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## Profile: Mounir el Motassadeq

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**HAMBURG, Germany -- Mounir el Motassadeq was arrested in November 2001 on suspicion that he had links to Mohamed Atta, who flew one of the two planes that brought down the World Trade Center towers in New York.**

His lawyers portrayed Motassadeq as an innocent student who befriended fellow Muslims. He told a Hamburg court that he was a man of peace who studied hard and enjoyed playing football.

He admitted knowing Atta and other members of the alleged al Qaeda terror cell in Hamburg believed to have led the September 11, 2001, attack on the United States but he said he did not know of their plans until he saw the events of September 11 unfold.

The court rejected Motassadeq's defence and agreed with prosecutors that he was an accessory to the murder of more than 3,000 people in New York and Washington. ([Full story](#))

Judges also convicted him of being a member of an outlawed terror group and sentenced him to 15 years in prison.

Motassadeq, a 28-year-old Moroccan citizen, arrived in Germany in 1993 in Muenster to learn the local language. He later moved to Hamburg, Germany's second city with 1.7 million people, including 200,000 Muslims.

A member of a middle-class family, he was an electrical engineering student at Hamburg's Technical University from 1995 until his arrest at his Hamburg apartment.

Between 1996 and 1998, he worked as a cleaner at Hamburg airport and had access to secure areas and aircraft. He also worked at a camping store in the city.

In addition to his wages, Motassadeq received 3,000 euros (\$3,200) each year from his father, a medical technician. Motassadeq is one of six children.

In 1999, Motassadeq married a woman from St. Petersburg, Russia, who converted to Islam and moved to Hamburg to work at the technical university. They have an infant son and daughter.

During his trial, Motassadeq told the court of a modest life, how he saved money by sharing flats, and how he discussed religion and politics at a local mosque.

He spoke of playing football in the park with friends, and how in Muenster -- where he was a top goal-scorer on his local team -- his spindly legs earned him the nickname "Asparagus."

Slightly built with a thin beard, he spoke to judges in polite, reasonable German. He barely reacted to accusations from prosecutors or accusations from victims' tearful relatives.

When the judge sentenced him, Motassadeq was impassive.

### Case against Motassadeq

After his arrest, Motassadeq was charged with being an accessory to murder and belonging to the Hamburg-based al Qaeda cell.



Motassadeq studied at the same university as Mohamed Atta

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Prosecutors said Motassadeq was so intimately involved with the cell that he put his signature as a witness to Atta's will and had right-of-attorney to a German bank account held by Marwan al-Shehhi, another September 11 hijacker, prosecutors said.

"From May to November 2000 large amounts of money was paid into this Dresdner Bank account on a periodic basis," German Federal Prosecutor General Kay Nehm said last August.

"We have compelling evidence that this money was used to finance this terrorist operation."

Nehm said evidence showed the money helped finance flight training classes at two air schools in Venice, Florida. Bank records also show that Atta received \$1,000 from the account in May 2001.

Motassadeq lived for a time at a Hamburg apartment shared by Atta, al-Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah, a third September 11 hijacker. Atta and al-Shehhi also studied at the same university as el Motassadeq.

Nehm said Motassadeq was also a close friend of the Hamburg terrorist cell's chief logistician, Said Bahaji, and that the Hamburg flat -- No. 54 Marien Strasse -- served as the cell's nerve centre.

Motassadeq shared a room with Ramzi Binalshibh, who had been groomed to be one of the hijackers but failed to get a U.S. visa, Nehm said.

Throughout it all, Motassadeq was intimately linked to the terrorists and was clearly involved in plotting the September 11 attacks, Nehm said.

Nehm said Motassadeq also travelled to Pakistan and is known to have been in Karachi on July 28, 2001.

"The accused was especially intensive" in the operation of the al Qaeda terrorist cell in Hamburg, Nehm said.

"He approved of the mass murder of Jews during national socialism. He approved of terror acts and he approved of the violent conversions of infidels to Islam."

### **'Totally normal'**

In an interview with CNN in October 2001, Motassadeq spoke of his relationship with Atta -- who German prosecutors say was the acknowledged head of the Hamburg cell by virtue of his fluency in German and the fact that he was the oldest of the members.

"We were normal friends, that means we are Muslims," said Motassadeq. "We help each other out. We meet in the mosque. We discuss things. Totally normal."

Asked whether he had a power of attorney for al-Shehhi's bank account, he replied: "Why? That is typical, normal, when you help others here. Marwan, when he travelled, then one had to help him with the apartment, also for the university tuition."

Motassadeq denied he had wired money to Atta and Binalshibh. When asked about his signature on Atta's will, Motassadeq said simply: "I don't remember."

However, he said he did recall taking a trip to Karachi, Pakistan, in the summer of 2000, for a holiday, he said, leaving his wife and small child for several weeks.

But, he said, he could not remember how long he was there, precisely when he was there, where he stayed, or what he did.

During his 3 1/2-month trial, Motassadeq consistently denied the charges against him.

He acknowledged knowing six other alleged members of the Hamburg cell -- Atta, Ziad Jarrah, al-Shehhi, Binalshibh, Bahaji and Zakariya Essabar. But he says he knew nothing of their plans.

"I couldn't believe that people I knew could do something like that," Motassadeq said in his closing statement. "I watched it on television and I was shocked... I can only hope that something like September 11 never happens again."

But witnesses testified that el Motassadeq was as radical as the rest of the group, talking of jihad -- holy war -- and his hatred of Israel and the United States.

The defendant himself admitted training in a camp run by Osama bin Laden -- the al Qaeda chief alleged by the U.S. to be the mastermind of the September 11 attacks -- in Afghanistan in 2000.

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