

According to FBI documents, on August 15, an employee at Pan Am called the FBI's Minneapolis field office because he and other employees were suspicious of Moussaoui, who met none of the usual qualifications for Pan Am students. The FBI's Minneapolis field office opened an international terrorism investigation and determined that, since Moussaoui had been authorized to stay in the United States only until May 22, 2001, he was no longer in proper legal status.

On the same day the Minneapolis field office learned about Moussaoui, it asked both the CIA and the FBI's legal attaché in Paris for any information about Moussaoui and informed FBI Headquarters of the investigation. The FBI Headquarters agent who was responsible for the contact suggested that the Minneapolis field office put Moussaoui under surveillance. However, a Minneapolis field office supervisory agent testified to the Joint Inquiry that:

. . . [m]y background in the criminal arena suggests that when a violation occurs and you can stop further or potential criminal activity, you act on that. So that is exactly what I instructed the agents to do. . . . Because I didn't want him to get any additional time on a flight simulator that would allow him to have the knowledge that we could no longer take back from him to operate an aircraft.

INS agents took Moussaoui into custody on August 16 because his authority to stay in the United States had expired. Moussaoui declined to consent to a search of his belongings. On Saturday, August 18, the Minneapolis field office sent a detailed memorandum to an agent in the Radical Fundamentalist Unit (RFU) at FBI Headquarters describing the investigation.

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The memorandum stated that Moussaoui had two knives, padded gloves and shin guards in his possession when he was arrested; had told his roommate that "true Muslims must prepare themselves to fight;" and had begun exercise and martial arts training. In addition, the memorandum stated that the Minneapolis field office believed that Moussaoui and his roommate were part of a larger international radical fundamentalist group. Based on Moussaoui's "possession of weapons and his preparation through physical training for violent confrontation," the Minneapolis field office stated it had reason to believe that Moussaoui, his roommate, "and others yet unknown," were conspiring to seize control of an airplane.