

DEFINING MOMENTS THE SEPTEMBER 11 TERRORIST ATTACKS



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prefaceix
How to Use This Bookxiii
Research Topics for <i>Defining Moments: The September 11 Terrorist Attacks</i> ..	.xv

NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Prologue	3
Chapter One: Rage and Despair in the Arab World	7
Chapter Two: Jihad in Afghanistan and the Birth of al-Qaeda	25
Chapter Three: Al-Qaeda Emerges as a Global Threat	41
Chapter Four: The September 11 Attacks on America	57
Chapter Five: Heartbreak and Heroism on the Ground	83
Chapter Six: Investigating 9/11	103
Chapter Seven: Missed Clues and Opportunities	121
Chapter Eight: Legacy of the September 11 Attacks	137

BIOGRAPHIES

Mohamed Atta (1968-2001)	157
<i>Egyptian-born al-Qaeda Member Who Led the 9/11 Hijackings</i>	
Osama bin Laden (1957-2011)	161
<i>Founder and Leader of the al-Qaeda Terrorist Organization</i>	
George W. Bush (1946-)	165
<i>President of the United States during the September 11 Terrorist Attacks</i>	

Richard A. Clarke (1951-)	169
<i>Top Counterterrorism Official in the Clinton and Bush Administrations</i>	
Khaled Sheikh Mohammed (1964?-)	173
<i>Chief Architect of the September 11 Terrorist Attacks</i>	
Condoleezza Rice (1954-)	176
<i>National Security Advisor and Secretary of State to President George W. Bush</i>	
George Tenet (1953-)	180
<i>Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) from 1997 to 2004</i>	
Ayman al-Zawahiri (1951-)	184
<i>Egyptian Leader of Al-Jihad and Major Figure in al-Qaeda</i>	

PRIMARY SOURCES

Osama Bin Laden and the World Islamic Front Call for a “Holy War” Against Jews and Crusaders	189
An al-Qaeda Manual Urges the Overthrow of “Apostate” Arab Rulers	192
The CIA Warns of al-Qaeda Attacks on American Soil	196
A New York Police Officer Endures the Fall of the South Tower	198
A North Tower Survivor Remembers His Narrow Escape	205
A Survivor Recalls the Attack on the Pentagon	209
Mourning Lost Firefighters and Police Officers in New York	213
President Bush Addresses the Nation after the 9/11 Attacks	217
Osama bin Laden Taunts America after September 11	219
Condoleezza Rice Defends the Bush Administration’s Record on Terrorism	222
Richard Clarke’s Explosive Testimony before the 9/11 Commission	226

The 9/11 Commission Issues Its Final Report233

President Obama Announces the Death of Osama bin Laden237

Important People, Places, and Terms241

Chronology247

Sources for Further Study253

Bibliography255

Photo and Illustration Credits259

Index261

Chapter Four

THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS ON AMERICA



We have some planes. Just stay quiet and you will be O.K.

—Hijacker of American Airlines Flight 11 to passengers,
21 minutes before the airliner hit the North Tower of the
World Trade Center

In early 1999 Osama bin Laden gave Khaled Sheikh Mohammed his formal stamp of approval for the airplane hijacking proposal Mohammed had first pitched back in 1996. Mohammed immediately began devising plans for the operation. Over the next several months, he and bin Laden and another al-Qaeda deputy named Mohammed Atef settled on a scheme to hijack several U.S. passenger planes and fly them into strategically vital targets along America's eastern seaboard. Preliminary targets included the White House and the U.S. Capitol Building (where the Senate and House of Representatives meet) in Washington, D.C.; the Department of Defense's Pentagon headquarters in northern Virginia, directly across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C.; and New York City's World Trade Center, a symbol of American high finance that Mohammed's nephew had nearly destroyed in a 1993 bombing attack.

Preparing for the “Planes Operation”

Under the plan first conjured up by Mohammed, Atef, and bin Laden, al-Qaeda warriors from Afghanistan would be sent to the United States, where they could enroll in any number of flight schools and learn the basics of airplane piloting. In early 2000, in fact, two such men—Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdhar—entered the United States and took up residence in San Diego, California, where they began taking flight lessons.

Over the second half of 2000 and the early months of 2001, Atta and his fellow hijackers trained in small planes and flight simulators at various flight schools and small airports up and down the East Coast. They showed particular dedication to learning how to execute turns and other mid-air maneuvers.... The men showed much less interest in learning how to take off or land airplanes.

Despite sending these operatives to America, however, bin Laden worried that jihadists from Tora Bora and Kandahar were poor candidates for the “planes operation,” as it came to be known within bin Laden’s inner circle. Most of his followers in the Arab world knew only fragments of English, and they were largely unfamiliar with daily life and culture in the West. Bin Laden and Mohammed recognized that such men could easily draw unwanted attention from the FBI or other law enforcement authorities. And even if they avoided detection, their gaps in knowledge and education might prove too great for them to carry out their mission successfully.

The plotters found a way around these potential stumbling blocks in November 1999, when four radical Islamists arrived in Kandahar from Hamburg, Germany. These men—Mohamed Atta, Ramzi Binalshibh, Marwan al-Shehhi, and Ziad Jarrah—were all active members of the Hamburg al-Qaeda cell, and they passionately hated the United States. More importantly for bin Laden’s purposes, the Hamburg men could speak fluent English. In addition, their years as students in Germany—a country that shared many cultural trends and lifestyle similarities with America—had prepared them for living in the United States. “The new recruits from Germany possessed an ideal combination of technical skill and knowledge that the original 9/11 operatives, veteran fighters though they

were, lacked,” summarized the 9/11 Commission. “Bin Laden and Atef wasted no time in assigning the Hamburg group to the most ambitious operation yet planned by al-Qaeda.”¹ Atta was selected as the tactical commander of the group.

As bin Laden had feared, al-Hazmi and al-Mihdhar could not handle the rigors of pilot training. By mid-2000 both men had dropped out of flight school in San Diego. But the emergence of the Hamburg cell saved the plot from unraveling. In early 2000 Atta and the other Hamburg radicals returned to Germany, where they promptly applied to flight schools in the United States (they also considered flight schools in Europe, but determined that flight training in America was less expensive and required less time). By mid-

2000 Atta, al Shehhi, and Jarrah had all obtained travel visas, entered the United States, and begun taking flight training, mostly in Florida.

The fourth Hamburg cell member, Binalshibh, was unsuccessful in his efforts to obtain a U.S. visa. His application was repeatedly turned down because he was a citizen of Yemen, and Yemenis were notorious among U.S. immigration officials for overstaying their visits and becoming illegal aliens. The al-Qaeda leadership responded to this setback by changing Binalshibh's assignment. They made him a courier for the 9/11 attacks, then started looking for someone to replace him as the fourth suicide pilot. After considering a variety of options, including a French Muslim radical named Zacarias Moussaoui (see "The Twentieth Hijacker?" sidebar, p. 60), bin Laden, Mohammed, and Atef selected a Saudi Arabian radical named Hani Hanjour to take Binalshibh's place as the fourth pilot. Hanjour had actually earned a commercial pilot's license in Arizona in 1999, so he did not have the learning curve that most other candidates faced.

Over the second half of 2000 and the early months of 2001, Atta and his fellow hijackers trained in small planes and flight simulators at various flight schools and small airports up and down the East Coast. They showed particular dedication to learning about how to execute turns and other mid-air maneuvers. Conversely, several of their flight instructors acknowledged in post-9/11 interviews that the men showed much less interest in learning how to take off or land airplanes. The hijackers were supported financially during this time by a steady stream of secret payments from al-Qaeda operatives and supporters overseas.

After the four pilots completed their training, al-Qaeda sent a larger group of jihadists to America to help them carry out the planned hijackings. These "strongmen" had orders to help Atta and the other pilots take over the cockpits of the hijacked planes and kill any passengers or crew members who threatened the mission. The arrival of these fanatics on American shores between March and June 2001 was coordinated by al-Mihdhar and al-Hazmi, who remained part of the hijacking plot despite their disastrous flight training experiences in California.

The strongmen entered America in small groups from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a country that had long been friendly to the United States. Only one of the strongmen was a UAE citizen, however; the rest were from Saudi Arabia. All told, in fact, fifteen of the nineteen terrorists who participated in the September 11 hijackings hailed from Saudi Arabia, bin Laden's native country. The operation's high percentage of Saudis has since been

The Twentieth Hijacker?

Although Zacarias Moussaoui did not participate directly in the September 11 attacks, he has acquired a certain infamy because he was identified by U.S. investigators as a possible “twentieth hijacker” who might have taken part in the attacks if he had not already been in U.S. custody. Born on May 30, 1968, near Narbonne, France, to Moroccan parents, Moussaoui had converted to the fundamentalist Wahhabi strain of Islam as a young man. In 1998 he went to Afghanistan to receive training in Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda camps, where his devotion to the jihad cause caught the attention of instructors.

In mid-2000 Moussaoui allegedly was selected by bin Laden and Khaled Sheikh Mohammed to serve as a pilot in their coalescing “planes operation” against America. He would replace Ramzi Binalshibh, who had been denied entry into the United States by immigration officials. Over the next several months, al-Qaeda’s leadership became sufficiently concerned about Moussaoui’s stability that they picked another man to serve as the fourth pilot. Nonetheless, Moussaoui was still sent to the United States to take flight training, and he remained in contact with—and received financial support from—several of the same al-Qaeda figures that coordinated the September 11 attacks.

Moussaoui arrived in the United States in February 2001 with a three-month visa. After flunking out of a flight school in Oklahoma, he enrolled in another flight training program in Eagan, Minnesota, in August. Within

attributed both to the great number of Saudi recruits in al-Qaeda and to the relative ease with which Saudi citizens could obtain U.S. travel visas.²

The Hijackers Take Their Places

By the end of July 2001 all nineteen hijackers were in the United States. Most of the strongmen joined Atta and his fellow pilots in Florida, where they tried to blend into the general population. They opened bank accounts, worked out at local gyms, and found housing in modest apartment complexes.

days of entering the program, however, Moussaoui was identified by instructors as a potentially dangerous character. The instructors later told investigators that the student behaved strangely, and that he only wanted to learn to fly a Boeing 747. He also asked them about how cockpit doors operated and inquired about the explosive impact of a Boeing 747 with full fuel tanks. They alerted a Minneapolis FBI field office, and on August 16, 2001, Moussaoui was arrested for remaining in the United States with an expired visa. The Minneapolis agents then asked permission from FBI headquarters to carry out a search of his belongings, but their request was turned down by officials who insisted that they did not have enough evidence to request a search warrant. After September 11, this decision by FBI officials would be heavily criticized by observers who thought that a prompt and full investigation of Moussaoui might have uncovered the terrorist plot before the attacks took place.

Following 9/11, American federal prosecutors charged him with a range of serious crimes, including preparing acts of terrorism, conspiracy to hijack an aircraft, and using weapons of mass destruction against American citizens. Moussaoui initially claimed that he was not involved in the September 11 plot, insisting that he had been working on an entirely separate terrorist scheme. The evidence of his involvement with September 11 was not strong, but prosecutors insisted on going forward. In April 2006, midway through his trial, Moussaoui abruptly admitted guilt to all charges. He was sentenced to life in prison on May 4, 2006. He is currently serving out his sentence in solitary confinement in a maximum security facility in Colorado.

The pilots, meanwhile, took first-class trips on cross-country flights across the United States in order to acquaint themselves with the layouts of the planes they intended to hijack (each pilot made a point of booking his flight on the same type of aircraft he would pilot on September 11).³ “There were no slip ups,” testified FBI Director Robert Mueller months after the 9/11 attack. “Discipline never broke down. They gave no hint to those around them what they were about. They came lawfully. They lived lawfully. They trained lawfully... They simply relied upon everything from the vastness of the Internet to the openness of our society to do what they wanted to do without detection.”⁴



In this still photo taken from security camera footage, two men later identified by authorities as hijackers Mohamed Atta (right) and Abdulaziz Alomari pass through security at a Portland, Maine, airport. They then boarded a plane to take them to Boston, from where they carried out their suicide hijacking of American Airlines Flight 11.

Atta also conducted a meeting in Madrid, Spain, in July with Binalshibh to finalize details of the coming attack. Atta informed Binalshibh that he thought that striking the White House with one of the planes would probably be too difficult, since the target was relatively small. He told the Yemeni terrorist that he and Shehhi intended to fly their planes into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. He also stated that he had assigned Jarrah to take out the Capitol and Hanjour to strike the Pentagon.⁵

Upon returning to the United States from Madrid, Atta and his fellow suicide hijackers began their final preparations. In mid-August Atta selected

the date of September 11 for the attacks. On August 26 the hijackers began buying tickets for four separate cross-country flights scheduled to depart from various East Coast airports between 7:45 and 8:14 A.M. on September 11. They selected cross-country flights because the planes would be carrying huge fuel loads—and thus serve as more potent bombs when the hijackers plowed them into their targets. As September 11 approached, the four hijacking teams—each one led by a pilot—checked into hotels near the airports out of which they would be flying.

The lone exceptions to these preparations were Atta and one of the musclemen, Abdulaziz Alomari. Atta spent the last few days going from city to city to meet up with the teams one final time. On September 10 he picked up Alomari at a Boston hotel and drove to Portland, Maine, for unknown reasons. Early the following morning, the two hijackers boarded a commuter flight that took them from Portland to Boston's Logan International Airport, where they had reservations on American Airlines (AA) Flight 11 from Boston to Los Angeles. They arrived in Boston in time to pass through the airport's security checkpoints and make their flight, but one of Atta's travel bags did not get checked through in time to get tossed on Flight 11. It remained behind at Logan, where it sat until 9/11 investigators found it and began sorting through its chilling contents.

American Airlines Flight 11 Hits the North Tower

Atta and Alomari were joined on AA Flight 11 by three familiar faces: Waleed al-Shehri, Wail al-Shehri, and Satam al-Suqami. The five terrorists sat quietly in their seats (which were scattered between the plane's business class and first-class sections) as AA 11 lifted off from Logan Airport at 7:59 A.M. with ninety-two people on board. The airliner, which was helmed by Captain John Ogonowski, was a Boeing 767.

The first fifteen minutes of the flight unfolded in normal fashion. Air traffic controllers monitored AA 11 as it steadily climbed toward its assigned cruising altitude of 29,000 feet. At 8:14, however, the flight's pilots failed to acknowledge new instructions to go to 35,000 feet. At the same time, air traffic controllers began to notice that AA 11 was straying off its assigned flight path. Controllers attempted to communicate with the plane over the next several minutes, but all of their messages were met with silence.

The anxious atmosphere on the ground turned to outright dread and horror at 8:19, when the American Airlines Reservations Control Center received an emergency call from a flight attendant using one of AA 11's airphones. The attendant, Betty Ong, reported in a calm but frightened voice that hijackers had forced their way into the cockpit and taken control of the plane. She also reported that the hijackers had stabbed two flight attendants and cut the throat of a passenger, and she identified the seat numbers of the hijackers.

At 8:22 the Boeing 767's transponder, a type of tracking device for aircraft, stopped emitting signals. This development meant that the flight's altitude could no longer be monitored on the ground. Radar imagery became the only method by which air traffic controllers could track the flight's progress. At 8:24 air traffic controllers heard the voice of a hijacker come in over the air traffic control channel: "We have some planes. Just stay quiet and you will be O.K. We are returning to the airport. Nobody move, everything will be O.K. If you try to make any moves, you'll endanger yourself and the airplane. Just stay quiet." Authorities believe this message was actually intended for the AA 11 passengers, but that the hijackers accidentally broadcast it over the air traffic control communication system rather than the Boeing's cabin public address system. The message confirmed the worst fears of Boston air traffic controllers, who immediately informed other regional air traffic control centers that a hijacking was in progress.

At 8:28 the plane abruptly changed course to the south. Four minutes later, another AA 11 flight attendant, Amy Sweeney, was able to establish contact with the American Airlines Flight Services Office in Boston after several failed attempts. She confirmed Ong's account of the hijacking, and over the next several minutes Ong (who was still on her line) and Sweeney both provided descriptions of the hijackers as well as harrowing firsthand impressions about the plane's "erratic" flight path. Meanwhile, air traffic controllers watched helplessly as the plane's radar image moved down the Hudson River Valley toward New York City.

At 8:44 American Airline officials lost their phone connection to Ong. At the same time, Sweeney reported that "something is wrong. We are in a rapid descent.... We are all over the place." She then peered out one of the windows and stated, "We are flying low. We are flying very, very low. We are flying way too low." She paused briefly, then exclaimed, "Oh my God we are way too low."



Civilians in the North Tower of the World Trade Center jump to their deaths to escape the flames after a hijacked plane hit their building.

A few seconds later, at 8:46:40 A.M., American Airlines Flight 11 smashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center at a speed of nearly 400 miles per hour. The Boeing 767 hit the north side of the 110-story tower at about the level of the 96th floor. The plane obliterated three floors above and below the point of impact, and it created an enormous fireball that erupted out of the west and east sides of the building. Fragments of airplane and shattered construction girders also “cut through stairwells, severed elevator cables, and displaced entire stairway sections,” according to one account of the tragedy. “For everyone above the point of impact at this moment, the tower had become a death trap.”⁶

United Airlines Flight 175 Hits the South Tower

At 8:14 A.M.—approximately the same moment that American Airlines Flight 11 was being hijacked by Atta and his henchmen—United Airlines (UA) Flight 175 lifted off from Boston’s Logan International Airport. Also bound for Los Angeles, the Boeing 767 was piloted by Captain Victor Saracini and carried 10 other crew members and 61 passengers. Among the tourists and businesspeople on board were five al-Qaeda terrorists—Fayez Banihammed, Ahmed al-Ghamdi, Hamza al-Ghamdi, Mohand al-Shehri, and pilot Marwan al-Shehhi.

Within twenty minutes of liftoff, UA 175 had climbed to its assigned cruising altitude of 31,000 feet and was streaking toward California. At 8:42 the crew reported to air traffic controllers that they had heard a “suspicious transmission” from another plane. This report—which was a reference to the transmission that the AA 11 hijackers had erroneously made over their jet’s air traffic control communication system—was the last contact that air traffic controllers had with UA 175.

Sometime between 8:42 and 8:46 A.M., the terrorists aboard UA 175 revealed themselves and wrested control of the airplane from its crew. According to panicked calls made by passengers and crew members, the hijackers used Mace and knives to kill the pilots, attack at least one flight attendant, and herd the remaining crew and passengers to the back of the aircraft. At 8:47 UA 175 changed its transponder signal several times. When controllers asked the plane to go back to its assigned code, they received no response. Over the next few minutes, several passengers managed to make calls to family members or United Airlines offices. It was at this time that the



This photograph shows the hijacked United Airlines Flight 175 just before it slammed into the South Tower of the World Trade Center

New York air traffic control center realized that UA 175 had been hijacked, and at 9:01 the office notified the FAA's national air traffic command center in Herndon, Virginia, that a second hijacking had taken place that morning.

At 8:58 the plane abruptly changed course and turned its wings for New York City. One minute later, a UA 175 passenger named Brian Sweeney used his cell phone to leave a message at home for his wife: "Hi Jules, it's Brian. I'm in a plane being hijacked and it does not look good. I just wanted to let you know that I love you and that I hope to see you again. If I don't, please have fun in life and live your life the best you can."⁷ He then called his mother and told her that several passengers were weighing whether they could storm the cockpit and retake control of the plane from the terrorists. At 9:00, passenger Peter Hanson, who was traveling with his wife and two-year-old daughter, called his father. "It's getting bad, Dad," he said. "They seem to have knives and Mace.... Passengers are throwing up and getting sick—The plane is making jerky movements—I don't think the pilot is flying the plane—I think we are going down—I think they intend to go to Chicago or someplace and fly into a building—Don't worry, Dad—If it happens, it'll be very fast—My God, my God."⁸

As Sweeney and Hanson made these final calls to their loved ones, the plane in which they were trapped was descending out of the sky toward downtown Manhattan at a rate of more than five thousand feet per minute. At two different times it nearly collided in midair with other passenger jets, which were forced to take evasive maneuvers. New York Center air traffic controller Dave Bottiglia later stated that he and his colleagues "were counting down the altitudes, and they were descending, right at the end, at 10,000 feet per minute. That is absolutely unheard of for a commercial jet. It is unbelievable for the passengers in the back to withstand that type of force as they're descending. [The hijackers are] actually nosing the airplane down and doing what I would call a 'power dive.'"⁹

The plane crashed into the southeast corner of the South Tower of the World Trade Center at 9:03:11 A.M. The impact and explosion wiped out a huge swath of the tower from the 77th to the 85th floors. But by hitting the extensive steelworks at the corner of the building instead of one of its broad faces, as AA 11 had done to the North Tower, the Boeing's progress was halted before it could demolish all of the stairwells in the interior. One stairwell was left sufficiently intact for eighteen people working on the floors above impact to make it down to the streets below. Investigators who examined amateur

videotapes of the UA 175 crash later reported that the Boeing was in the midst of a sharp turn when it plowed into the corner of the South Tower—an indication that al-Shehhi and his fellow hijackers nearly missed the tower altogether.

American Airlines Flight 77 Crashes into the Pentagon

The third American passenger jet that fell into the grip of bin Laden's murderous gang was American Airlines Flight 77, which departed Washington Dulles International Airport (located in Dulles, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C.) at 8:20 A.M. The Boeing 757, which was piloted by Charles Burlingame, held a total of six crew members and fifty-eight passengers—including five terrorists scattered throughout first class and coach—when it took off that morning on its flight to Los Angeles. The lead terrorist was pilot Hani Hanjour. His strongmen were Khalid al-Mihdhar, Majed Moqed, Nawaf al-Hazmi, and Salem al-Hazmi.

The first half hour or so of the flight passed without incident, and at 8:46 the plane reached its assigned cruising altitude of 35,000 feet. Five minutes later, the crew issued a routine radio transmission to air traffic controllers. Between 8:51 and 8:54, however, the hijackers seized AA 77 using knives (one passenger using a phone also reported that the hijackers possessed box cutters). At 8:54 the plane began drifting south from its assigned course, and at 8:56 air traffic controllers on the ground lost AA 77's transponder signal.

As evidence mounted that a third passenger jet might have been hijacked—a horrifying realization that was underscored at 9:03, when UA 175 crashed into the South Tower—both American Airlines and United Airlines ordered all of their flights that had not yet taken off to be grounded. In other respects, however, both the airlines and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)—the government agency responsible for overseeing air transportation in the United States—seemed overwhelmed by the scale of the tragedy that was unfolding. “No one at the FAA or the airlines that day had ever dealt with multiple hijackings,”

“No one at the FAA or the airlines that day had ever dealt with multiple hijackings. Such a plot had not been carried out anywhere in the world in more than 30 years, and never in the United States. As news of the hijackings filtered through the FAA and the airlines, it does not seem to have occurred to their leadership that they needed to alert other aircraft in the air that they too might be at risk.”



Firefighters work to put out flames moments after a hijacked jetliner crashed into the Pentagon on September 11.

wrote the 9/11 Commission. “Such a plot had not been carried out anywhere in the world in more than 30 years, and never in the United States. As news of the hijackings filtered through the FAA and the airlines, it does not seem to have occurred to their leadership that they needed to alert other aircraft in the air that they too might be at risk.”¹⁰

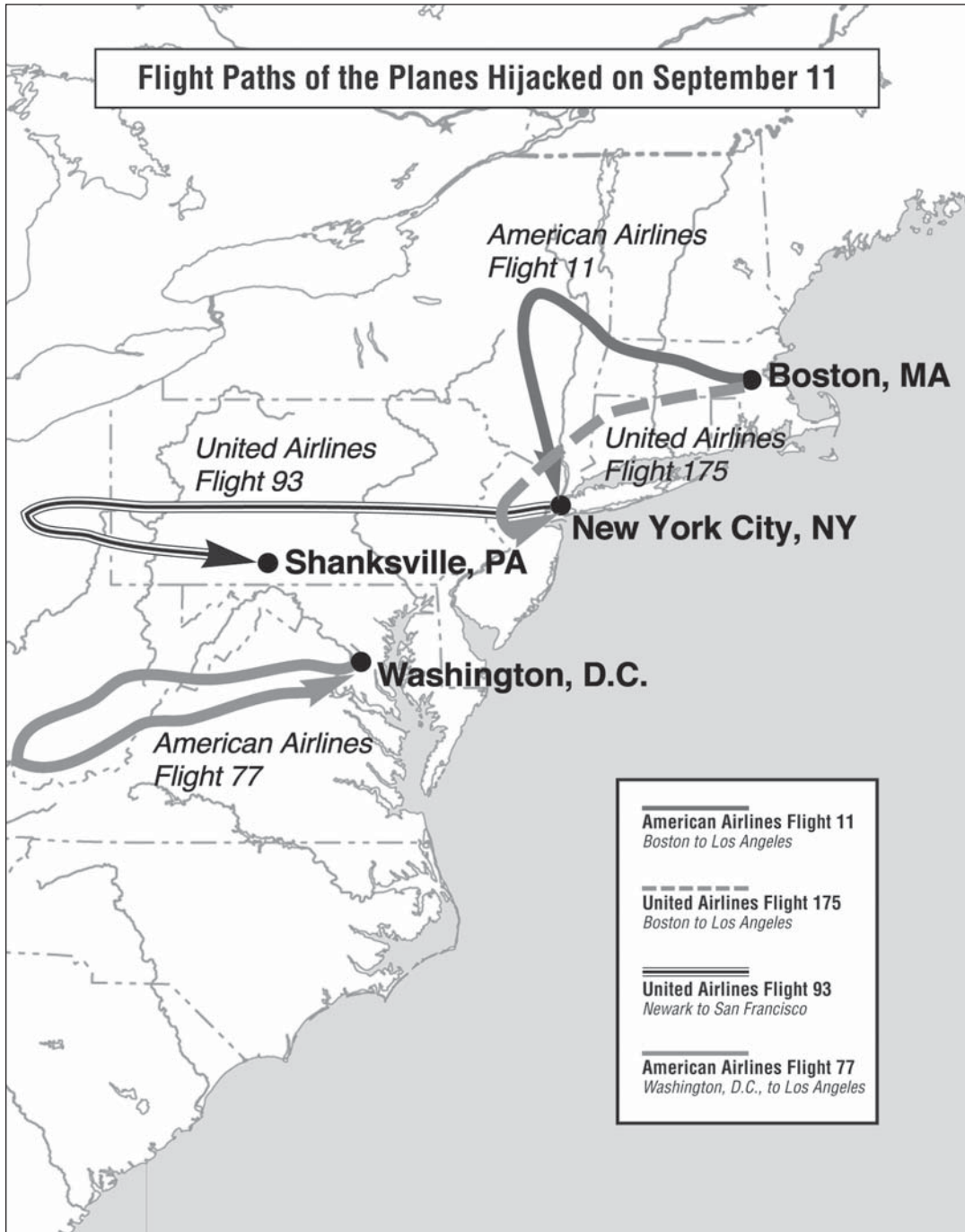
Over the next several minutes a number of passengers aboard AA 77 were able to make phone contact with loved ones. They anxiously reported that hijackers had taken control of their plane, employing the same general tactics (such as using knives and forcing passengers to the back of the cabin) as the hijackers of the planes that had struck the World Trade Center. One of the callers was Barbara Olson, who managed to reach her husband, Ted Olson, the solicitor general of the United States. During their conversation Barbara Olson learned of the hijackings and World Trade Center attacks that had already taken place that morning.

At 9:25 air traffic controllers reported that AA 77 was heading straight toward Washington, D.C. Four minutes later, the Boeing 757's autopilot was disengaged and the hijacker pilot (assumed to be Hani Hanjour) took manual control of the airplane. At 9:34 air traffic controllers warned the Secret Service that the hijackers might be targeting the White House, even though President George W. Bush was not there at the time. A few seconds later, the plane executed a wide 360-degree turn, just south of the Pentagon. It then picked up speed and roared over the streets of Washington, shearing off the tops of trees and streetlights. At 9:37:46 it blasted into the southwest side of the Pentagon, instantly killing dozens of people there and all of the plane's passengers and crew.

Passengers Strike Back on United Airlines Flight 93

The last hijacking of September 11 took place aboard a Boeing 757 that departed from Newark, New Jersey, at 8:42 with seven crew members and thirty-seven passengers (including four hijackers) on board. This flight, United Airlines Flight 93, was captained by Jason Dahl and was bound for San Francisco, California. The hijackers on board consisted of pilot Ziad Jarrah and three strongmen—Saeed al-Ghamdi, Ahmed al-Haznawi, and Ahmed al-Nami—all of whom occupied seats in first class. UA 93 was the only flight that was hijacked with a four-man team. Investigators later concluded that this team was short-handed because its likely fifth member, a radical named Mohamed al Kahtani, had been denied entry into the United States by a suspicious immigration inspector at Florida's Orlando International Airport one month earlier.

The first forty-two minutes of UA 93's flight proceeded in a routine fashion. At 9:24, though, Dahl received a message from UA flight dispatcher Ed Ballinger, who on his own initiative had begun transmitting warnings to UA's in-progress transcontinental flights about the possibility of cockpit intrusions from hijackers (at this point neither the airlines nor the FAA had begun issuing official warnings about hijackings). At 9:26 Ballinger received a reply seeking confirmation of his warning: "Ed, confirm latest mssg. [message] pls—Jason." Two minutes later, just before the UA 93 crew could institute additional security measures to defend the cockpit, the hijackers made their move. FAA air traffic controllers listened helplessly on the ground as they received radio transmissions of a fierce struggle for control of the cockpit. They could hear Dahl or co-pilot Leroy Homer shouting "Mayday" and "Get out of here!" as well as the sounds of physical violence. By 9:32 the hijackers



had won this grim struggle. One of the hijackers, most likely Jarrah, broadcast a message into the cabin: “Ladies and Gentlemen: Here the captain, please sit down keep remaining sitting. We have a bomb on board. So, sit.”¹¹

Most of the passengers and crew members were subsequently pushed toward the rear of the main cabin by the hijackers. It was here that passengers and crew members began making telephone calls to friends, family, and colleagues. According to a number of the passengers, the confident hijackers made no effort to halt these calls. During these conversations, however, many of the passengers learned that hijacked planes had already been flown into the towers of the World Trade Center. Armed with the knowledge that the hijackers almost certainly intended to use their plane as a fuel-laden missile against a vital American target, several brave hostages agreed to take action. They decided to mount an assault against the terrorists and either regain control of the plane or force it down before the hijackers reached the target of their suicide mission.

The leaders of this rebellion were business executive Tom Burnett, small business owner Mark Bingham, and website sales manager Jeremy Glick, but they were joined by an unknown number of other passengers and crew as well. “The passengers and crew members aboard Flight 93 were not ordinary citizens placed in an extraordinary situation,” wrote *New York Times* reporter Jere Longman.

As a group, these were people who were on top of their game, who kept score in their lives and who became successful precisely because they were assertive and knew how to make a plan and carry it out. The people aboard the plane had varied skills. Not everyone could rush the cockpit, but I am convinced that each person offered whatever resources he or she had available in the final moments of the flight. I heard tapes of a couple of the phone calls made from the plane and was struck by the absence of panic in their voices.¹²

One participant in the counter-attack was flight attendant Sandra Bradshaw, who was on the phone to her husband just before the passengers made their charge. “We talked about how much we loved each other and our chil-

“We talked about how much we loved each other and our children,” recalled the husband of Flight 93 attendant Sandra Bradshaw. “Then she said: ‘Everyone is running to first class, I’ve got to go. Bye.’ Those were the last words I heard from her.”

dren,” recalled her husband, Phil Bradshaw. “Then she said: ‘Everyone is running to first class, I’ve got to go. Bye.’ Those were the last words I heard from her.” Another passenger who participated was sales executive Todd Beamer. He was on the phone with a telephone company operator named Lisa Jefferson when Glick, Bingham, and Burnett signaled that they were preparing to attack. The last words Jefferson heard from Beamer were directed at his fellow passengers: “You ready? OK, let’s roll.”¹³

The UA 93 passengers launched their attack on the hijackers at 9:57 A.M. The plane’s cockpit voice recorder documented the desperate struggle that ensued between the hijackers and the passengers. The device recorded how Jarrah urged the strongmen to hold the passengers off as they tried to force their way into the cockpit, but the Americans refused to give up. Over the next few minutes the recorder filled with the sounds of crashing, shouting, cursing, screaming, and shattering glass. Jarrah pitched the plane up and down and side to side in an effort to disrupt the attack, and at one or two points it appeared that the hijackers managed to fight the unarmed passengers off. Each time, however, the determined passengers simply regrouped and renewed their assault. At 10:02:23, a hijacker could be heard on the recorder saying “Pull it down! Pull it down!” According to the 9/11 Commission, the hijackers probably realized that the passengers were only seconds away from defeating them. The airplane went into a deep dive and turned onto its back as one of the hijackers started screaming “Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest.” A few seconds later, at 10:03, the Boeing crashed into an empty field just outside of Shanksville, Pennsylvania, about twenty minutes’ flying time from Washington, D.C.¹⁴

The Collapse of the Towers

At the same time that UA 93 passengers and hijackers were fighting for control of that plane, the South Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed. It began to fall in on itself at 9:58:59 A.M., and over the next ten seconds the entire magnificent structure plummeted to the streets below. The collapse, which came fifty-six minutes after the building had been hit by UA 175, killed all civilians and emergency personnel inside the tower, as well as a number of people in the surrounding area. The ruined building was obscured, though, by a massive cloud of debris and dust that billowed up around the tangled steel and concrete. Engineering experts believe that the South Tower collapsed first, even though the North Tower had actually been



The South Tower begins its horrifying collapse as the neighboring North Tower continues to burn.

struck seventeen minutes earlier, for two reasons: UA 175's collision with one of the South Tower's corners had badly damaged its central support structure; and the South Tower had been struck at a lower point than the North Tower, so its impact zone was forced to bear more weight.

The sudden collapse of the South Tower stunned thousands of people in Manhattan who were eyewitnesses to the tragedy. As the ashy cloud billowed forth, covering block after block, countless people fled from the downtown district in panic. It also horrified millions of Americans who watched live television coverage of the tower's fall.

Thirty minutes later, at 10:28:25 A.M., the North Tower collapsed from the top down with a tremendous roar, unleashing a second monstrous cloud of smoke and debris. The loss of this second majestic icon of American capitalism triggered a second wave of grief and disbelief among viewers all across the United States and around the world

The collapse of the twin towers caused extensive damage to the surrounding area. The smaller buildings in the World Trade Complex were destroyed or heavily damaged, and several other adjoining facilities and buildings suffered extensive damage. These losses, though, paled next to the shocking human toll of the attacks. All told, an estimated 2,996 people (excluding terrorists) lost their lives in the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks of September 11. More than 2,700 of these casualties occurred in New York City.

The majority of these losses were innocent civilians, but a staggering number of deaths came from the ranks of the city's "first responders"—emergency personnel who rushed to the towers in rescue operations. The Fire Department of New York (FDNY) suffered 343 fatalities that day, the largest loss of life of any emergency response agency in history. The Port Authority Police Department (PAPD), which provides law enforcement services to bridges, tunnels, seaports, and airports in and around New York Harbor, lost 37 officers on September 11. The carnage also claimed the lives of 23 members of the New York Police Department (NYPD). The deaths of so many valiant firefighters and police officers—men and women who had put their lives on the line every day for the people of New York—gave the day an even more nightmarish hue.

President Bush Learns of the Attacks

When the dark events of the morning of September 11 took place, President George W. Bush was hundreds of miles away from the Oval Office. He



President George W. Bush listens as his chief of staff, Andrew Card, informs him during an appearance at a Florida elementary school that a second plane crashed into the World Trade Center—a sure indication that America was under terrorist attack.

was visiting Emma E. Booker Elementary School in Sarasota, Florida, to publicize and drum up support for some of his education policies. Before entering a class of second graders, Bush had been informed that a plane had hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Bush and his staff had no evidence at that point that the incident was anything but a tragic accident, so they decid-

ed to go ahead with the event. At 9:05 A.M., though, Bush's chief of staff, Andrew Card, entered the classroom where the president was preparing to participate in a reading lesson. Card leaned down and whispered: "A second plane hit the second tower. America is under attack." Bush's expression became tight and drawn. He spent the next eight minutes sitting silently in the classroom as the second graders made a presentation, then excused himself to talk with his staff. Bush was harshly criticized in some quarters for this delay, but he later said that he had not wanted to frighten the children in the classroom. The Secret Service, which is responsible for the president's safety, has never responded to questions about why it delayed taking Bush to safety despite clear evidence that terrorists were launching spectacular strikes against America.

Bush left the classroom at 9:16, then hurriedly consulted with advisors about the attacks. He also spoke on the phone with FBI Director Robert Mueller and New York Governor George Pataki. Bush decided that he needed to make a televised address to the nation, but as he and his staff worked on his statement, they kept glancing over to a television that showed the horror unfolding in downtown Manhattan. Turning to his aides, Bush reportedly declared, "We are at war."¹⁵

At 9:30 Bush delivered a brief televised statement acknowledging the tragedy that was unfolding. He closed his remarks by stating that "terrorism against our nation will not stand." A few moments later Bush left in his presidential motorcade for a nearby airport, where Air Force One awaited. Meanwhile, Vice President Dick Cheney and other top White House officials were taken down to the Presidential Emergency Operations Center, a bunker beneath the building that is designed to withstand nuclear attack.

Air Force One lifted off from Sarasota at 9:55. By this time AA 77 had already crashed into the Pentagon and the valiant passengers of UA 93 were preparing their desperate assault on the terrorists who had hijacked their plane. During this same period, orders to ground commercial and private air traffic began to be issued by a variety of aviation agencies, airports, and airline companies across the country. The skies gradually emptied of planes except for U.S. fighter jets that had belatedly scrambled into action. By shortly after noon, there was not a single private or commercial plane flying over the contiguous United States. Commercial air traffic in the United States remained grounded for the next three days.

The military jets that prowled the skies had been authorized by Vice President Cheney around 10:10 A.M. to shoot down any suspected hijacked commercial airliners before they could reach important targets or population centers. When he gave this order, Cheney was unaware that the last hijacked plane, UA 93, had already crashed in Pennsylvania. In actuality, however, Cheney did not possess the legal authority to give such an order. Only Bush, the nation's commander in chief, was so empowered. The White House later said that Bush authorized a "shootdown" order in a conversation with Cheney earlier that morning. But no record of such a call exists in phone logs maintained that morning at the White House and aboard Air Force One.

Protecting the President

Upon leaving the school in Sarasota, Bush expressed a strong desire to return to Washington, D.C. Instead, Secret Service agents and White House staffers with whom he was traveling managed to convince him to go to a military base as a precaution. Air Force One subsequently charted a course for Barksdale Air Force Base in Shreveport, Louisiana. "It was a time of chaos and confusion that is reflected in the official documents of that day, some public, some classified," wrote journalist Bob Woodward. "Various documents have Bush arriving in Louisiana at 11:48 A.M., 11:57 A.M., 12:05 P.M., and 12:16 P.M.—a range of 28 minutes."¹⁶

Bush and his aides arranged to issue another televised statement at 12:36 p.m from Barksdale. "It had been more than three hours since the president or any senior administration official had spoken publicly," noted Woodward. "The president's eyes were red-rimmed when he walked in. His performance was not reassuring. He spoke haltingly, mispronouncing several words as he looked down at his notes."¹⁷

After concluding his remarks, Bush once again voiced a desire to return to Washington. But the Secret Service insisted that it was safer for him to remain sequestered away for the time being, and this position was supported by Cheney, Card, and other top members of the White House staff. Bush grudgingly approved a plan to fly to Offut Air Force Base in Nebraska, which included a heavily fortified bunker facility. In addition, Offut was home to the

"I'm not going to let some tinhorn terrorist keep the president of the United States away from the nation's capital," said Bush. "The American people want to see their president and they want to see him now."

U.S. Strategic Command, which maintains and controls the nation's vast arsenal of nuclear weapons.

Air Force One arrived at Offutt at approximately 2:50 P.M. A short time later, Bush conducted a teleconference with the members of his National Security Council to discuss the tragedy. During this meeting Bush was told by Director George Tenet of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), America's main spy agency, that the attacks were almost certainly the work of Osama bin Laden. The meeting wrapped up in less than an hour, at which point Bush overruled the Secret Service and ordered Air Force One to take him back to Washington. "I'm not going to let some tinhorn terrorist keep the president of the United States away from the nation's capital," he reportedly said. "The American people want to see their president and they want to see him now."¹⁸

Bush left for Washington at 4:36 P.M. and he arrived at the White House at 6:54. At 8:30 he gave his third address of the day to the American people—and to a worldwide audience that had been transfixed by the awful events of the day (see "President Bush Addresses the Nation after the 9/11 Attacks," p. 217). Bush declared in his speech that as the United States moved forward to punish its attackers, "we will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them." He also issued a statement of national resolve. "A great people has been moved to defend a great nation," he said. "America has stood down enemies before and we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day. Yet we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in the world."

After concluding his seven-minute address, Bush spent the next few hours meeting with his full National Security Council, including Tenet, Mueller, Secretary of State Colin Powell, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and other close advisors. There was broad agreement in these meetings that al-Qaeda was the culprit—and that Afghanistan and other countries known for harboring terrorists needed to choose whether they were with the United States or against it.

Bush finally went to sleep in the White House residence, only to be awakened by Secret Service agents. Alarmed by reports of an unidentified airplane in the area, the agents hustled Bush and his wife, Laura, to the building's underground bunker. When the plane sighting turned out to be a false alarm, Bush and his wife returned to the residence. Before going back to bed, however, Bush took out his diary and reflected on the day's events. "The Pearl

Harbor of the 21st century took place today,” he wrote. “We think it’s Osama bin Laden.”¹⁹

Notes

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- ⁷ Quoted in *Der Spiegel*, p. 69.
- ⁸ Quoted in National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, p. 8.
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- ¹¹ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, p. 12.
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- ¹⁸ “Bush Wanted Quick Return to Washington,” Associated Press, September 13, 2001.
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Mohamed Atta (1968-2001)

Egyptian-born al-Qaeda Member Who Led the 9/11 Hijackings

Mohamed Mohamed el-Amir Awad el-Sayed Atta was born at Kafr el-Sheikh, an Egyptian town in the Nile Delta. He spent most of his adolescence in Giza, a middle-class suburb of the national capital of Cairo. His father, Mohamed el-Amir Awad el-Sayed Atta, was a lawyer. His mother was Bouthayna Mohamed Mustapha Sheraqi, who had two daughters before she gave birth to her only son. Atta's sisters grew up to become a professor and a doctor, and some people who have studied Atta's life believe that he often felt overshadowed by his older siblings when he was growing up.



Atta enrolled at the University of Cairo to study architecture in 1985. He spent the next five years at the school, where friends remembered him as shy and modest. "I could never imagine him on a plane threatening people, killing people," said one of Atta's best friends from his university days. "He would be scared to death.... Mohamed was well liked because he never offended or bothered anyone."¹ Atta also joined an engineering society at the school that was sponsored by the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamic group that often clashed with Egypt's authoritarian rulers.

In October 1992 Atta began studying architecture and city planning at the Technical University of Hamburg in northern Germany. Atta was reportedly anxious about the intensely competitive business environment in Cairo. He hoped that a graduate degree from Hamburg would give him a career advantage over other young Egyptians when he completed his studies and returned home.

A Mysterious Transformation

Atta's first few years in Hamburg were quiet ones. He studied hard and supported himself with a part-time architectural drafting job in the city. Classmates, professors, and fellow employees remembered him as a well-mannered

young man who was quietly devoted to his Islamic faith. Over time, however, Atta became more outspoken about his religious beliefs. He also became active in a Muslim student group on campus. During this same period, he expressed growing anger and frustration with the corrupt nature of many Arab governments and the influence of the United States over Middle Eastern affairs.

In mid-1997 Atta was laid off from his drafting job. Shortly thereafter, he took an extended break from his studies. He vanished in June 1997, and when he returned to Hamburg in the fall of 1998 he seemed to be an entirely different person. Atta was sporting the sort of big, bushy beard that was favored by some Islamic fundamentalists, and he seemed to walk around with a perpetual scowl on his face. Atta reported that he had spent much of his absence on a religious pilgrimage, but such trips typically only take a fraction of the time that he was gone. Several months later, Atta requested a new passport to replace his old one. He claimed to have lost his old passport, but passport replacement is a common tactic employed by criminals and terrorists who wish to erase evidence of their travel patterns.²

Atta led an increasingly secretive existence in late 1998 and 1999. He abandoned his studies and found work at a shipping warehouse with a number of other young Muslim men who shared his increasingly hateful religious and political beliefs. They shared an apartment as well, and investigators believe that this was probably the time that Atta and his friends coalesced into an actual al-Qaeda cell group.

In November 1999 Atta and three other radical Islamists from Hamburg traveled to Afghanistan to visit Osama bin Laden. The four men—Atta, Ramzi Binalshibh, Marwan al-Shehhi, and Ziad Jarrah—were selected by bin Laden and 9/11 mastermind Khaled Sheikh Mohammed to serve as the suicide pilots in a malevolent plot to hijack American planes and crash them into various targets on U.S. soil (Binalshibh was eventually replaced by Hani Hanjour). Bin Laden also selected Atta to serve as the operation's field commander, meaning that he was in charge of directing and organizing the other al-Qaeda hijackers involved in the plot.

Atta and the other suicide pilots then went to the United States for flight training in late 2000 and early 2001. Atta had several flight instructors and landlords during these months, and they all later described the Egyptian terrorist as a serious and arrogant man who displayed an intense dislike for women. The hijackers paid for housing, food, transportation, clothing, and

flight lessons during this time through secret payments from al-Qaeda. Once the four pilots completed their training in Florida, they were joined by the rest of the al-Qaeda jihadists. By July 2001 nineteen al-Qaeda terrorists were quietly biding their time in sunny Florida. During this same month, Atta traveled to Madrid, Spain, and met with Binalshibh to finalize the details of the planned hijackings.

Carrying Out the Attacks

In mid-August Atta selected the date of September 11 for the attacks. On August 26 the hijackers began buying tickets for four separate cross-country flights scheduled to depart from various East Coast airports on the morning of September 11. Atta made all the hijacker assignments for the attack. He reserved the suicide pilot duties on American Airlines (AA) Flight 11, which was departing from Boston, for himself. Atta and four fellow hijackers boarded AA 11 without incident, but one of Atta's bags was left behind at Logan International Airport. The contents of this bag included Atta's last will and testament and several al-Qaeda documents. All of these materials helped 9/11 investigators piece together elements of the attack and identify al-Qaeda as the culprit.

The AA 11 hijackers seized control of the plane within twenty minutes of its 7:59 A.M. liftoff, and Atta settled in to steer the plane. He set a new course for downtown Manhattan, and at 8:46 A.M. Atta plowed the jet into the side of the World Trade Center's North Tower. This awful event stunned people in New York and across the country, but Americans would soon learn that it was only the first salvo in what would become the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil in American history.

Since that dark day, investigators have thoroughly documented Atta's role as the lead hijacker in the September 11 attacks. But his metamorphosis into a cold-blooded assassin will always remain a mystery to the family and friends who knew him during his youth. "When Atta brought hell to the north tower of the World Trade Center, when he perished in the flames and had his picture beamed around the world, friends back in Egypt were dumbfounded," wrote journalist John Cloud. "They looked and looked again at the photos, trying to find the kid they once knew.... 'Let each find his blade for the prey to be slaughtered,' reads a passage of the letter found in Atta's luggage. How Atta found his blade may never be known."³

Sources

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³ Cloud, "Atta's Odyssey."

A Survivor Recalls the Attack on the Pentagon

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Tracy Webb was a civilian employee of the Army, working at the Pentagon as a personnel administrator. Her department's offices were hit hard when hijackers crashed American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon at 9:37 A.M. In the following oral history, Webb recalls her narrow escape from the flames and smoke that enveloped her office space after the attack.

Tuesdays are like Mondays to me because I don't work on Mondays. That means they get busy fast because people come to me about things that happened the day before. That Tuesday was no different. I got to work just before nine o'clock. Before I could even put my stuff down, people were coming to my desk. I was trying to break away to make a quick run to the cafeteria with two of my coworkers to get some coffee and something to eat. But it just wasn't happening. Specialist Michael Petrovich came by and told me about the World Trade Center. Then Dr. Betty Maxfield said she needed to speak to me for a few minutes about a program we were doing. I turned to my two friends and asked them to wait. "We'll go as soon as I'm finished," I promised. One of them, Dalisay Olaes, sat back down at her desk and called her husband about what was happening in New York. The other one, Odessa Morris, said she was going to the rest room, and went into the E ring through the door by my desk.

Looking back at that moment, I beat myself up about the cafeteria. Why didn't I just tell them to go ahead without me, that I would meet them there? Odessa would be alive if I had said that. Instead she went into the E ring, which would be the worst-hit place in the Pentagon.

I had just finished talking to Dr. Maxfield. She stood up, saying, "I'll talk to you later, Tracy," when we heard a big BOOM! It sounded like an earthquake. The whole place shook. I immediately jumped up from my desk and screamed at Dalisay. "Day!" I shouted, which is her nickname. "Tracy!" she hollered back. I looked toward the nearest exit, that same door to the E-ring that Odessa had used, and there was fire coming through it. Within five seconds, the room was completely filled with thick black smoke. The ceiling panels started falling down on top of us. The floor beneath us buckled up. I

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looked up and saw fireballs flying through the air. Then my computer burst into flames. Something hit me on my forehead and knocked out one of my contact lenses. I felt my head and it was on fire. Thank God I had braids, because they did not burn easily. But I also had a hairpiece in my hair, and it just burned up like paper. It also felt like little glass pieces were hitting me all over my body. I was later told it was glass from the airplane.

Some coworkers started running out of a conference room that was right near my cubicle. People were hollering all over the place. I'll never forget the agonizing screams, "Help me! Help me!" I couldn't see anything or anybody. Just the voices. The only light was the fireballs in the air. Someone coming out of the conference room yelled, "Get down! Get below the smoke!" I remember thinking, "If I am going to get out of here, I am going to need my keys," so I grabbed my pocketbook and got down. I started crawling in the opposite direction of the E ring, following Dalisay and one other person, who I thought was Specialist Petrovich. But after a short distance, I got separated from them. I still couldn't see a thing. I had lost my shoes. There was stuff all over the place and I got confused and disoriented. My hair must have been on fire again, because when the sprinklers suddenly came on, I felt instant relief on my head. It was weird, but I was oblivious to the pain.

There was nothing left to do but listen. I recognized the voice of one of the officers, Lt. Col. Robert Grunewald, coaching another colleague, Martha Carden. "Hang on there, Martha," he said. "Come on there with me. Come on, Martha." I followed the voice and ended up all the way near a door into the 4th corridor. I held my breath as much as I could so I wouldn't breathe all the smoke. I could smell flesh burning. But then, after what seemed like an eternity I heard Lt. Col. Grunewald say that we couldn't get out that way. After he said that, everything went strangely silent. I couldn't hear a thing. No more screaming, nothing. I crawled a little bit, but I had no idea where I was or where to go. There were holes everywhere. I got the awful idea that I was the only one left. I am not going to get out of here, I said to myself. I totally panicked and stood up. It was the wrong thing to do. I lost all my breath and I had sharp pains in my chest. I just knew I was going to die. I said, "Lord, give my mother the strength to take care of my kids." I dropped back down to the floor on my hands and knees, continuing to pray the whole time. I thought it was over.

All of a sudden, I heard someone in the distance yelling, "Over here! Over here!" I was overwhelmed; it was like the Lord had answered my prayers, right then and there. I started moving toward the voice when I felt

someone tugging on my dress, I didn't know it, but it was Major Regina Grant, who had been one of the people in the conference room. My boss had been in there too, but they found his body later in the hallway. It seems Major Grant was with me the whole time. We couldn't see each other because the smoke was so thick. She had given up too, but she just happened to open her eyes when I was standing up. For some reason I didn't hear her, but when I fell back down, it gave her enough energy to shout for help one last time. Sgt. Major Tony Rose heard her and started yelling back. It was his voice that I was listening to and was following.

As we got closer to the voice, I could see some light in the smoke. We got to a door that Sgt. Major Rose was holding open and we crawled into the corridor. We were safe at last. Major Grant and I hugged but it was a short embrace and no time for tears. We had to keep moving. Col. Karl Knoblauch was holding the firewall open for us, as we slipped through the opening and made our way to the center courtyard. I later found out that we were lucky in that regard. Most of my colleagues who escaped our office had to jump out of the second-floor windows. I can't imagine myself doing that.

When we got to the center courtyard. I was throwing up black stuff and it was also coming out of my nose. I saw a coworker of mine there. He was burned really bad. He looked at me, "Are you all right, Tracy?" he asked. I was thinking, I should be asking you the same question. But I didn't say anything. I was overwhelmed. I couldn't breathe at all. I had to have oxygen. Then the pain just came rushing into my head, my back and my knees. My knees were torn up from crawling, and there was blood everywhere. People rushed to me with ice packs, but I couldn't have been there five minutes when people started yelling for us to get out of the center courtyard. They said another attack was coming.

I was terrified. We all started running to get outside the building to the north parking lot by the Potomac River. I had no shoes. I still can't believe it. I just ran as fast as I could. Major Denise McCann helped me. At that point, I still did not know what had happened. I believed it was a terrorist bomb. But when I got to the river, someone told me it had been a plane—and that they were afraid more planes were on the way. We were out there for about 30 minutes before an ambulance came and took me to a hospital. There were no more hijacked planes, but when the Air Force jets from Langley Air Force Base started flying around, it just scared me to death. I got down on the ground and waited for them to pass. It was there at the river that I finally let

go. Everything caught up with me. I started shaking all over. I just couldn't stop shaking.

At Arlington Urgent Care, I was treated for second-degree burns on my head and my back. I also had cuts on my knees and smoke inhalation. My dress had not caught fire, but the intense heat caused the burns on my back. At the hospital, I tried to get in touch with my three children, but none of the calls went through. I kept getting a recording from Verizon saying all the lines were busy. That was a big mess. My kids were frantic. My oldest daughter, Ebony, who is seventeen, had helped me move to my new office in June so when she turned on the TV, she knew I had been where the plane hit. She kept calling me from school and home, but couldn't get through. I finally got in touch with a friend of mine and she went over to the house and told Ebony, Echoe, and Reginald that I was okay. But by then it was already five o'clock. They let me go home from the hospital that night, so that made things better for everyone.

When I think about that day, I know what happened to me was a miracle. When I see pictures of what was going on, it is amazing anyone got out. The only thing I can conclude is the Lord was not ready for me or I wasn't ready. How else to explain it? Major Grant could see me standing there when I couldn't even see the hand in front of me. It was just not my turn. Still, I beat myself up about some things, especially when I think of Odessa Morris. She was going to work only a half day that Tuesday. It was her 25th wedding anniversary and her husband was taking her to dinner. Just before she left for the rest room, I had been playing with her about it. "Oh, so what are you all going to do?" I teased. Now she has passed.

I am back at work. At first, I was located in another building, but we moved back to the Pentagon about a week and a half ago. It feels real eerie. Everybody is fighting over space while they work fast to put the place back together. When it is finished, they say they are going to put us back in the same area, but I have mixed feelings about that. Within our agency, about thirty people didn't make it. In my immediate office, three of eleven died. That was very, very emotional. People now say the Pentagon is the safest place to be. I thought that before this happened.

Source

"Tracy Webb: Her Hair Burning, She Follows a Voice to Safety." In *September 11: An Oral History*. Compiled by Dean E. Murphy. New York: Doubleday, 2002, pp. 211-15.

IMPORTANT PEOPLE, PLACES, AND TERMS

Actionable intelligence

Information gleaned from spying and other intelligence work that is sufficiently strong for officials to make decisions and approve courses of action.

al-Qaeda

Radical Islamic terrorist organization founded by Osama bin Laden that carried out the September 11 attacks on the United States.

Alec Station

A special CIA department that was solely focused on Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

Arab

Member of an ethnically distinct people historically concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa, where the Arabic language and Islamic faith are dominant.

Arab world

Arabic-speaking countries, usually understood to encompass the Middle East as well as parts of northern Africa and central Asia.

Atta, Mohamed (1968-2001)

Egyptian-born al-Qaeda member who led the hijacking crews on September 11; Atta flew American Airlines Flight 11 into the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

Bin Laden, Osama (1957-2011)

A native of Saudi Arabia, bin Laden was the founder and leader of al-Qaeda, the terrorist organization responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States.

CHRONOLOGY

1922

Egypt receives its independence from England. *See p. 8.*

1928

The Muslim Brotherhood is founded in Egypt. *See p. 12.*

1948

The state of Israel is founded in the region of the Middle East historically known as Palestine at the conclusion of the Arab-Israeli War. *See p. 9.*

1954

Gamal Abdel Nasser becomes president of Egypt two years after leading a military coup that overthrew King Farouk. *See p. 12.*

1964

Sayyid Qutb smuggles his radical *Milestones* out of an Egyptian prison. *See p. 14.*
King Saud of Saudi Arabia is overthrown by his younger brother, Faisal. *See p. 19.*

1966

Sayyid Qutb is executed by Egyptian authorities on August 29. *See p. 15.*

1967

June 5-10 – The Six-Day War between Israel and Arab states ends in humiliating defeat for the latter countries. *See p. 15.*

1972

Palestinian terrorists murder eleven Israeli athletes and coaches at the Summer Olympic Games in Munich, West Germany. *See p. 18.*

1979

March 26 – Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin sign the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty in Washington, D.C. *See p. 21.*

November 20 – Islamic radicals seize the Grand Mosque of Mecca. *See p. 20.*

December – Soviet forces invade Afghanistan. *See p. 28.*

SOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Council on Foreign Relations. "U.S. War in Afghanistan." Retrieved from <http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/us-war-afghanistan/p20018>. This resource provides an up-to-date account of the history of America's military involvement in Afghanistan. The offerings on this website, which is produced by one of the nation's most distinguished foreign policy organizations, range from a multimedia timeline of events to in-depth essays on various aspects of the U.S. experience fighting the Taliban, working to root out terrorist camps, and supporting the installation of a new government.

Hafiz, Dilara, Imran Hafiz, and Yasmine Hafiz. *The American Muslim Teenager's Handbook*. Gilbert, AZ: Acacia, 2007. A slim but informative work that uses a conversational tone to help readers understand what it is like to be a Muslim teenager in America. In the process, the authors—a Muslim mother and her two teenage children—puncture many myths and misunderstandings about the Islamic faith and those who follow it.

Internet Archive. "Understanding 9/11: A Television News Archive." Retrieved from <http://www.archive.org/details/911>. This valuable website provides more than 3,000 hours of footage of domestic and international news coverage of the September 11 terrorist attacks and their aftermath. The materials, arranged in user-friendly form, illustrate how Americans gradually came to understand—with dawning horror—that they were witnessing the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history as it unfolded.

Levitas, Mitchel, Nancy Lee, and Lonnie Schlein, eds. *A Nation Challenged: A Visual History of 9/11 and Its Aftermath: Young Reader's Edition*. New York: New York Times/ Callaway, 2002. After September 11 the *New York Times* newspaper company collected hundreds of photographs of the tragedy taken by its photographers and published them in this book. The unforgettable images are supplemented with essays and diagrams (such as one that shows the layout of an underground al-Qaeda bunker).

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INDEX

A

- Abu Ghraib prison, 144
- Afghanistan, 131, 162
- al-Qaeda in, 41-45, 48-54, 223, 227
 - jihād against Soviets, 28-31, 29 (ill.), 42, 162
 - U.S. invasion of, 138-42, 167, 235
- Against All Enemies* (Clarke), 114, 226, 231
- al-Banna, Hassan, 12
- Albright, Madeleine, 130 (ill.)
- Alec Station, 126, 129, 181
- Algeria, 147-48
- al-Jihād, 25-26, 27, 38, 184-85
- Alomari, Abdulaziz, 62 (ill.), 63
- al-Qaeda
- attack on USS *Cole*, 52-54, 53 (ill.), 170, 227, 228
 - decline after 9/11, 146-47, 235, 238-39
 - development of 39, 41-50, 52-54, 162-63, 185-86
 - embassy bombings in Africa, 49-50, 123, 170, 196
 - fanatical beliefs of, 34-35, 38, 44-45, 48-49, 189-91, 192-93
 - founding of, 31-32, 162
 - popular support for, 48-49, 53
 - pre-9/11 intelligence warnings about, 104-18, 121-27, 129-35, 166, 181-82, 226-32, 235
 - propaganda efforts of, 44-45, 48-49, 189-91, 219-21
 - training manual of, 192-95
- American Airlines flight 11. *See* September 11 attacks, American Airlines flight 11 and
- American Airlines flight 77. *See* September 11 attacks, American Airlines flight 77 and
- Arab Spring, 147-49
- Arab-Israeli War of 1948, 9-11, 10 (ill.), 12, 18-19
- Armitage, Richard, 132
- Ascatigno, Doreen, 88
- Ashcroft, John, 125
- Assad, Bashar, 148
- At the Center of the Storm* (Tenet), 182
- Atef, Mohammed, 57, 174
- Atta, Mohamed, 104, 157 (ill.)
- American Airlines flight 11 and, 63-66, 159-60
 - biography, 157-60
 - preparation for 9/11 attacks, 58-63, 62 (ill.), 158-59
- Azzam, Abdullah, 28-29, 30, 31

B

- Ballinger, Ed, 71
- Banihammed, Fayeze, 66
- Battle of the Lion's Den, 31
- Beamer, Todd, 74
- Begin, Menachem, 21, 22 (ill.)
- Ben Ali, Zine al-Abidine, 147
- Ben Jelloun, Tahar, 148-49