

compel his wife to convert to Islam. Essabar's parents were said to have made repeated but unsuccessful efforts to sway him from this lifestyle. Shortly before the 9/11 attacks, he would travel to Afghanistan to communicate the date for the attacks to the al Qaeda leadership.⁸⁴

- Mounir el Motassadeq, another Moroccan, came to Germany in 1993, moving to Hamburg two years later to study electrical engineering at the Technical University. A witness has recalled Motassadeq saying that he would kill his entire family if his religious beliefs demanded it. One of Motassadeq's roommates recalls him referring to Hitler as a "good man" and organizing film sessions that included speeches by Bin Ladin. Motassadeq would help conceal the Hamburg group's trip to Afghanistan in late 1999.⁸⁵
- Abdelghani Mzoudi, also a Moroccan, arrived in Germany in the summer of 1993, after completing university courses in physics and chemistry. Mzoudi studied in Dortmund, Bochum, and Muenster before moving to Hamburg in 1995. Mzoudi described himself as a weak Muslim when he was home in Morocco, but much more devout when he was back in Hamburg. In April 1996, Mzoudi and Motassadeq witnessed the execution of Atta's will.⁸⁶

During the course of 1999, Atta and his group became ever more extreme and secretive, speaking only in Arabic to conceal the content of their conversations.⁸⁷ When the four core members of the Hamburg cell left Germany to journey to Afghanistan late that year, it seems unlikely that they already knew about the planes operation; no evidence connects them to al Qaeda before that time. Witnesses have attested, however, that their pronouncements reflected ample predisposition toward taking some action against the United States.⁸⁸ In short, they fit the bill for Bin Ladin, Atef, and KSM.

Going to Afghanistan

The available evidence indicates that in 1999, Atta, Binalshibh, Shehhi, and Jarrah decided to fight in Chechnya against the Russians. According to Binalshibh, a chance meeting on a train in Germany caused the group to travel to Afghanistan instead. An individual named Khalid al Masri approached Binalshibh and Shehhi (because they were Arabs with beards, Binalshibh thinks) and struck up a conversation about jihad in Chechnya. When they later called Masri and expressed interest in going to Chechnya, he told them to contact Abu Musab in Duisburg, Germany. Abu Musab turned out to be Mohamedou Ould Slahi, a significant al Qaeda operative who, even then, was well known to U.S. and German intelligence, though neither government apparently knew he was operating in Germany in late 1999. When telephoned by Binalshibh and Shehhi, Slahi reportedly invited these promising recruits to come see him in Duisburg.⁸⁹

Binalshibh, Shehhi, and Jarrah made the trip. When they arrived, Slahi