Aviation from Huffman Aviation in Venice. Chirivella said he spent four hours almost every morning from September to October last year instructing Mohamed Atta, 33, and Marwan Yousef Alshehhi, 23.

But Rudi Dekkers at Huffman Aviation, who has been getting all the national face-time, had been telling a different tale. They signed up at Huffman in late July, he stated in innumerable interviews, and stayed until December or January. The two cadre principals paid \$20,000 apiece at the rate of \$1000 a week.

Dekkers says the terrorist were at his school, located a half an hour south of Sarasota, down the Tamiami Trail, an old Indian path that wends through the mangrove swamps of Florida’s Gulf Coast, at the same time the two Jones’ Aviation instructors say the terrorist duo were flying four hours every morning with them.

Dekkers told his new buddy Larry King, and anyone else with a microphone who would listen, that when Atta & Co. showed up at his school they were already grumbling about a bad experience at another school. This directly contradicts the story the two Jones instructors gave reporters.

Why can't the flight instructors at the two schools get their stories straight? Did Atta and his sidekick attend both flight schools at once?

Here's another journalistic snapshot that gets a little blurry when you look at it a little closer:

In their inimitable British tabloid style, London's Mirror TV filmed a segment at the Venice Airport two days after the disaster, which they slugged: "IN THE COCKPIT WHERE A HIJACKER LEARNED TO FLY!"

"THIS is the cockpit of the light aircraft in which hijackers Mohamed Atta and Marwan Al-Shehhi learned to fly," the Mirror's American correspondent told British viewers.

"Under the guidance of instructor Mark Mickart I went through the same pre-flight checks and maneuvers on the white single-engine Cessna 172, terrorists Atta and Al-Shehhi had done on July 9."

"The same preflight checklists!"

Wow. Kitsch history. What is of interest is the flight instructor, Mark Mikarts, busily showing the audience how the terrorists checked off.

Mark Mikarts used to be somebody else.

His real name is Mark Wierdak. The only relative of his we were able to locate is a half-sister. She works in the British consulate in Venezuela. When we got in touch with her to ask about her "flight instructor" brother's new name all she would say was, "We used to share the same father."

Pilot Mikarts also flies out of the Sarasota-Bradenton Airport for a Christian missionary group called Agape Flights, which describe themselves as an independent ministry fighting disease, poverty and illiteracy by serving missionaries in the Western hemisphere and beyond. They have been running a weekly flight down and back to the Dominican Republic for more than 20 years.

How many guys using aliases fly American missionary flights servicing the Caribbean Basin? Mikarts is a perfect example of why things seem a little out of skew at the flight schools at the Venice Airport.

"Rudi's greedy, and when you're greedy you can be used for something," a Special Operations Commando leader from the nearby McDill Air Force Base told us.

"I've always had some suspicions about the way he breezed into town out of nowhere," said one observer at the Venice Airport. "Just too many odd little things. For example, he has absolutely no aviation background as far as anyone can tell. And he evidently had no use for, nor knowledge of, FAA rules and regs."

These statements struck us as strange. "Breezed into town out of nowhere" and "no aviation background" doesn't square with the portrayal of Dekkers in newspaper clippings announcing his

purchase of the flight school two years ago, which stressed his broad business aviation experience in neighboring Naples.

“Ambassador Airways owners Rudi Dekkers, 42, Naples, president, and Wally Hilliard, 67, also from Naples, were both said to be experienced pilots.” Their Ambassador Airways was said to “own several jet aircraft including Lear jets.” The new owners of Huffman Aviation have global presence

The friends of Rudi Dekkers

Lack of proper aviation background was also a comment heard about Dekkers in an interview this week with Richard Boehlke, a partner of Dekkers in a recent airline venture called Florida Air. Boehlke accuses Dekkers of not having enough experience to run a commuter airline and training facilities: Portland Native’s Brush with Terror

“He (Dekkers) was an oxymoron the day I met him,” Boehlke told Portland reporter Eric Mason. “I can’t believe anyone handed him millions of dollars to run a business he had no experience in.”

Boehlke leveled another charge in his interview, stating Dekkers had suggested that his students hone their skills by acting as co-pilots on commuter routes in Florida and elsewhere. Boehlke said Dekkers urged him to allow students to ride-along as co-pilots on scheduled airline flights, which is illegal.

“They could have been terrorists on a ride-along!” Boehlke told reporter Eric Mason of Portland, Oregon, radio station K-Pam. He said a “chill” runs through him when he thinks about it.

Said an FAA spokesman, about Dekkers’ proposed scheme, “Having a student without enough hours or that type rating as a co-pilot is not legal.”

Boehlke said, “I was amazed knowing how close we’d been to that training environment. It would have given them legal access to cockpits and other secure areas in airports across the country.”

Richard Boehlke’s claim to be “amazed” is like Capt. Renaud telling Bogie in Casablanca that he’s shocked—shocked!—to find gambling going on, while pocketing his winnings at the same time.

For the 53-year-old Boehlke, the sun-drenched parties aboard his personal Grumman Albatross with friends in the San Juan Islands are supposed to be over. His huge flying boat sits for sale at the Tacoma Narrows Airport in Gig Harbor, along with other assets from his troubled aviation company. He is not however running noticeably short of cash, observers note.

Boehlke was hot news because of his proximity to terrorist flight school owner Dekkers and his concurrent participation in what the Securities & Exchange Commission has called “the biggest fraud by an investment manager in U.S. history.”

“Ex-money manager charged with fraud” was the headline in an Oct. 6 AP story. A federal grand jury indicted Jeffrey Grayson whose firm “collapsed” losing hundreds of millions of pension investments. Grayson was charged with mail fraud, conspiracy, money laundering, witness tampering and paying a former union chief union trust funds in a scheme that cost Grayson’s clients over \$355 million in failed and fraudulent investments.

Might the two stories have a connection?

Might the same “international network” responsible for stealing almost a half billion dollars have been simultaneously training terrorist air corps in Florida?

Boehlke got \$25 million to build a condominium project that court documents reveal cost only half that amount.

Before Dekker’s airline partner Richard Boehlke ever broke ground on his failed project, someone had already pocketed \$13 million.

“I’ve known Jeff Grayson (Capital Consultants’ former CEO) for 12 years,” Boehlke said. “I have never known him to have any shady or, you know, some have asked me about . . . Mafia affiliations.”

There. He said the “M” word.

“Boehlke would do anything for money, he was so desperate,” an aviation executive who had witnessed Boehlke’s descent told us. “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 grateful beneficiary of the money they were giving away in Portland, Oregon, from the retirement pension funds of the little people—laborers and secretaries—was a Miami Florida man whose complex web of international connections is legendary.

Alvin Malnik has been called “Meyer Lansky’s heir” as the head of organized crime so often in print that he should put it on his business cards.

But it is not Malnick’s gangster ties that make your jaw drop: it’s his connection with the Saudi Royal Family.

Jewish “gangster” Alvin Malnick’s son is married to the daughter of a leading prince of the Middle Eastern kingdom’s founding family.

“The Saudi prince not only blessed the marriage, but regularly works with the US organized crime associates,” states one report on the connection. “The Saudi king would frequently send his private 747 to Florida to pick up Malnik and his associates, so they could conduct business on the plane away from prying eyes.”

A Saudi King, A Mob Boss, and a Terrorist Drug Kingpin

“Frankly, we can’t differentiate between terrorism and organized crime and drug dealing,” Assistant Attorney General Michael Chertoff told the Senate Banking Committee hearings about the terrorists’ money trail in the aftermath of the Sept 11 disaster.

Terrorist groups have been implicated in the \$360 billion a year international narcotics trade, directed by organized crime, says Judge Thierry Cretin of the European Anti-Fraud Office.

As recently as six weeks ago, crime families were being seen as particularly important for terrorist groups involved in the acquisition and transport of arms, like in the case of a Jersey City man, accused

of attempting to smuggle Stinger missiles out of the country to Osama bin Laden, who is now reportedly helping federal agents investigating the Sept 11 terrorist attacks.

If the deal he got caught doing was typical, insiders say, it was oil and heroin up front for guns and training.

Oil and heroin upfront for arms and training. Now there's a story we haven't heard about yet in the roiling skies above the terrorist flight schools on the Gulf Coast of Florida.

And no one is saying anything about the proximity to the terrorist's training sites of nearby Tampa, Florida, long the domain of reputed mob boss and heroin kingpin Santo Trafficante.

Daniel Hopsicker is the author of "Barry & 'the boys,' The CIA, the Mob & America's Secret History"
<<http://www.barryandtheboys.com/>>

Copyright © 1998–2001 Online Journal™. All rights reserved.