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Cell Phone Caller: 'We Are Being Hijacked!'

Tuesday, September 11, 2001

TODD SPANGLER, Associated Press Writer



(09-11) 20:49 PDT SHANKSVILLE, Pa. (AP) -- A passenger on United Airlines Flight 93 called on his cell phone from a locked bathroom with a chilling message: "We are being hijacked, we are being hijacked!" Minutes later the jetliner crashed with 45 people aboard, the last of four closely timed terror attacks across the country.

Radar showed the San Francisco-bound Boeing 757 from Newark, N.J., had nearly reached Cleveland when it made a sharp left turn and headed back toward Pennsylvania, crashing in a grassy field edged by woods about 80 miles southeast of Pittsburgh. There was no sign of any survivors.

"There's a crater gouged in the earth, the plane is pretty much disintegrated. There's nothing left but scorched trees," said Mark Stahl, of Somerset, who went to the scene.

The Boeing 757 crash was one of four reported Tuesday by United and American Airlines. Two jetliners crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City and one hit the Pentagon in Washington.

United said Flight 93 left Newark at 8:01 a.m. with 38 passengers, two pilots and five flight attendants.

Minutes before the 10 a.m. crash, an emergency dispatcher in Pennsylvania received a cell phone call from a man who said he was a passenger locked in a bathroom aboard United Flight 93. The man

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repeatedly said the call was not a hoax, said dispatch supervisor Glenn Cramer in neighboring Westmoreland County.

"We are being hijacked, we are being hijacked!" Cramer quoted the man as saying, from a transcript of the call.

The man told dispatchers the plane "was going down. He heard some sort of explosion and saw white smoke coming from the plane and we lost contact with him," Cramer said.

Also, Alice Hoglan told KTVU-TV in San Francisco that her son, Mark Bingham, 31, called her from aboard the flight at 9:44 EST.

"We've been taken over. There are three men that say they have a bomb," Hoglan said her son told her.

FBI agent Wells Morrison wouldn't confirm that the plane was hijacked, but said the FBI was reviewing the tape of the 911 call.

"At this point, we're not prepared to say it was an act of terrorism, though it appears to be that," Morrison said.

Reporters were taken to the top of a hill overlooking the scene. The crash left a V-shaped gouge in a grassy field surrounded by thick woods, just below a hilltop strip mine. The gouge is 8- to 10-feet deep and 15- to 20-feet long, said Capt. Frank Monaco of the Pennsylvania State Police.

Investigators believe the plane crashed there and disintegrated, sending debris into thick trees nearby, Monaco said.

"There's nothing in the ground you can see," Monaco said of the crash site. "It just looks like tiny pieces of debris."

Michael R. Merringer was out on a mountain bike ride with his wife, Amy, about two miles away from the crash site.

"I heard the engine gun two different times and then I heard a loud bang and the windows of the houses all around rattled," Merringer said. "I looked up and I saw the smoke coming up."

The couple rushed home and drove near the scene.

"Everything was on fire and there was trees knocked down and there was a big hole in the ground," he said.

In Chicago, United CEO James Goodwin said the airline was sending a team to Pennsylvania to assist in the investigation and to provide assistance to family members.

"Today's events are a tragedy and our prayers are with everyone at this time," Goodwin said.

Without citing a death toll, United said Tuesday afternoon that it had identified all passengers and crew members on board the two planes and was notifying family members. No names were released immediately.

In Pennsylvania's Richland Township, police Chief Jim Mock said air traffic control coordinators reported Tuesday morning that a large aircraft was heading toward John Murtha Johnstown Cambria County Municipal Airport in the township, about 60 miles east of Pittsburgh.

The air traffic controllers said the aircraft would not identify itself, according to Mock, who is also the airport's emergency coordinator. Shortly after talking to the controllers, Mock said, a plane crashed north of the Somerset County airport about 20 miles away.

"It shook the whole station," said Bruce Grine, owner of Grine's Service Center in Shanksville, about 21/2 miles from the crash. "Everybody ran outside, and by that time the fire whistle was blowing."

Stahl was listening to reports about the World Trade Center attacks on the radio when he heard Flight 93 crash. He took pictures showing a billowing cloud and a large, black hole burrowed into the ground surrounded by small piece of airplane still on fire.

"I didn't know what to think, it was shocking," Stahl said.

At San Francisco International Airport, where the plane was headed, an evacuation was ordered. Bomb-sniffing dogs patrolled the hallways and a counseling center was set up for relatives of the people aboard Flight 93.

"This is a time for compassion. It's not a time for long sermons," said the Rev. John Delariva, a Catholic priest who is part of the airport's counseling team.

Flight 93 also operated as a code-share flight with Air Canada as Flight AC4085.

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The phone line from Flight 93 was still open when a GTE operator heard Todd Beamer say: 'Are you guys ready? Let's roll'

Sunday, September 16, 2001

By Jim McKinnon, Post-Gazette Staff Writer

"Are you guys ready? Let's roll!"

That's how Todd Beamer lived.

And that's how he died, helping to lead a takeover by passengers on United Airlines Flight 93, which crashed Tuesday in Somerset County. It was the fourth plane to go down in last week's terrorist attacks.

Beamer, an Oracle Inc. executive from Hightstown, N.J., and others are being credited with foiling hijackers bent on crashing the Boeing 757 into what authorities say might have been a second target in Washington, D.C., possibly the Capitol or the White House.

Flight 93 had left Newark, N.J., at 8 a. m. Tuesday, bound for San Francisco.

"That's Todd," his wife, Lisa, said yesterday of the "Let's roll!" command, which he made over the plane's in-flight telephone. A GTE supervisor talked with him for about 13 minutes before the plane crashed.

"My boys even say that. When we're getting ready to go somewhere, we say, 'C'mon guys, let's roll.' My little one says, 'C'mon, Mom, let's roll.' That's something they picked up from Todd."



Todd Beamer

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Beamer, 32, told the GTE supervisor, Lisa D. Jefferson, that he and others on the plane had decided they would not be pawns in the hijackers' suicidal plot.

Jefferson told him about the other hijackings and Beamer made her promise to call his wife and their two boys, David, 3, and Andrew, 1.

Beamer's call connected at 9:45 a.m. He told Jefferson there were three hijackers, armed with knives. He did not know their nationalities or their intentions.

One of the men had what appeared to be a bomb tied to his midsection with a red belt.

Beamer said he could account for 37 of the plane's 38 passengers. The hijackers had forced 27 of them into the first-class compartment near the front.

Beamer, nine other passengers and five flight attendants were ordered to sit on the floor in the rear of the plane.

He did not know the whereabouts of the pilot, copilot and the remaining passenger. He said a flight attendant had told him the pilot and copilot had been forced from the cockpit and may have been wounded.

Two of the hijackers were in the cockpit with the door locked behind them. The man with the bomb stayed in the back of the plane, near Beamer's group.

With him were others who placed cell-phone calls from the plane, Jeffery Glick, 31, a sales manager for a technology firm, Thomas Burnett Jr., 38, a California businessman, and Mark Bingham, 31, a former college rugby player from California. Beamer mentioned Glick by his first name in the call to Jefferson, Lisa Beamer said.

Toward the end of his conversation with Jefferson, Beamer said the plane appeared to have changed directions a few times. Later, it would be determined that it had flown west from Newark to near Cleveland, then turned back to the southeast toward Pittsburgh.

Beamer became anxious.

"Oh! We're going down!" he shouted at one point.

He paused, then said in a calmer voice, "No, we're OK. I think we're turning around."

Beamer then told Jefferson that he and the others had decided to "jump on" the hijacker wearing the bomb.

Jefferson could hear shouts and commotion and then Beamer asked her to pray

with him. They recited the 23rd Psalm.

He got Jefferson to promise that she would call his family, then dropped the phone, leaving the line open.

That's when Jefferson heard what Lisa Beamer believes were her husband's last words: "Let's roll."

Then there was silence. Jefferson hung up at 10 a.m. EST, realizing that the plane had gone down. Officials said it crashed at 9:58 a.m.

Although it's not yet clear what Beamer, Glick and the others were able to do, they are being hailed as heroes for forcing the plane down in a remote strip mine area in Stoneycreek, Somerset County, about 80 miles southeast of Pittsburgh.

"When the plane started to fly erratically, he said he knew he wouldn't make it out of there," said Lisa Beamer, who is expecting their third child in January.

Lisa Beamer said reports of her husband's heroic role had "made my life worth living again." Jefferson kept her promise and called Lisa Beamer at 8 p.m. Friday.

"It was the best thing that I could've gotten [Friday]. It totally changed the mood around here," Lisa Beamer said.

Jefferson, reached by telephone yesterday, declined comment. She said GTE's parent company, Verizon, may issue a statement tomorrow about Beamer's call.

Lisa Beamer said the call she received from Jefferson had lifted her family's spirits.

"We all knew what kind of person Todd was. We know he's in heaven. He was saved," Lisa Beamer said.

"Just knowing that when the crisis came up he maintained the same character we all knew, it's a testament to what real faith means.

"It's been a real uplift. It's put a spring in my step that I didn't have since Monday."

The couple met at Wheaton College near Chicago, hometown for both of them. After graduation and marriage, they moved to New Jersey and both took jobs at Oracle before starting a family.

"He's a great guy in a crisis. He would have had his family in the forefront of his thoughts. And he would not let other people overpower him," Lisa Beamer said.



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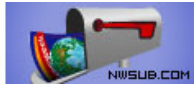
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The Final Moments of United Flight 93

“We’re going to do something,” one of the passengers told his wife during a final phone call. Then a group of strangers banded together and took on the hijackers

By Karen Breslau

Newsweek Web Exclusive

Updated: 11:09 a.m. ET Sept. 22, 2001

Sept. 22, 2001 - United Flight 93 was late. After pushing off from the gate at 8:01 a. m., the Boeing 757 made its way slowly through the runway traffic at Newark International, finally taking off at 8:41 a.m., 40 minutes behind schedule. In the first-class cabin, Mark Bingham, a San Francisco publicist, had settled into his seat. Next to him was Tom Burnett, an executive for a health-care company in the Bay Area. It was a routine flight for both men. Bingham shuttled regularly between New York and San Francisco, working with technology companies; Burnett was on his way home from a business trip.

[Story continues below](#) ↓

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FURTHER BACK in the business-class cabin, Jeremy Glick, a 31-year-old sales manager for an Internet company, was in Row 11. Behind him sat Lou Nacke, a toy-company manager on his way to Sacramento for a day trip. In the main cabin was Todd Beamer, 32, a manager for software giant Oracle, headed from his home in New Jersey to the company’s Silicon Valley headquarters.

There was, in airline parlance, a “light load” that morning. Only 37 of the plane’s 182 seats were occupied. Some of the passengers had never planned to be on the flight. Nacke had booked his seat only the night before. Out to dinner with his family, he had a received a phone call from one of his customers who needed help with an inventory problem. Nacke rarely traveled, but, reluctant to let his client down, he planned to

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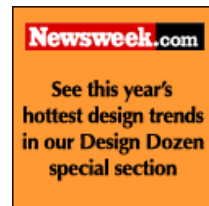
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make a one-day trip to California, returning on the red-eye late Tuesday night.

FEEDBACK

- E-mail us your comments

Jeremy Glick was supposed to have been on Flight 93 a day earlier, but missed the Monday flight after getting stuck in traffic on his way to Newark Airport. It was his first business trip in months. Since the birth of his daughter, Emmy, three months ago, he had been reluctant to leave home. But there was a conference in San Francisco, and his wife had urged him to get back to work and stop worrying about the baby. Another passenger, Lauren Grandcolas was on her way home to Marin County, north of San Francisco, after attending her grandmother's funeral in New Jersey. Originally scheduled on a later flight, she had been pleasantly surprised to easily get a standby seat on Flight 93 at the airport. "I can't wait to see you," she told her husband Jack in a message she left on the couple's answering machine before dawn in California, telling him she would be home a few hours early.

At 8:45 a.m., four minutes after takeoff, Flight 93 was still climbing to cruising altitude, moving west across Pennsylvania, when, in New York, American Airlines Flight 11 plowed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. At that same instant, hijackers were already in control of other aircraft. United Flight 175, which had taken off from Boston a minute earlier than Flight 11, was making a sharp turn over northern New Jersey, bearing down on the South Tower. American Airlines Flight 77, which had taken off for Los Angeles from Dulles at 8:10 a.m., had made its own U-turn in the skies over Kentucky, and was headed back toward Washington.

All three of these aircraft were under the control of the Boston air-traffic control center, which handles airline traffic in New England and New York airspace. While the Boston controllers were trying to deal with the three planes' abrupt changes in course, bomb threats were being called in to the center. Cleveland, which takes control of flights as they pass into the Midwest, was receiving similar threats. Officials suspect that the bomb threats were intended to add to the chaos, distracting controllers from tracking the hijacked planes.

By 9:35 a.m., both towers of the World Trade Center are in flames and Flight 77 is bearing down on the Pentagon. At this time, NEWSWEEK has learned, air-traffic controllers at the Cleveland center are listening "over the frequency," the radio contact between cockpit and control center. They hear screams aboard the flight. Then a gap of 40 seconds with no sound. Then more screams. Then a voice, nearly unintelligible, saying something like "bomb on board."

The controllers try to contact the plane, asking the pilot, Capt. Jason Dahl, to verify his altitude. There is no response from the cockpit. Minutes later, at 9:38 am, the plane makes a hairpin turn just south of Cleveland and heads for Washington. Air-traffic controllers hear a man, in thickly accented English saying "This is your captain. There is a bomb on board. We are returning to the airport."

It's possible the passengers never hear the false warning. The hijacker was accidentally speaking into a cockpit microphone that air-traffic controllers could hear, not the public-address system.

In the passenger cabin, it is bedlam. Three men wearing red bandannas are in control. The passengers had been herded to the back of the plane, near the galley. Burnett calls his wife, Deena, in California, where she is preparing breakfast for the couple's three young daughters. "We're being hijacked" he tells her, before giving the flight number and telling her to call authorities. When Tom calls back a few minutes later, Deena has the FBI on the phone. She patches Tom through so he can describe the men directly.

There are other phone calls. Jeremy Glick calls his wife, Lyz, in New York to say that three "Iranian looking" men, one with a red box strapped to his waist, have taken control of the plane and to call the authorities. He asks if it's true, as he's heard from another passenger, that two other planes have crashed into the World Trade Center.

From the back of the plane, Todd Beamer tries to use his credit card on an Airfone installed in one of the seatbacks, but cannot get authorization. His call is automatically routed to the Verizon customer-service center in Oakbrook, Ill. Although operators are used to crank calls from seatback phones, it is clear to the operator that Beamer's report of a hijacking is genuine. His call is immediately sent to Verizon supervisor Lisa Jefferson who alerts the FBI. When Jefferson gets on the line at 9:45 a.m., she immediately begins interviewing Beamer. "What is your flight number? What is the situation? Where are the crew members?"

Beamer tells Jefferson that one passenger is dead. He doesn't know about the pilots. One hijacker is in the rear of the plane, claiming to have a bomb strapped to his body. The conversation is urgent, but calm. Then Beamer says, "Oh my God, I think we're going down." Then adds, "No, we're just turning." At this point, investigators theorize, one of the hijackers was flying erratically. The plane plunges from its assigned altitude and the transponder is turned off.



David Maxwell / AFP

Mark Bingham uses an Airfone to call his mother, Alice Hoglan, who is still asleep at her brother's home in Saratoga, Calif., having been up late the night before caring for triplets. "Mom, this is Mark Bingham," he tells her, so rattled he uses his last name. Bingham describes the situation for his mother, a United Airlines flight attendant. The call lasts about three minutes. Twice during the call, says Alice, "Mark was distracted. There was a five-second pause. I heard people speaking. There was murmuring, nothing loud." She theorizes that Mark was talking to the other men, and planning to fight back.

The crash site in Shanksville, Penn.

“We’re going to do something. I know I’m not going to get out of this.” At

— TODD BEAMER

around the same time, Todd Beamer is telling the operator that the men plan “to jump” the hijacker in the back, claiming to have a bomb. “We’re going to do something,” Beamer tells operator Lisa Jefferson. “I know I’m not going to get out of this.” He asks Jefferson to recite the Lord’s Prayer with him. The last words Jefferson hears are “Are you ready guys? Let’s roll.”

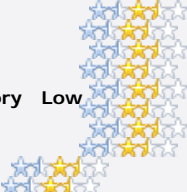
It’s unclear when, in all of the telephony, Glick, Beamer, Bingham, Burnett and Nacke hatched their plot. It is also unclear if they attacked just once, or twice, first taking out the hijacker claiming to have the bomb, then storming the cockpit. Crucial evidence, NEWSWEEK has learned, may come from yet another phone call made by a passenger. Elizabeth Wainio, 27, was speaking to her stepmother in Maryland. Another passenger, she explains, had loaned her a cell phone and told her to call her family. “I have to go,” Wainio says, cutting the call short. “They’re about to storm the cockpit” referring to her fellow passengers.

Nacke is the only member of the group who is not known to have made a phone call, although his wife, Amy, did have a message on her answering machine that contained only noise and a click. United Airlines later told his family that he was apparently one of the fighters. “If you knew Lou,” says Nacke’s father-in-law, Dr. Robert Weisberg, “he never would have been far from the action.”

This much we know, they were big guys: Bingham was a 6-foot-4 rugby player; Glick, also a rugby player and judo champion; Beamer was 6 foot 1 and 200 pounds, and Nacke was a 5-foot-9, 200-pound weightlifter with a “Superman” tattoo on his shoulder. Investigators are operating on the theory that the men somehow made their way up 100 feet from the rear of the plane into the cockpit. The last transmission recorded is someone, probably a hijacker, screaming “Get out of here. Get out of here.” Then grunting, screaming and scuffling. Then silence.

With Mark Hosenball

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Flight 93: Forty lives, one destiny

Sunday, October 28, 2001

This story was written by Staff Writer Dennis B. Roddy, based on his reporting and that of Staff Writers Cindi Lash, Steve Levin and Jonathan D. Silver.

Late. They were late. United Airlines Flight 93 had been scheduled to take off at 8:01 a.m. Now it was sitting on the tarmac, waiting for clearance to depart for San Francisco.

Tucked into a flatland from which the New York skyline shone in the distance, Newark International Airport was ringed with new construction. Two days earlier, a fire had started at one of the sites, briefly closing the airport. Flights already delayed by construction around an overtaxed airport had backed up even further.

The Flight 93 passengers had walked down the concourse of Terminal A, where they breezed past the security gate, then walked the 100 yards to a long circular hallway from which the boarding ramps jutted out like spokes.

At Gate 17, they strode another 70 feet down the jetway, made a left turn, and were inside the Boeing 757.

The plane pulled away from the gate on time. Then it sat.

It was a 110-foot-long space that different people from different worlds were meant to share for the six-hour flight across a continent filled with immigrants and their descendants.

Hilda Marcin, 79, took an aisle seat in row 17. A retired special education teacher's aide, Marcin was moving to Danville, Calif., to live with her daughter's family. Her older daughter, Elizabeth Kemmerer, had driven her to the airport, waited with her until 7:30, then seen her mother off to a new life.

Thomas Burnett Jr., 38, had been living in planes for the preceding six days. A senior vice president and chief operating officer for a medical research company in San Ramon, Calif., he had made it home at 4 p.m. Sept. 5 for dinner, left at 11 p.m.

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Sept. 11

that night, stopped in Minnesota, then spent the weekend moving deer stands around on land he owned in Wisconsin. He planned to go back in November to hunt deer. He installed himself in seat 4C, first class.

Christine Snyder's husband of two months was waiting for her back in Kailua, Hawaii, where she worked as an arborist, planting trees and landscaping public places, bringing human order to a natural paradise. On the drive to the airport she marveled at the billboards, wires, transmission lines, industrial plants -- things she didn't see back home.

Also on board were four men from an entirely different world. Ziad Jarrah, their leader, had been born in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon in 1975. Outwardly, it would have been hard to know the turmoil that boiled inside him. Born into an apolitical and secular family of Sunni Muslims, Jarrah attended Christian schools as a youth, studied aviation in Europe and told the man in Florida who had taught him close-quarters hand-fighting that he loved living in America.

"Find ways to blend in with your opponent and control him," the instructor, Bert Rodriguez, had told Jarrah back in May, when he walked into US-1 Fitness, a gymnasium in Dania Beach, Fla., and paid \$500 cash for the course.

Now, settling into a seat in first class, Jarrah had blended in.

No one on board would have guessed that back in the Florida apartment he'd left four days earlier, Jarrah had set up a full-size, cardboard replica -- three panels in all -- of the cockpit of the airplane they had just boarded. Nobody could have known he was carrying a global positioning satellite receiver to help him track the plane's course. No one could have known that he and his three companions, seated throughout the plane, had stayed in the same hotel as some of the passengers the night before, eating at the best of its three restaurants, paying



Profiles of each of the crew members and passengers aboard United Airlines Flight 93, who came together for a morning departure for San Francisco from Newark on the fateful morning of Sept. 11, 2001.

The Crew

Jason Dahl	LeRoy Homer, Jr.
Lorraine Bay	Sandra Bradshaw
Cee Cee Lyles	Deborah Anne Jacobs
Wanda Green	Welsh

The Passengers

Christian Adams	Todd Beamer
Alan Beaven	Mark Bingham
Deora Bodley	Marion Britton
Thomas E. Burnett Jr.	William Cashman
Georgine Rose	Patricia Cushing
Corrigan	
Joseph DeLuca	Patrick "Joe" Driscoll
Edward Porter Felt	Jane Folger
Colleen L. Fraser	Andrew Garcia
Jeremy Glick	Lauren Grandcolas
Donald F. Greene	Linda Gronlund
Richard Guadagno	Toshiya Kuge
Hilda Marcin	Waleska Martinez
Nicole Miller	Louis J. Nacke II
Donald and Jean Peterson	Mark "Mickey" Rothenberg
Christine Snyder	John Talignani
Honor Elizabeth Wainio	Kristin Gould White

cash for seven rooms, meeting with other men who would depart on missions investigators are still trying to figure out.

United Flight 93 groaned down Runway 4-Left, pulled up and banked to the west. From the right side of the plane, passengers would have seen lower Manhattan where, on overcast days, the only thing poking above the clouds were the twin pillars of the World Trade Center. On this day, everything was clear.

No one could have known that, in the skies over Pennsylvania, the worlds of Hilda Marcin, of Thomas Burnett, of Christine Snyder, of Ziad Jarrah, would meet in a cataclysm of cool rage and desperate courage, as passengers tried to take back their airplane, all the time unaware that an Air Force jet, scrambled from a base in Virginia, was closing in with orders to shoot the plane down before it got to Washington, D.C.

By the time United Flight 93 was in smoldering pieces in a field outside the Somerset County village of Shanksville, the F-16 was 14 minutes from the range at which it could have brought down the 757 with heat-seeking missiles.

Flight 93 became an asterisk to a day of horror that claimed almost 5,000 lives, toppled buildings that stood like a twin Colossus on the New York shore, took down one side of the Pentagon, and ushered in a war without rules against an enemy without a state.

What made Flight 93 different was a decision reached somewhere over the skies of Western Pennsylvania, after passengers learned on cell phones that they were likely to be flown into a building as the fourth in a quartet of suicide attacks.

They decided to fight.

They became the first casualties in a strange new combat against an enemy as old as hatred and as unclear as the muffled shouts and groans investigators would later hear on the cockpit voice recorder dug out of a reclaimed strip mine on a Pennsylvania hillside.

This is their story.



In December 1999, 40 people were living lives as ordinary and remarkable as those doled out to anyone by fortune's hand.

John Talignani was retired after 20 years of serving drinks at a Manhattan steakhouse. He would sit in front of his 55-inch television in his Staten Island home and order things on QVC. He couldn't resist. He had two bread makers. Toasters. A pasta maker. Baseball memorabilia.

Sandra Waugh Bradshaw was juggling dual careers -- flight attendant and mother. She was home in Greensboro, N.C. with her year-old daughter, Alexandria. In the coming year, her son Nathan would arrive.

Alan Beaven was practicing law in San Francisco. Kristin Gould White was researching medical history at Ivy League schools. Richard Guadagno was photographing wildlife. Pilot LeRoy Homer Jr. was living life as a newlywed.

In the town of Abha, Saudi Arabia, a skinny, 21-year-old student of Islamic law -- it is called Sharia -- was leaving on a religious trip. Under the rules of Islam, every man must, once in his life, travel to the city of Mecca. Then there were the other trips, the optional, minor pilgrimages known as "Umra." It was on Umra that Ahmed Al Nami left for Mecca.

Before entering the city, Al Nami would stop, perform the rituals of purity, then enter, pray, and walk on holy ground.

But he was supposed to come home.

For almost two years his family would hear nothing from him. His religious journey was about to take him several stops beyond a holy city.



Melodie Homer doesn't know if her husband kissed her goodbye. She had spent most of Monday, Sept. 10, sick in bed. LeRoy Homer stayed up late watching television. By the time he got to bed, she was drifting off to sleep.

The alarm sounded at 4:45 Tuesday morning. She could hear the shower running, the sounds of a man dressing quietly in the bathroom, trying not to awaken his wife, or their 11-month-old daughter, Laurel, who slept in another room. LeRoy Homer put on dark blue trousers, a white shirt, blue tie, and a United Airlines jacket with epaulets. He was now First Officer LeRoy Homer, who would sit in the righthand seat of the cockpit of a Boeing 757. He was starting the day in Marlton, N.J., and was to end his morning in San Francisco.

Homer got into his Toyota 4-Runner and began the 75-minute drive north to Newark International Airport.

Alan Beaven was up at 4. He had a rental car to drop off at the airport from the Catskills home he was sharing with his wife and 5-year-old daughter, Sonali. Beaven was born in New Zealand. He lived in England for a time



and worked as a prosecutor for Scotland Yard. Now he was an environmental lawyer, with an office in San Francisco, and he had one last case to try before departing with his family to do volunteer work in India. His world view was summed up in a motto he'd taped to the wall of his New York office: "Fear -- who cares?"

Melodie Homer marked the first birthday of her daughter, Laurel, last week without her husband, United Flight 93 First Officer LeRoy Homer. Her mother, Ena Thorpe, holding Laurel in the background, came from her home in Canada to stay with her in Marlton, N.J. after her husband died in the Sept. 11 crash. (Lake Fong, Post-Gazette)

Before he left, Beaven woke his wife, Kimi, to say goodbye.

"I'm going to win this case for you," he said.

She pulled him toward her.

"All I want from California is for you to come back safe and sound," she said.

Beaven left with a suitcase and a bag of court papers, but no cell phone. He didn't carry one.

As LeRoy Homer was traveling north on the New Jersey Turnpike, Christine Snyder and Mary Steiner were in a limousine, going south, from a friend's apartment in Manhattan. The pair had slipped up to New York after attending the American Forestry Conference in Washington. The day before they left Manhattan, they took in a Broadway show, rode the Staten Island Ferry and drank Diet Cokes at the top of the tallest buildings on the East Coast. The view from the World Trade Center had been astonishing.

When they reached the airport they split up. Steiner was flying on Northwest. Snyder wanted to build up frequent flier miles on her United account. That morning, she called to check on her flight, Flight 91, due to leave after 9 a.m. She moved up to Flight 93 for an earlier start.

"See you tomorrow," Steiner called out to her friend.

Colleen L. Fraser, 51, dressed for comfort that morning. At 4 1/2 feet tall, a survivor of childhood surgeries for an inherited bone condition, she walked with a cane, flew with trepidation and fought for the disabled with ferocity. She was vice chairwoman of the New Jersey Developmental Disabilities Council, a woman with a flame-red, spiked crewcut who kept a small copy of the Constitution that she would brandish when confronted with anything that struck her as unjust. Her sister Christine dropped her off shortly before 7 a.m. They marveled at the clear weather.

At the Airport Marriott Hotel, visible from Terminal A, Christian Adams had said good night on Monday to Carol Sullivan, director of the German Wine Information

Bureau, and Sullivan's assistant, Caroline Von Bistram. The trio were to travel the next day to San Francisco for an annual wine-tasting. Adams was deputy director of the German Wine Institute, visiting on business from Biebelsheim in southern Germany.

"My assistant and I had to leave the hotel by 6 a.m. to catch the hotel shuttle going over to the airport," Sullivan said. "He'd been joking with us the night before that, since his flight was 15 minutes later, he could sleep 15 minutes longer and probably wouldn't be seeing us in the lobby." Apparently, Adams did sleep a little longer. Sullivan and Von Bistram boarded the shuttle without seeing him.

Somewhere upstairs at the Marriott, other passengers were gathered.

Ziad Jarrah had come to the hotel a day earlier and paid cash for seven rooms. He and his companions ate the night before at Priscilla's, the hotel's upscale restaurant, where prime steak sells for \$34, baby New Zealand lamb goes for \$30, and cream of watercress soup starts at \$10.

"They paid cash for everything," said one hotel waiter.

With Jarrah was his roommate from Florida, Ahmed Al Haznawi, a 20-year-old student from Baljurshi, Saudi Arabia, along with Al Nami, the man who disappeared on his visit to Mecca, and Saeed Al Ghamdi, a young man about whom almost nothing is known.

Since arriving in the United States in late 1999, Jarrah had studied at two south Florida flight schools. His family in Lebanon told investigators they regularly sent him money -- sometimes as much as \$2,000 a month. Before moving to the United States, Jarrah studied aeronautical engineering in Hamburg, Germany, where he became close to another Muslim student named Mohamed Atta, later identified as the man who flew American Airlines Flight 11 into the World Trade Center.

Atta was fiery, religious, almost fearfully disdainful of women.

It changed Jarrah, who had received a largely non-religious upbringing.

Jarrah's Turkish girlfriend, Aisle Senguen, told



The Hijackers



German investigators that Jarrah sometimes criticized her for becoming "too westernized," although he himself had attended Christian schools as a youngster, drank and fancied discotheques.

After moving to Florida, Jarrah and his companions were regularly in touch with Atta, who dispensed thousands of dollars in living expenses through postal orders. Jarrah moved from apartment to apartment, rarely leaving a forwarding address.

On Sept. 5, Jarrah and Al Haznawi, the son of a Muslim prayer leader, visited Mile High Travel in Fort Lauderdale and booked two one-way tickets to Newark. Two days later, Al Ghamdi and Al Nami stopped at another Fort Lauderdale travel agency, Passage Tours, and paid \$140 each for budget airline flights to Newark.

The night before boarding Flight 93, in their hotel rooms, Jarrah would have opened a list of instructions, kept in a notebook that apparently was written by his old friend Atta.

It instructed them to bathe, wear cologne, shave excess hair from their bodies and check the knives they carried.

"You must make your knife sharp and you must not discomfort your animal during the slaughter," it read.

"Completely forget something called 'this life.' The time for play is over and the serious time is upon us."

It instructed them to turn to two Suras -- chapters -- of the Koran, al Tawba and al Anfa, which translate to "Repentance" and "The Spoils of War." In Al-Anfa, the 32nd verse reads:

*Remember how they said:
"O Allah! If this is indeed*

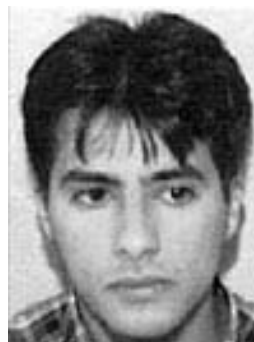
Ziad Jarrah, 26, was born in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon just as the nation was beginning to unravel into civil war. A Sunni Muslim, he was educated in Christian schools and sent to Hamburg, Germany, to study. It was there he met Mohamed Atta, the apparent ringleader of the Sept. 11 attacks.



Ahmed Al Haznawi, who occasionally shared a home with Jarrah in South Florida, was in his early 20s. Born in Baljurshi, Saudi Arabia, he was the son of prayer leader at his local mosque.



Saeed Al Ghamdi is a cypher to authorities. They know almost nothing of the young man and are uncertain if his name -- a common one in the Middle East -- was an alias.



*The Truth from Thee,
Rain down on us a shower
Of stones from the sky,
Or send us a grievous Penalty."*

Ahmed Al Nami, 23, studied Islamic Law at King Khaled University in Abha, Saudi Arabia. His family said he vanished while on pilgrimage.



The crew of United Flight 93 gathered one hour before the scheduled take-off. Such meetings are routine. Pilot and first officer decide who will handle the takeoff and landing, who will work the radio and computers.

Flight attendants go over the passenger manifest and decide who will work what sections of the cabin.

The pilot was Jason Dahl, 43, of Denver. Homer would fly alongside him as first officer.

Dahl was planning to take his wife Sandy to London for their fifth wedding anniversary Sept. 14, and by moving up his flight schedule, they would have more time together overseas. Sandy, a United flight attendant, went onto United's computer system and shifted him to Flight 93.

The night before he left Denver, Dahl took his wife downtown and told her to pick a car she liked. What he hadn't told her was, when he got back home on Friday, he also was having a baby grand piano delivered.

On Sept. 10, Dahl flew as a passenger in business class on his way to Newark. He sat next to Rob Quillen, a businessman from Lincoln, Neb., who knew he was next to someone important when an attendant brought Dahl a beer before anybody else on the plane had been served.

The pair struck up a conversation about the safety of flying.

Quillen said his biggest fear was engine failure. Dahl told him that had happened to him but that he'd made an emergency landing without trouble.

Dahl's biggest worry, as Quillen remembered it, was landing in the rain. The massive wheels could hydroplane.

The conversation moved on to stock car racing, and Quillen, who was scheduled to be a host at a NASCAR event in Kansas City a week later, got Dahl's cellphone number. He planned to send along tickets for Dahl and his 15-year-old son from a previous marriage.

"I'll talk to you next week and get those tickets out to you," Quillen told him.

Deborah Welsh was the purser -- the key attendant who stands in front, makes announcements and oversees the others.

Wanda Green wasn't originally supposed to be on Flight 93. The 49-year-old divorced mother of two grown children had been scheduled to fly Sept. 13, but Green, who also worked as a real estate agent, realized she had to handle the closing of a home sale Sept. 13. She'd phoned her best friend, fellow flight attendant Donita Judge, who opened United's computerized schedule and shifted Green to the Sept. 11 flight.

It was what attendants call a "senior trip" -- with few passengers and a layover in San Francisco where Green could visit family.

"I was feeling good about that," Judge said.

Green drew Door 2, the first row of coach, from which she would work the first-class aisles with Lorraine Bay, a 37-year veteran with United.

Sandy Bradshaw, 38, would work the back of the plane, in economy class. After the first of her two children was born two years ago -- she also had a 16-year-old stepdaughter -- Bradshaw cut back on her workload. Her husband, Phil, a US Airways pilot, urged her to quit. She was thinking about it. But after 11 years as an attendant, and a personnel file filled with complimentary letters from pleased passengers, she still loved to fly.

She was in economy because she'd picked up Flight 93 late in the planning. Ordinarily, she liked working first class. It was a good fit with her gregarious ways.

"She just liked the one-on-one that you have with people up there," Phil Bradshaw said.

CeeCee Lyles, 33, of Fort Myers, Fla., had perhaps the most unusual resume among the flight crew. She'd been a police officer and detective for six years in Fort Pierce, Fla. In late 2000, she left that job to pursue her lifetime dream: to be a flight attendant.

The switch displeased some relatives. Air travel, they told CeeCee, seemed more dangerous than police work. Lyles laughed it off. She had married Lorne Lyles, a police officer in Fort Myers, and between them they were raising a blended brood of four boys: her sons Jerome Smith, 16, and Jevon Castrillo, 6, and Lorne's sons, Justin, 11, and Jordan, 9. When United posted her to Newark in February, CeeCee Lyles picked up an apartment with four other attendants, and commuted home to

Florida when she was free. And in-between, there was the cell phone.

"We talked about everything and nothing," Lorne Lyles said. "Stuff about the kids, the list of bills I had to pay and how much we missed each other."

The crew boarded its flight 35 minutes ahead of the scheduled departure. The attendants began preparing the in-flight breakfast.

One passenger was late. Mark Bingham had overslept and his friend, Matthew Hall, drove madly from Manhattan to Newark. They screeched to a halt outside Terminal A at 7:40. Bingham leapt from the car, lugging the old, blue-and-gold canvas bag he'd used as a rugby player at the University of California at Berkeley a decade earlier.

United attendants reopened the door to the boarding ramp and let him on the plane.

Bingham slipped into a seat in aisle 4-D, next to Thomas Burnett. Nine minutes after Hall dropped him off, Bingham picked up his cell phone.

"Hey, it's me," he said. "Thanks for driving so crazy to get me here. I'm in first class, drinking a glass of orange juice."



Bert Rodriguez thinks it was the flier that drew in Ziad Jarrah. He turned up at US-1 Fitness in Dania Beach, just north of Miami, in May after Rodriguez put out a handbill saying, "Assert yourself." It explained that Rodriguez had trained police and federal agents in close-quarters hand-fighting.

Most martial arts students don't train directly with Rodriguez, who has a staff of instructors. But Jarrah, Rodriguez said, "specifically came to train with me."

He paid \$500 cash for a series of 10 lessons. Then, when those were done, he returned and peeled off \$500 in cash for another 10.

At 5 feet, 11 inches and about 180 pounds, Jarrah surprised Rodriguez with his stamina. The training included flat-out fighting. At one point, the trainer went at the student with a baseball bat to teach him disarming techniques.

The young man, who told Rodriguez he was training to become a pilot, could go 10, 15 or 20 minutes in unrelenting combat. The battle techniques Jarrah came to learn involved thinking -- figuring out ways to make an opponent's moves work

More on the story

[Investigation pursues the missing elements of Flight 93 story](#)

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against him; throwing attackers off-balance; keeping composure under stress.

Jarrah, Rodriguez said, was very calm and a quick learner.

"He was in very, very good shape. He was a great person to work with," Rodriguez said. "I told him, 'If you have someone to practice with, practice these techniques.' He told me, 'Oh, yeah, I have some roommates I can train with.' "

Rodriguez told Jarrah to bring them in. He'd give a group discount.

"He said no, they travel a lot."

Between lessons, Jarrah, who carried a German passport and claimed to be Saudi, and Rodriguez, a 53-year-old Cuban-American, talked about the world.

"We talked about business and leadership. We talked about employees," Rodriguez said. "He told me that he loved it here and that he had a girlfriend in Germany and he was planning to return there."

In August, Jarrah said he was planning some more travel. Rodriguez could not have known that the young man had written home to his family -- not in Saudi Arabia but in Beirut -- asking for \$700. Investigators say the family told them it was "for fun."

He planned to visit California.



Flight 93 was near cruising altitude when a system-wide message came over its monitor. United control warned pilots in the air of potential "cockpit intrusion" -- meaning some passenger might try to seize a plane.

They acknowledged the message.

A few minutes after 9 a.m., with the World Trade Center hundreds of miles behind it and now in flames, Flight 93 would have reached 31,000 feet and 515 mph.

At some point -- the best estimation is about 40 minutes into the flight west -- at least three of the hijackers stood up and put red bandanas around their heads. Two of them forced their way into the cockpit. One took the loudspeaker microphone, unaware it could also be heard by air traffic controllers, and announced that

someone had a bomb onboard and the flight was returning to the airport. He told them he was the pilot, but spoke with an accent.

U.S. Rep. John P. Murtha, D-Johnstown, a ranking Democrat on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, described the announcement this way: "As they got toward Cleveland, the hijackers said 'Look, just be calm, we're going to land this plane.' "

By that time, though, Jarrah and his crew apparently had already drawn blood.

Deena Burnett was waking up at her home in San Ramon, Calif. She'd gone down to the kitchen to fix breakfast for her three daughters. The phone rang. She recalls it was around 6:20 a.m. -- 9:20 Eastern time.

It was Tom.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"No. I'm on United Flight 93 from Newark to San Francisco. The plane has been hijacked. We are in the air. They've already knifed a guy. There is a bomb on board. Call the FBI."

Deena Burnett dialed 911.

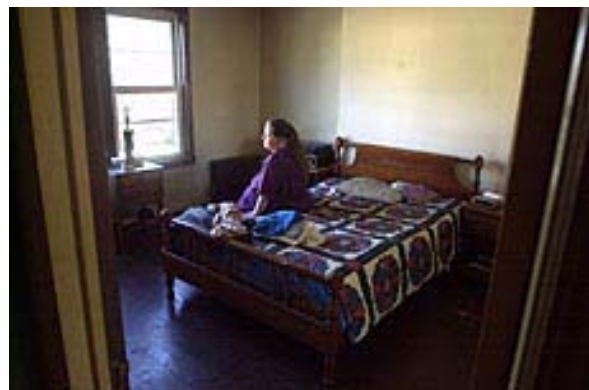
Jeremy Glick picked up a GTE Airfone just before 9:30 a.m. and called his in-laws in the Catskills. His wife, Lyz, and daughter, Emerson, were visiting. The family had been transfixed in front of a television, watching news coverage of airliners smashing into the World Trade Center in New York.

Glick's mother-in-law, JoAnne Makely, answered.

"Jeremy," she said, "Thank God. We're so worried."

"It's bad news," Glick replied. He asked for Lyz.

Lyz recalls no background noise. No commotion. He described the men as Arabic-looking, wearing red headbands, carrying knives. One told passengers he had a bomb. Most passengers had been forced to the rear of the cabin. Glick's mother-in-law went to another phone and dialed 911. As Jeremy and Lyz spoke, New York



Christine Fraser, 50, sits alone in her bedroom in the house she'd shared with her older sister, United Flight 93 passenger Colleen L. Fraser, in Elizabeth, N.J. The sisters, who were born 15 months apart, were exceptionally close. "We were like twins," said Christine, who like her sister, has a bone disorder. (Lake Fong, Post-Gazette)

state police patched in on the call.

Glick asked his wife: Was it true that planes had been crashed into the World Trade Center?

Yes, she said. Glick thought so. Another passenger had been on the phone home and heard the same thing.

Around 9:30, Deena Burnett's phone rang again. It was Tom.

"He didn't sound frightened, but he was speaking faster than he normally would," she said. He told her the hijackers were in the cockpit.

"I told him a lot of planes had been hijacked, that they don't know how many," she said.

"You've got to be kidding," he replied.

"No," she said.

Were they commercial planes, airliners, he asked her. She didn't know.

"OK," he said, "I've got to go." He hung up.

Deena looked at the television. The Pentagon suddenly appeared, a hole torn into its side by an oncoming airplane. She wondered if it was her husband's flight. Deena Burnett started crying.

Alice Hoglan was visiting her sister-in-law, Kathy Hoglan, in Saratoga, Calif., when the phone rang. It was 9:42 Eastern time. Kathy's nephew, Mark Bingham was on the line.

"Alice, talk to Mark," Kathy said, handing her the phone. "He's been hijacked."

"Mom? This is Mark Bingham," the voice said. It sounded strange for her son to introduce himself by his full name. She knew he was flustered.

"I want to let you know that I love you. I'm on a flight from Newark to San Francisco and there are three guys who have taken over the plane and they say they have a bomb," he said.

"Who are these guys?" Alice Hoglan asked.

There was a pause. Hoglan heard murmurs of conversation in English. Mark's voice came back.

"You believe me, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes, Mark. I believe you. But who are these guys?"

There was a pause. Alice heard background noise. The line went dead.

Todd Beamer was near the rear of the plane, trying to use his company's Airfone account. For some reason, he couldn't get authorization for the call. Finally, he was routed to a Verizon customer service center in Oakbrook, Ill.

He told the operator his airliner had been hijacked. He was patched through immediately to Lisa Jefferson, a Verizon supervisor.

It was 9:45 a.m.

Somewhere outside Cleveland, United Flight 93 had made a sharp turn and began flying east, toward Washington, D.C.

Beamer told Jefferson he was sitting next to a flight attendant. He could see three hijackers, armed with knives. One insisted he had a bomb. Twenty-seven of the passengers had been herded to the rear of the plane, where the hijacker with the bomb was guarding them, he said. Two hijackers were in the cockpit. A fourth was in first class.

He asked Jefferson to promise to call his wife, and their two sons, David, 4, and Drew, 2.

"Oh! We're going down!" Beamer shouted. There was a pause. Then, calmly: "No, we're OK. I think we're turning around."

Deena Burnett doesn't know how she did it, but she went on with her morning rituals. She got the 5-year-old twins up and ready for school. She called a friend to get them there.

While Beamer was on the phone with Lisa Jefferson, Deena Burnett's phone rang again.

Tom was still alive.

"They're taking airplanes and hitting landmarks all up and down the East Coast," she told him.

"OK," he replied. "We're going to do something. I'll call you back."

Click.

In Fort Myers, Fla., Lorne Lyles didn't hear the phone ringing. He'd worked the night shift and had lain down to sleep at 7:30. At 9:47 a.m., the answering machine picked up a call from his wife, CeeCee, stranded in the back of the airplane.

When the tape was played back hours later, CeeCee Lyles could be heard praying for her family, for herself, for the souls of the men who had hijacked her plane.

"I hope I'll see your face again," she said.

Lyz Glick was still on the phone with Jeremy. She stood in her parents' living room while the television screen filled with the sight of two burning towers.

"You need to be strong," she said.

State police, on the other line with Glick's mother-in-law, relayed a question: Did Glick know where his plane was? Glick didn't know, but he sensed they had changed direction.

Lyz and Jeremy spoke of their love for each other.

"I need you to be happy," he told her, "and I will respect any decisions that you make."

Then he told her the passengers were taking a vote: Should they try to take back the plane?

"Honey, you need to do it," Lyz told him.

Glick wondered what to use for a weapon. "I have my butter knife from breakfast," he joked.

Phil Bradshaw was home in Greensboro, N.C., on the telephone, talking with a friend about the horrors on television. The line clicked. He asked his friend to hold.

It was Sandy Bradshaw, his wife, the flight attendant.

"Have you heard what's going on? My flight has been hijacked. My flight has been hijacked by three guys with knives," she said.

Who was flying the plane? Phil asked his wife.

"I don't know who's flying the plane or where we are," she said.

Sandy Bradshaw, who was trained never to spill hot coffee on a paying customer, slipped into the airplane's galley and began filling pitchers with boiling water.



Some calls from Flight 93 arrived at hours people can no longer recall.

Marion Britton, 53, assistant director of the Census Bureau's New York office, phoned a longtime friend, Fred Fiumano. All he can remember is that it was "sometime after 9:30."

Britton was crying. She had been hijacked, she told Fiumano, and two people on the plane already had been killed.

"I was trying to console her," Fiumano said. "I said 'Don't worry, they're only going to take you for a ride. You'll be all right.' "

Lauren Catuzzi Grandcolas, 38, phoned her husband Jack in San Rafael, Calif.

She'd been scheduled to take a later flight that day, but rebooked to get home sooner. Jack hadn't heard the message. He'd seen the madness on television, and when Jack's sister-in-law phoned to ask if he'd heard from Lauren, he checked the phone machine.

"Sweetie," the voice came over the tape, "pick up the phone if you can hear me." There was a brief pause. "OK, I love you. There's a little problem with the plane. I'm fine and comfortable for now." She told Jack she loved him. She asked him to tell her parents and family how much she loved them, too. Then she passed the Airfone to the woman seated next to her.

"Now you call your people," Grandcolas told her.

Honor Elizabeth Wainio, 27, took the phone from Grandcolas and dialed her stepmother, Esther Heymann, in Baltimore.

"Mom, we're being hijacked. I just called to say good bye," she said.



Gordon Felt, whose older brother Edward Felt was a passenger on United Flight 93, said he believes his brother and everyone on the plane were heroes for overpowering the hijackers to save others on the ground. Edward Felt, 41, of Matawan, N.J., was married and the father of two children. (V.W.H. Campbell Jr., Post-Gazette)

"Elizabeth, we don't know how this is going to turn out. I've got my arms around you," Heymann said.

Wainio told her stepmother she could feel them.

"Let's look out at that beautiful blue sky. Let's be here in the moment," Heymann told her. "Let's do some deep breathing together."

They passed a few quiet moments.

"It hurts me that it's going to be so much harder for you all than it is for me," Wainio said.



"I see a river." Sandy Bradshaw couldn't name it. It suggested, though, that Flight 93 was somewhere over Western Pennsylvania.

"I just told her to be safe and come home soon," Phil Bradshaw said. "She said she hoped she would."

Sometime shortly before 10 a.m., Tom Burnett called home one last time.

"A group of us is going to do something," he told Deena.

"I told him, 'No, Tom, just sit down and don't draw attention to yourself,' " she said.

"Deena," he told her, "If they're going to crash the plane into the ground, we have to do something. We can't wait for the authorities. We have to do something now."

The authorities, at that moment, had scrambled three F-16 fighter jets from Langley Air Force Base in Hampton, Va. The planes, armed with heat-seeking, Sidewinder missiles, were authorized to knock down any civilian aircraft that appeared headed toward a target on the ground.

The fighter jets were 14 minutes out of range and closing in.

"Pray, just pray, Deena. We're going to do something," Tom Burnett told his wife.

Still on his own phone call, Todd Beamer was pouring out his heart to his family through Lisa Jefferson, the Verizon supervisor he'd reached on his Airfone.

They prayed the 23rd Psalm:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want

*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures
He leadeth me beside the still waters ...*



Sometime shortly before 10 a.m., the direct line from Cleveland Air Traffic Control rang inside the control tower at Johnstown-Cambria County Airport, 70 miles east of Pittsburgh.

Did Johnstown tower have any radio contact with a large aircraft about 20 miles to its south? Supervisor Dennis Fritz and controller Thomas Hull picked up binoculars -- the tower has no radar -- and scanned the horizon to the south. The day was clear and, from the highest point in the area, they could spot radio towers in neighboring Somerset County. A large plane would have stood out.

"We didn't see a thing," Fritz said.



Jerry and Beatrice Guadagno of Ewing, N.J. lost their only son, Richard Guadagno of Eureka, Calif., in the crash of United Flight 93. Richard Guadagno had returned to New Jersey to visit his parents and to attend the 100th-birthday party for Beatrice's mother. When his father dropped him off at the airport, he was carrying crape myrtle, Japanese maple and primrose cuttings from his parents' yard that he'd planned to transplant in his garden. (Lake Fong/Post-Gazette)

Hull went on the radio and broadcast an open message: "Aircraft 20 South of the field, contact Johnstown tower"

Ninety seconds later, Cleveland called back. The plane was now 15 miles south and heading directly for the Johnstown tower.

"We suggest you evacuate," they told him.

Fritz ordered trainees and custodial staff out of the 85-foot tower. He and Hull stayed at their posts and scanned the south with binoculars. It occurred to Fritz that the plane must be flying below the level of the mountain ridges around them.

From the back of Flight 93, CeeCee

Lyles finally reached her husband, Lorne.

"Babe, my plane's been hijacked," she said.

"Huh? Stop joking," he said.

"No babe, I wouldn't joke like that. I love you. Tell the boys I love them."

The pair prayed. In the background, Lorne Lyles could hear what he now believes was the sound of men planning a counterattack.

"They're getting ready to force their way into the cockpit," she told him.

When he had finished talking with Lisa Jefferson, finished relaying his love for his family, finished praying the Psalm that asked for green pastures and still waters, Todd Beamer put down the phone, still connected with the outside world.

"Are you guys ready? Let's roll," he said.

Honor Wainio was still on the line with her stepmother.

"I need to go," she said. "They're getting ready to break into the cockpit. I love you. Goodbye."

"Everyone's running to first class," Sandy Bradshaw told her husband. "I've got to go. Bye."

CeeCee Lyles let out a scream.

"They're doing it! They're doing it! They're doing it!" she said. Lorne Lyles heard a scream. Then his wife said something he couldn't understand. Then the line went dead.

Forty-five seconds after telling Fritz to evacuate the Johnstown tower, Cleveland Air Traffic Control phoned again.

"They said to disregard. The aircraft had turned to the south and they lost radar contact with him."

It was 10:06 a.m.

Fritz and Hull studied the horizon to the south. They couldn't see a thing.



NEWS RELEASE

11:17AM, EST

United Airlines has confirmed one of its flights has crashed near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. United Flight 93, a Boeing 757 aircraft, is the flight number involved. The flight originated in Newark and was bound for San Francisco. United is deeply concerned about a further flight, United Flight 175, a Boeing 767, which was bound from Boston to Los Angeles. On behalf of the airline, CEO James E. Goodwin said, "The thoughts of everyone at United are with the

passengers and crew of these flights. Our prayers are also with everyone on the ground who may have been involved in today's tragic events. United is working with all the relevant authorities, including the FBI, to obtain further information on these flights. In the meantime, in line with FAA directives, a worldwide groundstop on all our flights continues. For further information, friends and relatives who may be concerned about a passenger on United Flight 93 should call 1-800-932-8555."



The next day, Deena Burnett gathered the three girls on her bed and tried to explain the inexplicable.

"There were some bad guys on dad's airplane," she said. "The bad guys caused the airplane to crash and everyone on board died."

"And Dad, too?" one of them asked.

"Yes," she said.

The four of them cried together for a while. They asked where their father was. Deena told them heaven.

The youngest, Anna Clare, 3, asked her, "Why does he want to be with Jesus instead of us?"

"I'm really going to miss his silly faces," said Madison, one of the twins.

"I will, too," Deena said.

"Well, can we call him on his cell phone?" Madison asked.

"No," Deena told them. "There are no cell phones in heaven."

Halley, the other twin, suggested they write a letter.

After the crash, Lorne Lyles discovered CeeCee's first message on the answering machine.

He couldn't force himself to listen to it. He will. Someday.

CeeCee's boys are with their father. Lorne's sons are with his ex-wife. He spends his days in an empty home in Fort Myers wondering when he will go to work again.

"I felt so helpless," he said. "As a police officer, I protect and serve people all day

long. But there was nothing, absolutely nothing I could do to help my wife."

Christine Fraser, who dropped off her sister, Colleen, at the airport that morning, reproached herself for not getting out to hug her sibling.

It was only after she worked up the courage to finally enter Colleen's room that Christine found her sister's turquoise, flower ring. Colleen had worn it for most of her life. It was her signature item. For some reason, she hadn't done so that day.

"It was in her room, like she'd left it for me. I'm wearing it now," said Christine Fraser. "It's a comfort."



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Stewardess ID'd Hijackers Early, Transcripts Show

by Gail Sheehy

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16 February 2004

The New York Observer

Hearing the taped voice of a courageous flight attendant as she calmly narrated the doomed course of American Airlines Flight 11 brought it all back. The frozen horror of that September morning two and a half years ago. The unanswered questions. Betty Ong narrated that first hijacking right up to the moment that Mohamed Atta drove the Boeing 767 into the north tower of the World Trade Center.

Twenty-three minutes into her blow-by-blow account, Ong's voice abruptly ceased. "What's going on, Betty?" asked her ground contact, Nydia Gonzalez. "Betty, talk to me. I think we might have lost her."

Emotional catharsis, yes. There was scarcely a dry eye in the Senate hearing room where 10 commissioners are probing the myriad failures of our nation's defenses and response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. But answers? Not many. The most shocking evidence remains hidden in plain sight.

The politically divided 9/11 commission was able to agree on a public airing of four and a half minutes from the Betty Ong tape, which the American public and most of the victims families heard for the first time on the evening news of Jan. 27. [See the minutes of the Seventh public hearing of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States --ratitor] But commissioners were unaware of the crucial information given in an even more revealing phone call, made by another heroic flight attendant on the same plane, Madeline (Amy) Sweeney. They were unaware because their chief of staff, Philip Zelikow, chooses which evidence and witnesses to bring to their attention. Mr. Zelikow, as a former adviser to the pre-9/11 Bush administration, has a blatant conflict.

"My wife's call was the first specific information the airline and the government got that day," said Mike Sweeney, the widowed husband of Amy Sweeney, who went face to face with the hijackers on Flight 11. She gave seat locations and physical descriptions of the hijackers, which allowed officials to identify them as Middle Eastern men by name even before the first crash. She gave officials key clues to the fact that this was not a traditional hijacking. And she gave the first and only eyewitness account of a bomb on board.

"How do you know it's a bomb?" asked her phone contact.

"Because the hijackers showed me a bomb," Sweeney said, describing its yellow and red wires.

Sweeney's first call from the plane was at 7:11 a.m. on Sept. 11 -- the only call in which she displayed emotional upset. Flight 11 was delayed, and she seized the few moments to call home in hopes of talking to her 5-year-old daughter, Anna, to say how sorry she was not to be there to put her on the bus to kindergarten. Ms. Sweeney's son Jack had been born several months premature, and she had taken the maximum time off over the previous summer to be with her children. "But she had to go back that fall, to hold the Boston-to-L.A. trip," explained her husband.

American's Flight 11 took off from Logan Airport in Boston at 7:59 a.m. By 8:14 a.m., the F.A.A. controller following that flight from a facility in Nashua, N.H., already knew it was missing; its transponder had been turned off, and the controller couldn't get a response from the pilots. The air-traffic controller contacted the pilot of United Airlines Flight 175, which at 8:14 also left Boston's Logan bound for California, and asked for his help in locating Flight 11.

Sweeney slid into a passenger seat in the next-to-last row of coach and used an Airfone to call American Airlines Flight Service at Boston's Logan airport. "This is Amy Sweeney," she reported. "I'm on Flight 11 -- this plane has been hijacked." She was disconnected. She called back: "Listen to me, and listen to me very carefully." Within seconds, her befuddled respondent was replaced by a voice she knew.

"Amy, this is Michael Woodward." The American Airlines flight service manager had been friends with Sweeney for a decade, so he didn't have to waste any time verifying that this wasn't a hoax. "Michael, this plane has been hijacked," Ms. Sweeney repeated. Calmly, she gave him the seat locations of three of the hijackers: 9D, 9G and 10B. She said they were all of Middle Eastern descent, and one spoke English very well.

Mr. Woodward ordered a colleague to punch up those seat locations on the computer. At least 20 minutes before the plane crashed, the airline had the names, addresses, phone numbers and credit cards of three of the five hijackers. They knew that 9G was Abdulaziz al-Omari, 10B was Satam al-Suqami, and 9D was Mohamed Atta -- the ringleader of the 9/11 terrorists.

"The nightmare began before the first plane crashed," said Mike Sweeney, "because once my wife gave the seat numbers of the hijackers and Michael Woodward pulled up the passenger information, Mohamed Atta's name was out there. They had to know what they were up against."

Mr. Woodward was simultaneously passing on Sweeney's information to American's headquarters in Dallas-Fort Worth. There was no taping facility in his office, because the most acute emergency normally fielded by a flight service manager would be a call from a crew member faced with 12 passengers in first class and only eight meals. So Mr. Woodward was furiously taking notes.

Amy Sweeney's account alerted the airline that something extraordinary was occurring. She told Mr. Woodward she didn't believe the pilots were flying the plane any longer. She couldn't contact the cockpit. Sweeney may have ventured forward to business class, because she relayed the alarming news to Betty Ong, who was sitting in the rear jump-seat. In professional lingo, she said: "Our No. 1 has been stabbed," referring to a violent attack on the plane's purser, "also No. 5," another flight attendant. She also reported that the passenger in 9B had had his throat slit by the hijacker sitting behind him and appeared to be dead. Betty Ong relayed this information to Nydia Gonzalez, a reservations manager in North Carolina, who simultaneously held another phone to her ear with an open line to American Airlines official Craig Marquis at the company's Dallas headquarters.

The fact that the hijackers initiated their takeover by killing a passenger and stabbing two crew members had to be the first tip-off that this was anything but a standard hijacking. "I don't recall any flight crew or passenger being harmed during a hijacking in the course of my career," said Peg Ogonowski, a senior flight attendant who has flown with American for 28 years.

Betty Ong and Amy Sweeney also reported that the hijackers had used mace or pepper spray and that passengers in business class were unable to breathe. Another dazzling clue to the hijackers having a unique and violent intent came in Betty Ong's earliest report: "The cockpit is not answering their phone. We can't get into the cockpit. We don't know who's up there."

A male colleague of Ms. Gonzalez then comes on the line and makes the infuriating observation: "Well, if they were shrewd, they'd keep the door closed. Would they not maintain a sterile cockpit?"

To which Ong replied: "I think the guys are up there."

Ms. Sweeney told her ground contact that the plane had radically changed direction; it was flying erratically and was in rapid descent. Mr. Woodward asked her to look out the window -- what did she see?

"I see water. I see buildings. We're flying low, we're flying way too low," Sweeney replied, according to the notes taken by Mr. Woodward. Sweeney then took a deep breath and gasped, "Oh, my God."

At 8:46 a.m., Mr. Woodward lost contact with Amy Sweeney -- the moment of metamorphosis, when her plane became a missile guided into the tower holding thousands of unsuspecting civilians. "So sometime between 8:30 and 8:46, American must have known that the hijacking was connected to Al Qaeda," said Mike Sweeney. That would be 16 to 32 minutes before the second plane perforated the south tower.

Would American Airlines officials monitoring the Sweeney and Woodward dialogue have known right away that Mohamed Atta was connected to Al Qaeda?

"The answer is probably yes," said 9/11 commission member Bob Kerrey, "but it seems to me that the weakness here, in running up to pre-9/11, is an unwillingness to believe that the United States of America could be attacked. Then you're not putting defensive mechanisms in place. You're not trying to screen out people with connections to Islamic extremist groups."

Peg Ogonowski, the widow of Flight 11s captain, John Ogonowski, knew both Betty and Amy very well. "They had to know they were dealing with zealots," she said. "The words -- Middle Eastern hijackers -- would put a chill in any flight-crew members heart. They were unpredictable; you couldn't reason with them."

Ms. Ogonowski knew this from her nearly three decades of experience as a flight attendant for American. She and her husband had dreamt of the time in the not-so-distant future when their teenage children would be old enough that the couple could work the same flight to Europe and enjoy layovers in London and Paris together. She had been scheduled to fly Flight 11 on Sept. 13. After Sept. 11, she imagined herself in Sweeney's shoes: "When Amy picked up the phone -- she was mother of two very young children -- she had to know that, at that point, she might be being observed by another hijacker sitting in a passenger seat who would put a bullet through her head. What she did was incredibly brave."

How, then, could the commission have missed -- or ignored -- crucial facts that this very first of the first responders communicated to officials on that fateful day?

"It seems amazing to me that they didn't know," said Mrs. Ogonowski. "The state of Massachusetts has an award in Amy Sweeney's name for civilian bravery." The first recipients were John Ogonowski and Betty Ong. A full-court ceremony was held on Sept. 11, 2002, in Faneuil Hall in Boston, with Senators Kennedy and Kerrey and the state's whole political establishment in attendance.

Even the F.B.I. has recognized Amy Sweeney by bestowing on her its highest civilian honor, the Directors Award for Exceptional Public Service. "Mrs. Sweeney is immeasurably deserving of recognition for her heroic, unselfish and professional manner in which she lived the last moments of her life," according to the F.B.I.

What her husband wants to know is this: "When and how was this information about the hijackers used? Were Amy's last moments put to the best use to protect and save others?"

"We know what she said from notes, and the government has them," said Mary Schiavo, the formidable former Inspector General of the Department of Transportation, whose nickname among aviation officials was "Scary Mary." Ms. Schiavo sat in on the commission's hearing on aviation security on 9/11 and was disgusted by what it left out. "In any other situation, it would be unthinkable to withhold investigative material from an independent commission," she told this writer. "There are usually grave consequences. But the commission is clearly not talking to everybody or not telling us everything."

This is hardly the only evidence hiding in plain sight.

The captain of American Flight 11 stayed at the controls much of the diverted way from Boston to New York, sending surreptitious radio transmissions to authorities on the ground. Captain John Ogonowski was a strong and burly man with the instincts of a fighter pilot who had survived Vietnam. He gave extraordinary access to the drama inside his cockpit by triggering a "push-to-talk button" on the aircraft's yoke (or wheel). "The button was being pushed intermittently most of the way to New York," an F.A.A. air-traffic controller told The Christian Science Monitor the day after the catastrophe. "He wanted us to know something was wrong. When he pushed the button and the terrorist spoke, we knew there was this voice that was threatening the pilot, and it was clearly threatening."

According to a timeline later adjusted by the F.A.A., Flight 11's transponder was turned off at 8:20 a.m., only 21 minutes after takeoff. (Even before that, by probably a minute or so, Amy Sweeney began her report to American's operations center at Logan.) The plane turned south toward New York, and more than one F.A.A. controller heard a transmission with an ominous statement by a terrorist in the background, saying, "We have more planes. We have other planes." During these transmissions, the pilot's voice and the heavily accented voice of a hijacker were clearly audible, according to two controllers. All of it was recorded by a F.A.A. traffic-control center in Nashua, N.H. According to the reporter, Mark Clayton, the federal law-enforcement officers arrived at the F.A.A. facility shortly after the World Trade Center attack and took the tape.

To this writer's knowledge, there has been no public mention of the pilot's narrative since the news report on Sept. 12, 2001. Families of the flight crew have only heard about it, but when Peg Ogonowski asked American Airlines to let her hear it, she never heard back. Their F.A.A. superiors forbade the controllers to talk to anyone else.

Has the F.B.I. turned this critical tape over to the commission?

At the commission's January panel on aviation security, two rows of gray suits filled the back of the hearing room. They were not inspectors general of any of the government agencies called to testify. In fact, said Mary Schiavo, there is no entity within the administration pushing any consequences. The gray suits were all attorneys for the airlines, hovering around while the big bosses from American and United gave their utterly unrevealing testimonies.

Robert Bonner, the head of Customs and Border Protection, finally shot back at the panel with a startling boast.

"We ran passenger manifests through the system used by Customs -- two were hits on our watch list of August 2001," Mr. Bonner testified. "And by looking at the Arab names and their seat locations, ticket purchases and other passenger information, it didn't take a lot to do a rudimentary link analysis. Customs officers were able to ID 19 probable hijackers within 45 minutes."

He meant 45 minutes after four planes had been hijacked and turned into missiles. "I saw the sheet by 11 a.m.," he said, adding proudly, "And that analysis did indeed correctly identify the terrorists."

How has American Airlines responded? According to the widower Mike Sweeney, "Ever since Sept. 11, AMR [the parent company of American Airlines] just wants to forget this whole thing happened. They wouldn't allow me to talk to Michael Woodward, and five months or so: they let him go." The Families' Steering Committee urged the commission to interview Michael Woodward about the Sweeney information, as did Ms. Ong's brother, Harry Ong. A couple of days before the hearing on aviation security, a staffer did call Mr. Woodward and ask a few questions. But the explosive narrative offered by Amy Sweeney in her last 23 minutes of life was not included in the 9/11 commissions hearing on aviation security.

The timeline that is most disturbing belongs to the last of the four suicide missions -- United Airlines Flight 93, later presumed destined for the U.S. Capitol, if not the White House. Huge discrepancies persist in basic facts, such as when it crashed into the Pennsylvania countryside near Shanksville. The official impact time according to NORAD, the North American Air Defense Command, is 10:03 a.m. Later, U.S. Army seismograph data gave the impact time as 10:06:05. The F.A.A. gives a crash time of 10:07 a.m. And *The New York Times*, drawing on flight controllers in more than one F.A.A. facility, put the time at 10:10 a.m.

Up to a seven-minute discrepancy? In terms of an air disaster, seven minutes is close to an eternity. The way our nation has historically treated any airline tragedy is to pair up recordings from the cockpit and air-traffic control and parse the timeline down to the hundredths of a second. But as Mary Schiavo points out, "We don't have an NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board) investigation here, and they ordinarily dissect the timeline to the thousandth of a second."

Even more curious: The F.A.A. states that it established an open phone line with NORAD to discuss both American Airlines Flight 77 (headed for the Pentagon) and United's Flight 93. If true, NORAD had as many as 50 minutes to order fighter jets to intercept Flight 93 in its path toward Washington, D.C. But NORAD's official timeline claims that F.A.A. notification to NORAD on United Airlines Flight 93 is "not available." Why isn't it available?

Asked when NORAD gave an order for fighter planes to scramble in response to United's Flight 93, the air-defense agency notes only that F-16s were already airborne from Langley Air Force Base in Virginia to intercept American's Flight 77. The latter jet heaved into the Pentagon at either 9:40 a.m. (according to the F.A.A.) or at 9:38 a.m. (according to NORAD). Although the F-16's weren't in the skies over Washington until 9:49, the question is: Did they continue flying north in an attempt to deter the last of the four hijacked jets? The distance was only 129 miles.

The independent commission is in a position to demand such answers, and many more.

Have any weapons been recovered from any of the four downed planes? If not, why should the panel assume they were "less-than-four-inch knives," the description repeatedly used in the commissions hearing on aviation security? Remember the airlines' first reports, that the whole job was pulled off with box cutters? In fact, investigators for the commission found that box cutters were reported on only one plane. In any case, box cutters were considered straight razors and were always illegal. Thus the airlines switched their story and produced a

snap-open knife of less than four inches at the hearing. This weapon falls conveniently within the aviation-security guidelines pre-9/11.

But bombs? Mace or pepper spray? Gas masks? The F.B.I. dropped the clue that the hijackers had "masks" in a meeting with the Four Moms from New Jersey, the 9/11 widows who rallied for this independent commission.

The Moms want to know if investigators have looked into how the pilots were actually disabled. To think that eight pilots -- four of whom were formerly in the military, some with combat experience in Vietnam, and all of whom were in superb physical shape -- could have been subdued without a fight or so much as a sound stretches the imagination. Even giving the terrorists credit for a militarily disciplined act of war, it is rare for everything to go right in four separate battles.

Shouldn't the families and the American people know whether or not our government took action to prevent the second attack planned for the command-and-control center in Washington?

Melody Homer is another young widow of a 9/11 pilot. Her husband, LeRoy Homer, a muscular former Air Force pilot, was the first officer of United's Flight 93. The story put out by United -- of heroic passengers invading the cockpit and struggling with the terrorists -- is not believable to Melody Homer or to Sandy Dahl, widow of the planes captain, Jason Dahl. Mrs. Dahl was a working flight attendant with United and knew the configuration of that 757 like the back of her hand.

"We can't imagine that passengers were able to get a cart out of its locked berth and push it down the single aisle and jam it into the cockpit with four strong, violent men behind the door," said Ms. Homer. She believes that the victim's family members who broke a confidentiality agreement and gave their interpretation of sounds they heard on the cockpit tape misinterpreted the shattering of china. "When a plane goes erratic, china falls."

Now, the most disturbing disconnect of all: The F.A.A. and NORAD had at least 42 minutes to decide what to do about Flight 93. What really happened?

At 9:30 a.m., six minutes after receiving orders from NORAD, three F-16s were airborne, according to NORAD's timeline. At first, the planes were directed toward New York and probably reached 600 miles per hour within two minutes, said Maj. Gen. Mike J. Haugen, adjutant general of the North Dakota National Guard. Once it was apparent that the New York suicide missions were accomplished, the Virginia-based fighters were given a new flight target: Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. The pilots heard an ominous squawk over the planes transponder, a code that indicates almost an emergency wartime footing. General Haugen says the F-16s were asked to confirm that the Pentagon was on fire. The lead flier looked down and verified the worst.

Then the pilots received the most surreal order of the morning, from a voice identifying itself as a representative of the Secret Service. According to General Haugen, the voice said: "I want you to protect the White House at all costs."

During that time, Vice President Richard Cheney called President George W. Bush to urge him to give the order that any other commercial airliners controlled by hijackers be shot down. In Bob Woodward's book, *Bush at War*, the time of Mr. Cheney's call was placed before 10 a.m. The Vice President explained to the President that a hijacked airliner was a weapon; even if the airliner was full of civilians, Mr. Cheney insisted, giving American fighter pilots the authority to fire on it was "the only practical answer."

The President responded, according to Mr. Woodward, "You bet."

Defense officials told CNN on Sept. 16, 2001, that Mr. Bush had not given authorization to the Defense Department to shoot down a passenger airliner "until after the Pentagon had been struck."

So what happened in the period between just before 10:00 a.m. and 10:03 (or 10:06, or 10:07) -- when, at some point, the United jet crashed in a field in Pennsylvania? Did the President act on Mr. Cheney's advice and order the last and potentially most devastating of airborne missiles brought down before it reached the Capitol? Did Mr. Cheney act on the President's O.K.? Did a U.S. fighter shoot down Flight 93? And why all the secrecy surrounding that last flight?

Melody Homer, the wife of Flight 93's first officer, was at home in Marlton, N.J., the morning of Sept. 11 with their 10-month-old child. Within minutes of seeing the second plane turn into a fireball, Ms. Homer called the Flight Operations Center at John F. Kennedy International Airport, which keeps track of all New York-based pilots. She was told that her husband's flight was fine.

"Whether or not my husband's plane was shot down," the widowed Mrs. Homer said, "the most angering part is reading about how the President handled this."

Mr. Bush was notified 14 minutes after the first attack, at 9 a.m., when he arrived at an elementary school in Sarasota, Fla. He went into a private room and spoke by phone with his national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, and glanced at a TV in the room. Mrs. Homer's soft voice curdles when she describes his reaction: "I can't get over what Bush said when he was called about the first plane hitting the tower: That's some bad pilot. Why did people on the street assume right away it was a terrorist hijacking, but our President didn't know? Why did it take so long to ground all civilian aircraft? In the time between when my husband's plane took off [at 8:41 a.m.] and when the second plane hit in New York [9:02 a.m.], they could have turned back to airfield."

In fact, the pilots of Flight 93 are seldom mentioned in news reports -- only the 40 passengers. And Mrs. Homer says that hurts. "My husband fought for his country in the Persian Gulf War, and he would have seen his role that day as the same thing -- fighting for his country. -- It's my belief, based on what I've been told by people affiliated with the Air Force, that at least one of the pilots was very instrumental in the outcome of that flight. I do believe the hijackers may have taken it down. But stalling the impetus of the plane so it didn't make it to the Capitol or the White House -- that was one of the pilots."

Melody LeRoy later learned from a member of the Air Force who worked with her husband that "a couple of weeks before the incident, they were all sitting around and talking about the intelligence that was filtering through the military that something big was going to happen. For all of this to get ignored," she said as she swallowed a sob, "it's difficult to excuse that."

John Lehman, former Secretary of the Navy and one of the most active interrogators among the commissioners, was told of some of the issues raised in this article. "These are exactly the right questions," he said. "We have to put all these details together and then figure out what went wrong. Who didn't do their job? Not just what was wrong with the existing system, but human beings."

After 14 months of watching while commissioners politely negotiated with a White House that has used every known ruse and invented some new ones to evade, withhold and play peekaboo with the commissioners, the Four Moms and their Families' Steering Committee feel frustrated almost to the boiling point.

Who is going to take a long, hard look at the policy failures and the failures of leadership? This seems to be where some members of the 9/11 commission are heading. Commission member Jamie Gorelick, winding up after the two-day hearings in January, said she was "amazed and shocked at how every agency defines its responsibility by leaving out the hard part." She blasted the F.A.A. for ducking any responsibility for the prevention of terrorism. "We saw the same attitude in the F.B.I. and C.I.A. -- not to use common sense to evaluate a mission and say what works and what doesn't."

Finally, Ms. Gorelick addressed a pointed question to James Loy, the deputy secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, the vast, Brobdingnagian bureaucracy which now lashes together 22 federal agencies that didn't talk to one another before the terrorist attacks.

"Who is responsible for driving the strategy to defeat Al Qaeda and holding people accountable for carrying it out?" Ms. Gorelick demanded.

"The President is the guy," said Mr. Loy. "And the person next to the President, who is the national security advisor."

The widows are furious that Dr. Rice was allowed to be interviewed in private and has not agreed -- or been subpoenaed -- to give her testimony, under oath, before the American people.

When 9/11 commission chairman Tom Kean gave his sobering assessment last December that the 9/11 attacks could have been prevented, the Bush White House saw the bipartisan panel spinning out of its control. In the President's damage-control interview with NBC's Tim Russert last weekend, Mr. Bush was clearly still unwilling to submit to questioning by the 9/11 commission. "Perhaps, perhaps," was his negotiating stance.

Asked why he was appointing yet another commission -- this one to quell the uproar over why we attacked Iraq to save ourselves from Saddam's mythical W.M.D. -- the President said, "This is a strategic look, kind of a big-picture look about the intelligence-gathering capacities of the United States of America. Congress has got the capacity to look at the

intelligence-gathering without giving away state secrets, and I look forward to all the investigations and looks."

Congress has already given him a big-picture lookin -- a scathing 900-page report by the joint House and Senate inquiry into the intelligence failures pre-9/11. But the Bush administration doesn't look at what it doesn't want to see.

"It is incomprehensible why this administration has refused to aggressively pursue the leads that our inquiry developed," fumes Senator Bob Graham, the former co-chairman of the inquiry, which ended in 2003. The Bush White House has ignored all but one or two of the joint inquiry's 19 urgent recommendations to make the nation safer against the next attempted terrorist attack. The White House also allowed large portions of the inquiry's final report to be censored (redacted), claiming national security, so that even some members of the current 9/11 commission -- whose mandate was to build on the work of the congressional panel -- cannot read the evidence.

Senator Graham snorted, "Its absurd."

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Jurors hear final struggle of Flight 93

Moussaoui trial plays cockpit tape of jet that crashed Sept. 11.

By Greg Gordon -- Bee Washington Bureau

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ALEXANDRIA, Va. - With a sudden rush that sent the sounds of grunts and screams into the cockpit, the Sept. 11 passengers of hijacked United Airlines Flight 93 set off a bold, life-or-death battle to take back the plane.

A federal jury got to feel the tables of terror turn Wednesday, listening to a cockpit recording as al-Qaida pilot Ziad Jarrah asked what was happening, encouraged his knife-wielding comrades and prayed in Arabic: "Allah is greatest."

A minute and a half later, he asked: "Shall we finish it off?" - meaning crash the plane short of their target before the passengers won control.

"Not yet," came the reply. "When they all come, we finish it off."

The jurors in the death-penalty trial of Zacarias Moussaoui sat frozen as prosecutors played for the first time publicly the only cockpit voice recorder salvaged from the wreckage of four jetliners hijacked that day.

During the 32-minute tape, they heard an unidentified flight attendant plead for her life, apparently as a knife-wielding hijacker pinned her to the cockpit floor. And they heard the sound of crashing dishes as several athletes turned a food cart into a battering ram that ultimately seemed to burst through the cockpit door.

"I'm injured," a voice, identified by family members as passenger Tom Burnett's, said at 10 a.m., after the passengers made their first rush. One or more hijackers may have died in the struggle.

"In the cockpit. If we don't, we'll die," came the frantic shout of another passenger as pilot Jarrah rolled the plane, up and down and from side to side, to throw the passengers off balance.

Less than three minutes later, after what sounded like a furious struggle over the controls, all 33 passengers, seven crew members and four hijackers were dead. The passenger revolt forced the hijackers to slam the jetliner into a field near Shanksville, Pa., at 580 mph. It was 20 minutes from its likely target: the U.S. Capitol.

The struggle aboard Flight 93, America's most shining moment on one of its darkest days, has been the subject of at least four movies, including a Universal Pictures production hitting theaters later this month.

Prosecutors played the tape and called Flight 93 victims' relatives to testify before resting their case for Moussaoui's execution. They also put into the record the names of all 2,972 people who died from the attacks, along with a huge poster of nearly all their pictures.

Defense lawyers for Moussaoui, who earlier undermined his case by testifying that he was training to pilot a fifth hijacked plane on Sept. 11, 2001, when he was arrested in

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Minnesota, now will begin presenting mitigating evidence. But they are expected to first let Moussaoui testify again today.

Late Tuesday, prosecutors played an air traffic control tape in which Flight 93 pilot Jason Dahl or his co-pilot, LeRoy Homer, could be heard shouting "Mayday! Mayday!" and "Get out of here!" as the hijackers burst into the cockpit at 9:28 a.m. Either Dahl or Homer is believed to have been slain.

As jurors heard the cockpit recording on Wednesday, they watched a color video showing a transcript, synchronized with the voices and the plane's instrument readings of its speed, altitude, pitch and headings.

"Ladies and gentlemen," came a voice from the cockpit at 9:31. "Here is the captain. Please sit down. Keep remaining seating. We have a bomb on board. So sit."

"No. No, no, no, no. ... No more. Please don't hurt me," a woman's voice pleaded again and again, apparently as she was assaulted and forced to lie in the cockpit.

Later, her voice or another person near the cockpit begged: "I don't want to die. ... No, no, please."

A hijacker then reported in Arabic: "Everything is fine. I finished," - words that may have signaled a slaying.

In the back of the plane, 13 of the terrified passengers and crew members made 35 air phone calls and two cell phone calls to family members and airline dispatchers, a member of an FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force testified Tuesday. Several learned that hijackers had already flown other planes into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon near Washington, D.C.

Burnett, a 38-year-old executive of a California medical device company, phoned his wife, Deena, at least three times in San Ramon, finally telling her that he and others had a plan.

Among the 33 passengers were several burly athletic types: Burnett, a former quarterback for St. John's University in Minnesota; Mark Bingham, a 6-foot-5 former member of the University of California's national championship rugby team; Jeremy Glick, a former NCAA judo champ; Alan Beaven, a hulking New Zealander; Lou Nacke, a 5-foot-3, 200-pound weightlifter; and Todd Beamer, a former college basketball player, who was heard in another phone call to utter the now-famous words: "Let's roll." Flight attendant Sandy Bradshaw told her husband she was boiling water to throw on the hijackers.

Within minutes, the West Coast-bound plane took a hard U-turn over eastern Ohio, headed south and then east and began a steady descent from an altitude of over 20,000 feet to less than 6,000 feet.

At 9:53 a.m., it was clear that the hijackers saw the passengers gearing up to attack. Jarrah or a comrade suggested holding up the cockpit's fire ax - apparently in front of the peephole in the cockpit door - "so everyone will be scared."

Then the sound of fighting set Jarrah to praying, and the hijackers tried to brace the door from inside.

At 9:59 came the sound of crashing dishes, and hijackers in the cockpit heard a silence.

At 10:01 a.m., he asked again: "Is that it? I mean shall we pull it down?"

"Yes, put it in it, and pull it down," a cohort said.

Four times, one of the hijackers barked, "Cut off the oxygen" to the cabin.

Then came an even louder clatter of dishes.

Screams of "ahh" could be heard as the plane began to bank to the right and rolled nose down toward the earth.

In the flight's final 44 seconds, it was not clear whether passengers reached the controls. There were English commands of "turn it up" and "push, push, push" - possibly aimed either at prying open the cockpit door or lifting its nose.

The hijackers' cries of "Allah is the greatest" were the last words before the crash.

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Hamilton Peterson, president of the board of the Flight 93 Families Association, said the tape "captures the American spirit," calling it extraordinary "that these brave Americans in a few moments overcame a horrific challenge."

U.S. District Judge Leonie Brinkema barred the public release of the cockpit recording in response to objections from three victims' family members and the Airline Pilots Association but did allow the release of a nine-page transcript.

Burnett's widow, Deena Burnett of Little Rock, Ark., called it "a travesty that they're going to keep it under seal."

"It's been almost five years," she said. "Let the American people hear it and see for themselves what happened and know that everyone aboard that flight was a hero."

Related links:

- [Transcript of Flight 93's cockpit voice recorder](#)
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