

Statement Recounting my Yemen Visit, September 1997 by Ant Heaford (7 Pages)

My US Visits Summer 1997

Spent most of June in the States, 7 machine installations. I took many domestic US flights and noted that security was very lax. In at least one instance I made it from check-in desk to boarding gate without been searched, metal detected or baggage x-rayed. This may have been Logan Airport - I had visited Boston that summer at least once, flying in on 6th & out on 11th June)

When i had a weekend in New York on a later trip (c.Oct 1997) i purposely went to the Empire State Building and not the WTC for the roof top view - a decision based on my fear that planes could be hijacked and used as missiles to attack the WTC at any time. I had related this freely to anyone who listened, friends etc, but felt sure that I could not be the only person to see this vulnerability and so did not pursue it other than raising it as a conversation point.

Equipment & Sale

Equipment was a flexographic plate mounting & proofing machine (ancillary equipment to a main printing press). Top of the range model with all the whistles and bells, cost c.£70k. Sale was through Longgulf Trading, a London registered UAE company. Typical end use is flexible food packaging – mars bar wrappers, bread bags, etc

End Customer, YemPak Taizz.

My personal customer data base entry:

Yempak, Sanaa, Yemen (Actually in Taizz, not Sanaa)

9/97 Install (date)

Contacts: Said Obadi – Chief, Mr Dino – Man(ager?)

Taiz “Shawki Alariki” 9674 216301 (Hotel & phone number maybe?)

Yemen / Pakistan (partnership) is where company name YemPak comes from, although senior managers were mostly Saudi. I do not remember meeting any Yemenis inside the factory.

The customer knew very little / nothing about printing from my recollection but had bought all top of the range equipment – a ‘money no object kind of project’ by appearance.

Previous Google search showed LinkedIn profile that had both SBG (Bin Laden Group) and YemPak listed as former employers (but I can’t find it since).

Travel to Customer

c.1 week notice - other technician had refused to travel after checking FCO advice. All my travel, visas, etc arranged by secretary.

19th Sept 1997 Dep. MAN to SAH via CDG. Friday, 1600hrs (local)

20th Sept Arrived at Sanaa Airport, c. 0700hrs (local) There was a guy at arrivals with a sign with the other technician’s name on – I ‘missed’ him and went outside and got a taxi myself. Driver and his mate were Yemeni nationals - very kind and hospitable. Cool 5 hour journey.

Arrival at Factory

Arrived factory on Taizz outskirts by 1300hrs 20th Sept. Extensive perimeter marked by c.4m high wall of corrugated sheet metal I recall. Uniformed security guards, Pakistani I think, opened the gate before telling us to wait & closing gate. I became aware of a non-uniformed man with an assault rifle watching us over the 4m wall, to the left of the gate house. I think there was a guard tower near to him too. The security guards returned with a manager, possibly the one marked ‘Admin’ in photos, who ushered me in quickly and the gates were closed – I protested because I hadn’t paid the taxi but the manager said the guards would take care of it and took me to the main office. I stayed at factory till 1700hrs and assembled the machine.

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Factory 'Complex'

All new build, office building on top of hill facing the gate, factory units to the right. Very little activity, although it appeared well maintained there was no evidence of any production. I visited the office building, then the factory unit where the machine was. Unit was otherwise empty. An Italian installation engineer I knew was there measuring up for a Bielloni 8 colour flexo printing press (up to c.£1 Million I think). It was unusual to purchase our ancillary machine before main press had even arrived, but did happen sometimes - annual budgets, production schedules, etc. See image attached as *possible* location.

Installation

21st 0800-1800hrs. Finished testing and commissioning, started operator training. Operators were Pakistani, I don't recall if they had any printing experience/knowledge but they were pleasant enough from memory

22nd 0800-1900 Operator training. Production job

23rd 0800-1730 Operator supervision, production job, gravure service. (?)

24th 0830-1900 Training (Maintenance?)

25th 0800-1300 Job sign off? Dinner with Yousef?

26th 0800-2100 Return journey / unscheduled detour

Hotel & Evenings

Clean, secure and good local standard. Only evening I specifically remember was the meal with 'Yousef', photographed below. I think this was Thurs 25th Sept, going off the working hours I have noted in my diary. He was not an employee of the company but 'associated' with the management - i think also a Saudi. I don't remember seeing /meeting him at factory so assume he met me at my hotel by arrangement. Yousef said nothing about himself that I remember and was vague about his role. He spoke English naturally, with a slight accent. We walked to a view point above the city and he was quite philosophical, nodding to the city view and asking me what I saw. I don't think I understood what he was asking and I don't remember rest of conversation. We then went for dinner.

9/11 method conversation

We had been chatting about world politics, and i again repeated my prediction of an attack on the WTC using suicide hijackers. It was a pleasant evening, and I think the only time I met Yousef.

Return journey and detour – Friday 26th Sept?

On the way to the airport (factory car, manager driving) we made an unscheduled detour that i hadn't been told about. We travelled off road to an isolated collection of buildings – one or 2 concrete single story – non descript. A couple of men and a Toyota pick-up truck or two were in a yard area. I was shown in to an unremarkable room with a long table and seating, was told to sit down and wait. c.15mins later c.10 men came in and sat down for lunch. Middle eastern, c.25 to 45yrs, all bearded, 'practical' eastern clothing – I did not think they were Yemenis.

Nothing was said, no introductions made. Ignorant of the customs, I did not wash or pray before the meal. After food was served everyone was eating the vegetables only. Again not aware of the custom of eating veg first and then meat, i made a mistake of reaching for the meat at the centre of the table. The head of the table (who i was sat next to) stood up abruptly, followed by the rest of the men and left leaving the food uneaten. I was then taken to the airport – no word was said about what had happened.

I don't think this was a 'tourist excursion' for a traditional Yemeni meal – it felt more like a job interview, that I failed.

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Follow Up

Non, until c. 2009/10 when i considered information again and thought to advise our security services. I called the MI6 'terrorist hotline' with this information; the moment i mentioned 'YemPak' the line clicked and i was transferred to another section. They listened to my information but said nothing and have not contacted me since.

I have recently (last month) contacted them again, with a little more information and photo of me & Yousef – no response. I then submitted the basic info (no photo) to a few news outlets (Tehran Times, RT, Guardian, NY Post, Independent, etc). I also sent it to the Iranian Consulate, Iranian Embassy Australia with the Me & Yousef photo attached. No response.

This is the first time I have found my old diary and customer data base entry and collated it with photos, recollections and certain memories. This is also the first time (3rd May 2015) I have found the original photograph contact sheet and recovered previously lost photos.

My Suspicions.

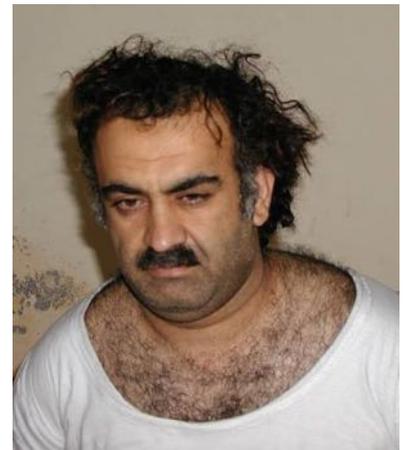
Summer 1997 I see appalling security lapses in US domestic airports and foresee the 9/11 attack method and target.

September 1997 I tell many people my prediction, in the US & UK, and also at a Saudi funded & managed company, run by Pakistanis in Yemen.

early 1998 9/11 attack plan was activated / initiated (my impression from trawling & filtering the internet).



I think this was the senior engineer at the factory in Sept 1997



Maybe?

If this is not the link then I feel there may yet be another like it that I've not seen. My instinct tells me these locations, meetings, conversations are significant and possibly linked to AQAP.

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Taizz compound most resembling my recollection – offices a top of hill in front of gate, factory buildings to right & compound continuing over brow of hill & large carpark opposite office entrance.



Machine & Operator. Inside factory unit, against partition wall.



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Photos taken with YemPak staff at end of install (Thurs 25th Sept?), me dressed up in some shemagh type cloths and wearing a jambia (knife) gift from company. I guess overalls guy is maintenance.



L-R: Admin?, Said Obadi?, Me (174cm), Senior Engineer?, Maintenance Engineer?



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Visiting Taizz view point with Yousef at sunset, so I guess Thurs 25th Sept (early finish from work & local sunset is always about 1800hrs). We went for dinner after and had conversation of world politics & outlook.



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Diary Entries made at time. Diary was solely for my personal installation record, & hours log.

20th GemPack – phonetic spelling of YemPak? Machine assembly

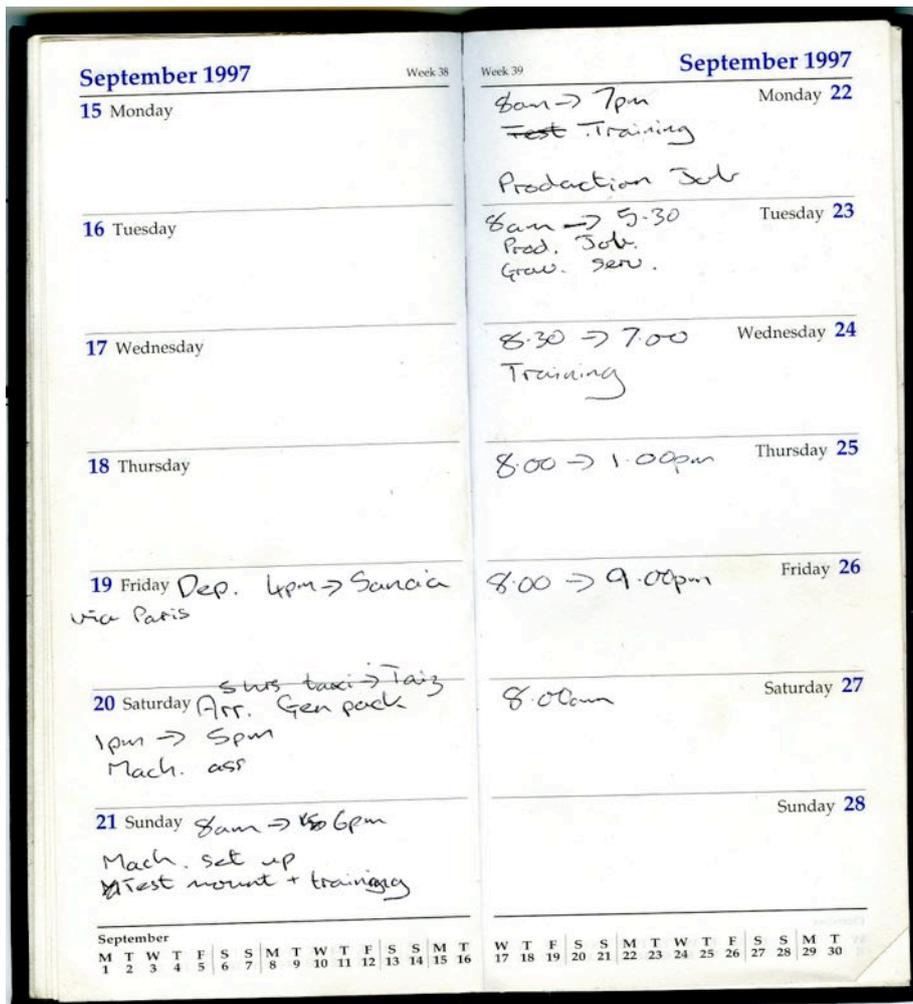
22nd 'Production job' – mounting printing plates to cylinders and 'proofing' them

23rd Don't remember a 'grav. serv.' (gravure proofing press service), as I don't remember any other equipment.

25th Early finish – met with Youseff? (sunset photo was evening we had dinner Local sunset is always about 1800hrs)

26th Guess return journey (long hours), and so day of detour and lunch

27th Maybe me going into factory for paper work, switch back to clock card, etc



My personal customer data base entry (scanned original print out). Don't know what "Shawki Alariki" is - maybe my hotel with phone number? Bielloni is an Italian printing press manufacturer.

Company: Yempak
 Country: Yemen
 Address: Saana
 Contacts: 9/97 Install. Arranged R/Bak Sample & sale
 Said Obadi ~ Chief
 Mr Dino ~ Man
 Taiz ~ Shawki Alariki ~ 9674 216301
 Machinery: 70153 WW Viper
 Equipment: Bielloni 6/8 col ~ install eng Nicolas