

began to make purchases suggesting that the planning was coming to an end. In mid-August, for example, they bought small knives that may actually have been used in the attacks. On August 22, moreover, Jarrah attempted to purchase four GPS units from a pilot shop in Miami. He was able to buy only one unit, which he picked up a few days later when he also purchased three aeronautical charts.¹⁷⁰

Perhaps most significant, however, was the purchase of plane tickets for September 11. On August 23, Atta again flew to Newark, probably to meet with Hazmi and select flights. All 19 tickets were booked and purchased between August 25 and September 5.¹⁷¹

It therefore appears that the attack date was selected by the third week of August. This timing is confirmed by Binalshibh, who claims Atta called him with the date in mid-August. According to Binalshibh, Atta used a riddle to convey the date in code—a message of two branches, a slash, and a lollipop (to non-Americans, 11/9 would be interpreted as September 11). Binalshibh says he called Atta back to confirm the date before passing it to KSM.¹⁷²

KSM apparently received the date from Binalshibh in a message sent through Binalshibh's old Hamburg associate, Zakariya Essabar. Both Binalshibh and KSM claim that Essabar was not privy to the meaning of the message and had no foreknowledge of the attacks. According to Binalshibh, shortly after the date was chosen, he advised Essabar and another Hamburg associate, Said Bahaji, that if they wanted to go to Afghanistan, now was the time because it would soon become more difficult. Essabar made reservations on August 22 and departed Hamburg for Karachi on August 30; Bahaji purchased his tickets on August 20 and departed Hamburg for Karachi on September 3.¹⁷³

Binalshibh also made arrangements to leave for Pakistan during early September, before the attacks, as did Ali and Hawsawi, the plot facilitators in the UAE. During these final days, Binalshibh and Atta kept in contact by phone, email, and instant messaging. Although Atta had forbidden the hijackers to contact their families, he apparently placed one last call to his own father on September 9. Atta also asked Binalshibh to contact the family of one hijacker, pass along goodbyes from others, and give regards to KSM. Jarrah alone appears to have left a written farewell—a sentimental letter to Aysel Senguen.¹⁷⁴

Hazmi, however, may not have been so discreet. He may have telephoned his former San Diego companion, Mohdar Abdullah, in late August. Several bits of evidence indicate that others in Abdullah's circle may have received word that something big would soon happen. As noted earlier, Abdullah's behavior reportedly changed noticeably. Prior to September 11, both he and Yazeed al Salmi suddenly became intent on proceeding with their planned marriages. One witness quotes Salmi as commenting after the 9/11 attacks, "I knew they were going to do something, that is why I got married." Moreover, as of August 2001, Iyad Kreiweh and other employees at the Texaco station where Hazmi had worked suddenly were anticipating attention from law enforcement