

MFR 04019367

**Memorandum for the Record**

Event: Interview of Saud al-Rasheed

Location: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Date: 24 February 2004

Access Restrictions: None

Commission Participants: Dieter Snell  
Raj De

Non-Commission Participants: 9/11 Law Enforcement Privacy

Foreign Representatives: Major Habib (Mabahith)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Mabahith)

Interpreter: 9/11 Law Enforcement Privacy

Prepared By: Raj De

Reviewed By: Dieter Snell

---

The interview of Saud al-Rasheed commenced at about 3:40 pm and concluded at about 6:50 pm. The interview took place at the Conference Palace in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Because the FBI had an interview request pending for al-Rasheed, Det. Sassok took the lead during this interview. Commission staff followed-up with additional questions as needed. Al-Rasheed used an interpreter for the entire interview (for both questions and answers).

After the introductions, al-Rasheed confirmed that his full name is Saud Abdul Aziz al-Rasheed and that he was born in Riyadh in Hijra 1401. When asked if he had any other names, al-Rasheed said he also was known as Abdul Aziz. Although he initially denied having any other names, when asked specifically whether he was referred to as "Faruq" or "Faruq al-Najdi," al-Rasheed confirmed that he used those names too. Al-Rasheed said his father's name is Abdul Aziz al-Rasheed, and his mother's name is Noura.

Al-Rasheed completed his education up to the ninth grade. He said that he stopped going to school as a result of the divorce of his parents. He later applied to the military, but was not accepted. He enrolled in computer courses for approximately six months. Ultimately he obtained a job as a typist at the Education Ministry. He stayed with this job for about one year, while he was 17-18 years old, before leaving for Afghanistan in early 2000.

~~SECRET~~  
Commission Sensitive

Al-Rasheed said that he had no stability in his living situation while growing up. After the divorce of his parents, he sometimes lived with his maternal uncles. Often, however, he would move from place to place. He said that he initially got religious by listening to tapes and by talking to people about death and the grave while he was living by the side of the road (akin to camping). Al-Rasheed became interested specifically in jihad after watching a videotape about Chechnya. He said that his desire to participate in jihad was most influenced by the killing and raping of Muslims on the videotape. The name of the particular tape was "The Russian Hell."

Al-Rasheed said that although he wanted to participate in jihad to protect the honor of Muslims after watching the videotape, he had no specific destination in mind. He said that he called an acquaintance of his cousin (the son of an aunt from his father's side), [redacted] who instructed both of them on how to travel to Afghanistan. The name of this acquaintance is [redacted]

[redacted] told al-Rasheed and his cousin that the most important thing for them to do was to get to Pakistan, because from there they could be smuggled into Afghanistan. Al-Rasheed and his cousin both made plane reservations in Riyadh to travel from Bahrain to Karachi. The two of them traveled by taxi to Bahrain. Al-Rasheed said that he had 5000 riyals with him at the time, and that [redacted] may have given him as much as 3000 of that amount before he left. He and his cousin stayed in Bahrain for about five hours and then flew to Karachi via either Gulf Airways or Emirates Air.

Al-Rasheed said he and his cousin were not met by anybody upon arriving in Pakistan. They first went to a rat-hole of a hotel (al-Rasheed could not remember a name) before moving to a five-star hotel called the Regent Plaza. Al-Rasheed said they stayed at the Regent for two or three days, and that they made no telephone calls and had no visitors. He claimed that he was simply having fun at the hotel and was totally unaware of what arrangements were made for him and his cousin to go to Afghanistan. According to al-Rasheed, they were picked up at the hotel by either an Afghan Arab or a Pakistani man, who took them to Quetta. Al-Rasheed claimed he could not remember this man's name. When asked how he thought this pick-up had been arranged, he guessed that maybe [redacted] had made the arrangement.

Al-Rasheed claimed they traveled via public bus to Quetta, from where they crossed the border into Afghanistan. He said they stayed in furnished apartments at a guesthouse in Quetta, but were there for a day or less. Al-Rasheed did not remember the name of this guesthouse, but he said that nobody met them there. At this point he was still with only his cousin and the Afghan/Pakistani man. The three of them traveled to Afghanistan by car without any problem. Al-Rasheed could not recall how long this drive was, or when it occurred, but he remembered that it was quite hot.

[redacted] showed al-Rasheed a photocopy of the latter's passport, and al-Rasheed confirmed that it was the passport with which he made the trip to Afghanistan. Al-Rasheed said he obtained this passport about a week before traveling and that he had gotten it specifically for the purpose of making this trip - in fact, he had never traveled

~~SECRET~~  
Commission Sensitive

outside Saudi Arabia before. Al-Rasheed said that his passport was stamped in Bahrain and Pakistan. While he still had his passport upon crossing the border into Afghanistan, there was no immigration checkpoint and no official stopped him, so his passport would not have been stamped for this entry.

Upon entering Afghanistan, al-Rasheed said he went to a guesthouse in Kandahar, but he could not remember the name. Neither he nor his cousin saw the man who brought them from Karachi again. Al-Rasheed thought that he may have been known by the name Abu Niama. Both al-Rasheed and his cousin became sick at the guesthouse. Al-Rasheed said he had numerous ailments, including some kind of skin disease. He claimed to have been sick for about three to four months, during which time he stayed in a clinic that was at the guesthouse. Al-Rasheed said his cousin went home after about a week.

After leaving the clinic, Al-Rasheed said he stayed only briefly in Kandahar before he went to Kabul with the others from the guesthouse. He claimed he did not attend any formal training camp, but rather went straight to the front line where the fighting was going on. There he received light weapons training, with a machine gun. Al-Rasheed claimed he did not have a hand gun or receive any explosives training (he even made a joke about the fact that he was afraid of electrical wires, let alone explosives). Though the battle was going on, al-Rasheed said that he remained in the rear. He did not really have any friends there. He said that a lot of people talked about him and even accused him of being an FBI informant. He also said that because he was so young, often times the other men would stop talking when he approached. When asked who was in charge of these men, al-Rasheed said he was not sure but maybe a person called "Abu Salman" or "Abu Sulama."

During this entire discussion, al-Rasheed constantly looked down and scribbled furiously on the notepad in front of him (he was not writing, just doodling). Moreover, often when he was asked about particular details he would claim that he could not remember because his brain was "gone."

Al-Rasheed said that he also spent time in the clinic in Kabul because he was still sick. He claimed he never saw Usama bin Laden (UBL) there, and that he never heard of him visiting Kabul while he was there. Al-Rasheed denied that he ever met UBL at any time. When [redacted] confronted al-Rasheed with the fact that the U.S. has information that he in fact did meet UBL, and had shared that information with the Saudi government, al-Rasheed continued to deny any such meeting - why would UBL want to meet with a 17 year old, he asked rhetorically.

Al-Rasheed denied ever hearing of anything called al Qaeda until after 9/11 when he was back in Saudi Arabia. He also denied ever meeting Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM). When confronted with information that KSM (and Mustapha al-Hawsawi) identified him as one of the potential muscle operatives for the 9/11 operation, and asked how and why KSM would lie about such a thing, al-Rasheed claimed that KSM could have seen what al-Rasheed looked like from the picture on his passport and KSM might have heard his name because there were rumors floating around that al-Rasheed was [redacted] Al-

~~SECRET~~  
Commission Sensitive

Rasheed said that his passport was taken when he arrived at the guesthouse in Kabul. Al-Rasheed denied that at any time anyone had ever spoken to him about being a martyr. He said his idea of being a martyr would be to die fighting with a weapon, not to blow himself up.

When asked why others would be saying the things about him that he is now denying, al-Rasheed guessed that others could be angry with him and thus may be trying to get him in trouble. He said he was viewed unfavorably while in Afghanistan because, unlike the other men, he could not grow a beard. He asserted that the whole trip had simply been an adventure for him, and he would not boast about himself if the grand allegations made by others about him were not true. If he in fact had been involved in the type of things that have been alleged, he said, he would not have turned himself into the authorities. Indeed, if he were just lying now, he would not have come to this interview in the first place. Al-Rasheed claimed that his whole reason for going to Afghanistan to fight in the jihad was not primarily religious, but rather was to escape reality.

Al-Rasheed said he spent a total of about eight to nine months in Afghanistan. He said he did not tell anybody when he decided to leave, but just went to the property/security place where his passport was kept and asked for it back. He said that anybody could ask for his passport back at any time without any problem. Al-Rasheed could not recall the name of the person who returned his passport. The person in charge of the guesthouse was named [redacted] a fat guy whom everybody knew.

Al-Rasheed said he was known at the guesthouse as a clown and that he cooked food there. He said he met [redacted] at the guesthouse once or twice. They mostly joked around, and al-Rasheed said they never discussed any special operation, Saudi Arabia, or travel. Al-Rasheed denied ever meeting any of the other 9/11 hijackers in person, and said he had only seen their pictures in the newspaper.

Al-Rasheed claimed to have used only his own personal money for his return trip from Afghanistan. He said he did not spend much money in Afghanistan, so he still had much of the money he had initially brought with him. Al-Rasheed insisted that he had traveled alone on the way back, leaving the guesthouse by taxi. He claimed that although he had bought a round-trip ticket from Bahrain to Karachi before he traveled to Afghanistan, the ticket had now expired. He therefore bought a new ticket to return home, which took him via Dubai rather than Karachi, as his original ticket had. Al-Rasheed claimed he partied in Dubai for one or two weeks before he returned to Saudi Arabia. He repeatedly denied meeting anybody in Dubai. When confronted with information that KSM had known he traveled to Dubai after he left Afghanistan and when asked how KSM would have known that, al-Rasheed said that because some individuals in Afghanistan had thought he was a spy, KSM may have inquired at the airport about al-Rasheed's travel route. When asked how he could have partied in Dubai for one or two weeks after buying his plane ticket, when he started with less than 5000 riyals, al-Rasheed simply affirmed his story.

At this point, the interview was stopped for the evening prayer.

~~SECRET~~  
Commission Sensitive

9/11 Personal Privacy

Al-Rasheed said he is not currently employed. Although he initially returned to his job as a typist at the Ministry of Education after returning from Afghanistan, he said that he was fired when he once again left for an extended period of time. Al-Rasheed explained that soon after he came back from Afghanistan, he traveled to Syria for three to six months to visit with his cousin. He said that before he traveled he cleansed his passport to hide any evidence of his travel to Afghanistan. In addition to visiting Syria, al-Rasheed said that he had also traveled to Egypt in order to get married (a sham wedding performed under Islamic law for the purpose of having sex). Before he got married, however, al-Rasheed said he saw his picture on the television and he turned himself into the authorities.

When confronted with information that his passport photo was found on a recovered disk with photos of some of the 9/11 hijackers, al-Rasheed had no explanation. He denied that he was ever part of the operation or that he ever changed his mind about participating in the operation. Al-Rasheed denied that at any point during his time in Afghanistan he ever heard a threat against Americans or American interests. Although al-Rasheed admitted he felt a bit of joy when he first heard of the 9/11 attacks, he said that he has since come to disapprove of the attacks because that is the position taken by religious scholars whom he follows.

Al-Rasheed denied that he was lying about anything and if he had intended just to lie, he would never have agreed to meet for an interview. He said that he had a right to say no to our questions, and if he was guilty of anything he could have escaped by now. When asked why he backed out of the previous interview in October, al-Rasheed said he was not comfortable talking to Americans but had decided to do it anyway this time around.

Al-Rasheed was asked to look through the Penttbom photo book. He claimed not to recognize any individuals other than from the media.