

FBI NOT ASKING VA. POLICE UNITS FOR HELP

by Paul Bradley, And Calvin R. Trice
Richmond Times-Dispatch Staff Writers
December 5, 2001

Each weekday morning at 8:45, senior police officials from around Northern Virginia get on the phone with the FBI and exchange information and intelligence about possible terrorists.

Federal agencies such as the Customs Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service also join in the conference call.

"They share information with us, and we share information with them," said Alexandria police spokesman Amy Bertsch. "We have regular contact with the FBI, and we're comfortable with the level of cooperation. We've worked with them in the past, and we know their limitations."

While some of the Virginia residents who have been detained or arrested by federal authorities are being held in the Alexandria city jail, the FBI has not asked city police for help, Bertsch said.

It's the same story all over Virginia. While the FBI is asking local police departments across the country to help with picking up and questioning people in connection with the Sept. 11 attacks, Virginia police departments aren't among them.

That may be because the FBI doesn't need them.

The Richmond Office of the FBI, which covers most of the state except Hampton Roads and the Northern Virginia area, has not detained, questioned or arrested anyone on the U.S. Department of Justice's 5,000-name master list compiled since Sept. 11, said spokesman Lawrence Barry.

However, Barry added, "We've obviously talked to hundreds of people in connection with the whole case, just in terms of following leads and that kind of thing. The Richmond office alone has had hundreds of leads since Sept. 11."

"A relatively small number of interviews from that list of 5,000 will be occurring in the Eastern District," said Paul J. McNulty, U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. "These are individuals who are noncitizens who may have some information that is useful. *.*. I think it's less than 100 in the total area of the Eastern District."

However, other authorities said the number of people being interviewed in the Eastern District is closer to 140. All but a handful of those people are located in Northern Virginia, and those interviews are being handled through

the Alexandria offices of the FBI and McNulty's U.S. attorney's office.

Police departments are taking steps on their own to prepare for future attacks.

Alexandria and Fairfax County have established new intelligence units to assess information coming in from the field. Warren Carmichael, spokesman for the Fairfax County police, said the county unit includes seven officers.

"Before September 11, there was no central location to analyze and disseminate the information," he said. "But now we do. Now we can expand on the volume and the kind of information we can exchange."

Police departments in other states, notably Oregon, have balked at helping the FBI, citing state laws and concerns with constitutional rights. And there is growing concern in some quarters over civil liberties.

That hasn't come up here.

"It's not a matter of principle at all, it's a matter of law, I think. And I'm going to follow the law," said Col. Carl Baker, Chesterfield's police chief. "If I have an electronic message that says detain and hold for the FBI, I'm going to detain and hold."

"If it says detain for questioning, I'll detain for questioning," he added. "If it says voluntary detention for interview by the FBI, then I'm going to ask the subject if he'd like to be interviewed by the FBI because they want to talk to him."

So far, Baker said, his department hasn't detained, questioned or arrested anyone being sought by federal authorities.

Neither has Henrico County police, said spokesman Tom Shumate. "We have had almost daily contact with the FBI and we have not arrested or detained for questioning anyone on that list," he said.

Law enforcement in the central Shenandoah Valley already keeps close ties with federal authorities in tracking down undocumented aliens among the region's relatively large migrant work force.

Most foreign-born residents are Central Americans who provide vital labor to the area's agribusiness.

Still, the Harrisonburg Police Department would cooperate fully with federal terrorism investigations, said Sgt. Kevin Lanoue, the department's crime prevention supervisor.

"Of course we're going to help out - that's what we get paid to do," Lanoue said.

In all, nine people in Northern Virginia have been arrested by federal officials, though none has been directly linked to the terrorist attacks

Five of the nine have been charged with assisting terrorists or suspected terrorists obtain fraudulent Virginia driver's licenses or identification cards by exploiting a now-closed loophole in Virginia Department of Motor Vehicle rules. Prosecutors believe four of the five were nothing more than unwitting accomplices. All were Salvadoran immigrants.

The fifth, Agus Budiman, a 31-year-old illegal immigrant from Indonesia, is being exhaustively investigated because he knew terrorist ringleader Mohammed Atta when they both lived in Germany. According to the FBI, Atta flew the first hijacked plane that slammed into the World Trade Center. Budiman also was an acquaintance of Marwan Al-Shehhi, who flew the second plane into the WTC, according to the FBI.

Budiman's Alexandria address also appeared on a visa application filed by Ziad Samir Jarrah, whom the FBI believes was at the controls of United Airlines Flight 93 when it crashed into a field near Shanksville, Pa. The same address appeared on two unsuccessful visa applications filed by Ramzi Binalshibh, who has been named by the FBI as a would-be 20th hijacker.

Through his lawyer, Budiman has denied any connection with the attacks.

The FBI is also investigating whether another Alexandria man is connected to the terrorist attacks. Mohamed Abdi, 44, who was arrested Sept. 25, is due to stand trial on unrelated forgery charges on Dec. 17.

But authorities are interested in Abdi, a naturalized U.S. citizen originally from Somalia. This is because the name "Muhumed" and Abdi's telephone number were found written on a Washington area map inside a car registered to one of the hijackers who crashed a hijacked jet into the Pentagon.

The car, registered to Nawaq Alhazmi, was found in the daily parking lot at Washington Dulles International Airport. Abdi's lawyer said his client is not connected to the terrorist attacks.

The other three people charged face immigration violations.

Roxanne Kopke, 57, a former Fairfax County resident, was arrested in Florida as was her 22-year-old husband, Saber Hassan Abassi, an Egyptian citizen. The two have been charged with lying to INS agents investigating the legitimacy of the couple's marriage. Law enforcement officials became suspicious of Abassi because he had expressed an interest in attending flight school, according to his lawyer. Both are being held in the Alexandria jail.

Khalid al Draibi, a Saudi Arabian citizen, is charged with making false statements on his visa application and falsely claiming he was an American citizen when he was arrested Sept. 11 near Dulles International Airport.

Though Draibi had taken flight lessons and flight manuals were found in his car, officials now believe he is not connected to the terrorist attacks. He remains in detention.

In October, a Department of Motor Vehicles investigator arrested two Afghanistan-born Harrisonburg residents on misdemeanor charges related to false information given to obtain a commercial driver's license.

The case attracted local news coverage when confusion arose over the identity of one of the suspects. Authorities discovered no links with terrorism. However, his lawyer, John Q. Adams, had to make two appeals to have a bond set for him.

A Harrisonburg Circuit judge eventually set a \$10,000 cash bond for his client - an unusually high bond that the suspect's family managed to post, Adams said.

"It was an ordinary case," Adams said. "But it was kind of unusual because it was right after the [terror attacks] and his identity was difficult to pin down."

Charged in Virginia

104 people have been charged with federal crimes in connection with the Sept. 11 attacks. Federal authorities have released 93 names; the names of 11 people were not released because they are sealed by court order. Of those whose names were released, 11 were charged in Virginia.

Mohamed Abdi: - Forging housing subsidy checks. His phone number was found in the car of suspected hijacker, Nawaf Al Hazmi, which was left at Dulles.

Agus Budiman: - Using false identification.

Saber Abassi: - Passport and visa fraud.

Roxanne Kopke: - Passport and visa fraud.

Luis Marinez-Flores: - Unlawful production of identification documents. Aiding and abetting. Helped two hijackers obtain Virginia identification.

Herbert Villalobos: - Unlawful production of identification documents. Aiding and abetting. Helped two hijackers obtain Virginia identification.

Kenys A. Galicia: - Making fraudulent identification documents. Aiding and abetting.

Victor M. Lopez-Flores: - Aiding and abetting. Assisting individuals in obtaining false identification documents.

Traci Elaine Upshur: - Illegal possession of a firearm.

Vincente Rafael Pierre: - Illegal possession of a firearm. Fraudulently obtaining a firearm. Knowingly violating firearms regulations.