

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

September 11, 2001 began as an ordinary, late-summer day. As the sun rose, fair weather and blue skies prevailed over much of the country and thousands of commercial airliners prepared for flight. But, in less than two hours' time, this seemingly routine day was transformed when 19 terrorists boarded and hijacked four commercial airplanes to attack America.

Nearly 3,000 people were killed when the hijacked planes were flown into the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon near Washington, DC, and when United Airlines Flight 93 crashed in the Pennsylvania countryside outside of Shanksville, PA.

Flight 93 did not arrive at the hijackers' intended target - the Nation's Capital - because of the selfless and courageous actions of the 40 passenger and crew members on board. When Flight 93 was hijacked, the passengers and crew members used Airfones on the plane to contact the authorities and their loved ones.

A total of 13 passengers made 37 phone calls. Through their phone conversations, they learned of the first two attacks, and subsequently took quick action. Pushed to the back of the plane by hijackers, the passengers and crew took a vote – and decided to fight back to try and regain control of their airplane. As a result of phone calls made from on board Flight 93 and from the cockpit voice recorder recovered at the crash site, we learn of the struggle the passengers and crew members had with their hijackers which began in the skies over Western Pennsylvania and ended with the high-speed crash of the plane in a reclaimed strip mine near Shanksville, just 18 minutes flying time from Washington, DC. Countless lives were spared thanks to their heroic actions, but all on board Flight 93 were lost. *A common field was transformed into a field of honor.*

FLIGHT 93 NATIONAL MEMORIAL

On September 24, 2002, Congress unanimously passed the Flight 93 National Memorial Act (P.L. 107-226). The Act "Established a Memorial at the September 11, 2001, crash site of United Airlines Flight 93 in Stonycreek Township, Somerset County, Pennsylvania, designating the final resting place to honor the passengers and crew of Flight 93." The Act also designated the National Memorial as a unit of the National Park system.

The design for Flight 93 National Memorial was chosen from more than 1,000 entries in an international competition that included submissions from 48 states in this country and 27 countries. The memorial provides a series of visitor experiences beginning with a three-mile journey through a landscape that still hints at its mining past, leading visitors to

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

an overlook located on the Flight Path, along with a Visitor Center and Learning Center down to the crash site. The winning design was awarded to Paul Murdoch Architects of Los Angeles, CA with Nelson Byrd Woltz of Charlottesville, VA in 2005.

The memorial features were dedicated in three phases. In 2011, the Wall of Names was dedicated which features the names of the 40 passengers and crew members inscribed on a wall of polished white marble panels erected along the Flight Path. The Memorial Plaza is the quarter-mile northern-boundary to the crash site, which is the final resting place of the passengers and crew members, leading to the Wall of Names. In 2015, the Flight 93 National Memorial Visitor Center and Learning Center opened, providing an even deeper level of information about this seminal day in history through engaging exhibits and educational programming. In 2018, the 93-foot-tall Tower of Voices was dedicated marking the final phase of construction and completion of the permanent memorial. In 2020, the final 40 chimes were hung and dedicated in the tower as a tribute in sound to forever commemorate the voices of the 40 heroes.

Flight 93 National Memorial is a place to be inspired by the courageous actions of the 40 passengers and crew members of Flight 93, and a place of peaceful reflection. The living memorial landscape is a tribute to the resilience of the passenger and crew members that will forever honor their actions on 9/11.

Defending America's Airspace

On September 11, America's air defense depended on close interaction between the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). The FAA is mandated by law to control the safety and security of civil aviation. Typically, that meant maintaining a safe distance between aircraft. NORAD was established in 1958 between the United States and Canada. It was created to counter the threat of Soviet bombers and its mission was to defend the airspace of North America and protect the continent. NORAD reached a high of 26 alert sites, but with the end of the Cold War the number of alert sites was continually reduced, and by 9/11 there were only seven alert sites left. On 9/11, NORAD's air defense mission was to "destroy, nullify, or reduce the effectiveness of attacking enemy aircraft or missiles."

In 2001, in the continental United States, [NORAD](#) was divided into three sectors. All four of the aircraft hijacked on the morning of September 11, 2001, were in the Northeast Air Defense Sector (NEADS), which is based in Rome, New

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

York. On call that morning for NEADS were two alert sites, each with one pair of fighter jets: two F-15s from Otis Air National Guard Base in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and two F-16s from Langley Air Force Base in Hampton, Virginia.

The FAA and NORAD had developed procedures to be implemented in the event of a hijacking that required the FAA to go through multiple levels to obtain approval for military assistance. If a hijacking was confirmed, the FAA would contact the Pentagon's National Military Command Center (NMCC) and ask for a military aircraft to follow the flight. The NMCC would then seek approval from the office of the Secretary of Defense. If approval was given, NORAD would be notified and the FAA center that was tracking the hijacked aircraft would then be authorized to coordinate the military response with NEADS. The many levels within the military that required notification and approval made this process a very time-consuming event. After gaining approval, the FAA would provide NEADS with the hijacked aircraft's call sign, position in latitude and longitude, heading, airspeed, and altitude. Normal procedures for fighter aircraft launched in the event of a hijacking did not include an intercept of the hijacked aircraft. Instead, the fighter escort would not make its presence known but would be vectored to a position five miles behind the hijacked aircraft.

Before September 11, 2001, there were three key presumptions regarding what a hijacked aircraft would do. First, the aircraft would be easy to identify and would not try to disappear from FAA controllers' screens. Controllers track aircraft primarily by watching the data from a signal transmitted by an aircraft's transponder radio. Commercial aircraft are given a unique four-digit code to input into the transponder that allows controllers to track each aircraft. It provides the identity of the aircraft by its call sign and gives the plane's position and altitude. This in turn helps the controllers to maintain vertical and horizontal separation of aircraft.

On 9/11, three of the four aircraft had their [transponders turned off](#) and another had its transponder code changed by the terrorists. American Airlines Flight 11 had its transponder turned off at 8:21. At 8:47, the four-digit transponder code on United Airlines Flight 175 was changed and then changed again. The change was not noted until 8:51, and after several minutes of trying to contact United 175 the controller reported he could not find the aircraft. American Airlines Flight 77 had its transponder turned off at 8:56 and the transponder of United Airlines Flight 93 was turned off at 9:41. With the transponder turned off it was still possible, though more difficult, to track the aircraft through primary radar. Primary radar returns take a signal sent from a radar site and bounces it off an object in the sky. It will not include the aircraft's identity and altitude. Air traffic control would have to search their radar screens with thousands of identical radar blips crossing through some of the nation's busiest air corridors. In addition, pre- 9/11, NORAD did not

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

view flights originating within the United States as a threat, so their radar was focused outward. This also added to the difficulty in identifying the hijacked aircraft.

The second presumption was that there would be time for the FAA to follow the protocol to request assistance through NORAD and still allow time to launch aircraft. In addition, it was assumed that an aircraft being hijacked would notify air traffic control either by making a radio call or by inputting a code of "7500", the universal code of "hijack in progress," into the transponder radio. This would not only alert air traffic control that the aircraft was declaring an emergency due to a hijacking but would identify which aircraft it was and provide a current position and altitude. The greatest amount of notification the military received on 9/11 from the FAA of any of the four hijacked airplanes was nine minutes prior to the first hijacked aircraft, American 11, being flown into the North Tower of the World Trade Center at 8:46:40. NEADS received notification of the second hijacked aircraft, United 175, as it struck the South Tower of the World Trade Center at 9:03:02. There was no notification that American 77 had been hijacked prior to its being flown into the Pentagon at 9:37:46. NEADS was notified that United 93 was hijacked four minutes after it had crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania at 10:03:11.

The third presumption was that the hijacking would be traditional and not a suicide designed to use the aircraft as a weapon. Of the three pre-9/11 presumptions, this was the most problematic. It is possible that air traffic control may have been able to identify the hijacked aircraft even though the transponder had been turned off by using primary radar. Additionally, one of the alert sites might have been close enough to allow the fighter jets enough time to launch and then shadow the hijacked aircraft. But even if there had been time for the fighter jets to discern the hijacked aircraft were on a suicide mission, they did not launch with standing orders to shoot them down. Prior to 9/11, it was understood that an order to shoot down a commercial aircraft would have to be issued by the National Command Authority (NCA). The NCA consists of the President and the Secretary of Defense or their duly deputized alternates or successors. Absent a presidential directive, these fighter jets had no authority to shoot a commercial airliner out of the sky. The time that the order was given that authorized the shooting down of the hijacked aircraft is not exactly clear. However, what is clear is that the military pilots had no orders until after all four aircraft had crashed.

America's air defense system was unprepared for the type of attack that occurred on 9/11. The procedures in place on September 11 required close interaction between the FAA and NORAD and assumed a "classic" hijacking scenario: ample notification time, no difficulty in locating the aircraft, hijackers intending to land the aircraft, and military aircraft

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

limited to escort. What they had trained for was not what they encountered. As the 9/11 Commission concludes, NORAD and the FAA “struggled, under difficult circumstances, to improvise a homeland defense against an unprecedented challenge they had never before encountered and had never trained to meet.”

The 9/11 Commission goes on to state that though NORAD officials have maintained that they would have intercepted and shot down United 93, Commission staffers are not so sure. “The nation owes a debt to the passengers of United 93. Their actions saved the lives of countless others and may have saved either the Capitol or the White House from destruction.” As an assistant to the mission crew commander observed while working on the floor of the NEADS command center on 9/11, “This is a new type of war.”

The Black Boxes: Key to Understanding the Final Moments of Flight 93

What are the black boxes?

Large commercial aircraft and some smaller commercial, corporate, and private aircraft are required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to be equipped with two "black boxes" that record information about a flight. In the event of an aircraft incident or accident, investigators use the data from the black boxes to reconstruct the events leading to the event. One of the black boxes, the **Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR)**, records radio transmissions and sounds in the cockpit while the other, the **Flight Data Recorder (FDR)**, monitors parameters such as altitude, airspeed, and heading.

Both recorders are typically installed in the tail of the plane, the most crash-survivable part of the aircraft. The boxes themselves are made of stainless steel or titanium and made to withstand high impact velocity or a crash impact of 3,400 Gs and temperatures up to 2000 degrees F (1,100 degrees C) for at least 30 minutes. The recorders inside are wrapped in a thin layer of aluminum and a layer of high-temperature insulation. Though popularly known as “black boxes,” the steel cases that protect the sensitive recording devices inside are painted high-visibility orange so they can be more easily spotted at a crash site. Underwater locator beacons assist in recovering recorders immersed in water.

The CVR records the flight crew's voices, as well as other sounds inside the cockpit using microphones usually located in the overhead instrument panel between the two pilots and in the headsets of the pilots. Sounds of interest to an

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

investigator include engine noise, stall warnings, landing gear extension and retraction, and other recognizable clicks and pops. Communications with Air Traffic Control and conversations between the pilots and cabin crew are also recorded by the CVR.

The FDR onboard the aircraft records many different operating conditions of the flight such as altitude, airspeed, heading, fuel usage, autopilot status, and aircraft attitude. With the data retrieved from the FDR, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) can generate an animated video reconstruction of the flight that enables the investigating team to combine the data from the CVR and FDR to visualize the last moments of the flight before the accident.

The role of the NTSB

The NTSB is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation – railroad, highway, marine, and pipeline. The NTSB determines the probable cause of the accidents and issues safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. Following an aviation accident, NTSB investigators are immediately dispatched to the scene to begin gathering evidence and undertake the search for the black boxes. When the boxes are found, they are immediately transported to NTSB headquarters in Washington, DC for processing. Using sophisticated equipment, the information stored on the recorders is extracted and translated into an understandable format. While complete reports on NTSB investigations can take years, the NTSB laboratories work quickly to analyze black box data so that the findings can help guide the on-going field investigation. According to a September 14, 2014 *Washington Post* article, “Unraveling the mystery when a plane falls from the sky,” listening to the final words from the cockpit is considered “a sacred duty” at the NTSB laboratory. “They slip on headphones, sit before individual computer screens and begin to listen, not just to voices, but to every noise that was recorded.” Later, the NTSB issues a transcript as part of its final report but does not release the audio.

The Black Boxes on Flight 93

United Airlines Flight 93 was equipped with a solid-state CVR measuring 12.5” long x 5” wide x 6” high, weighing about 11.5 pounds. This model could retain the most recent 30 minutes of audio from the cockpit, meaning that older information was over-written by new data collected beyond the 30-minute recording limit. The CVR records 4 distinct channels. One channel contains audio information from an open cockpit area microphone (CAM) that is mounted in the

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

center of the cockpit above the windshield. The remaining 3 channels contain aircraft radio information from microphones in the Captain's, First Officer's, and cockpit jump seat's headsets.

Cockpit Voice Recorder



Flight Data Recorder



The **FDR** on Flight 93 was a solid-state, digital model measuring 19.5" long x 5" wide, x 6" high. It was capable of recording data from the entire flight from take-off to crash. Both black boxes on Flight 93 were in the tail section of the aircraft.

Search and recovery at the Flight 93 crash site

When investigators arrived at the crash site in Stonycreek Township, Somerset County, on September 11, 2001, the search for the black boxes was their top priority. Investigators from the NTSB arrived on the afternoon of September 11 to begin their work.



At a press briefing on September 12, 2001, FBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge Roland Corvington holds up a photo of the black boxes they hope to recover at the Flight 93 crash site. "The search will be painstaking," Corvington said. "The value of the black box and the information therein cannot be overstated. Until we recover that, we won't be able to answer any of the questions you're asking." ("Painstaking search begins in Shanksville," Mike Faher, Johnstown Tribune-Democrat, September 13, 2001)

Photo by Dale Sparks

The FBI reasoned that, due to the collateral damage of the buildings at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Flight 93 crash site would be the most likely place to recover critical evidence, including the black boxes. Beginning

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

September 12, teams of investigators began to simultaneously excavate the crater, and systematically search the surrounding woods and fields. Local contractors were hired to use heavy equipment to begin the excavation while investigators from the FBI, the FAA and the NTSB observed closely, hoping that the black boxes would be uncovered. It was a tense period, as all the workers were focused on the importance of quickly recovering this key evidence, while working methodically and carefully so the boxes would not be further damaged during excavation.



During the excavation of the Flight 93 crash site watchers were stationed around the pit, hoping to spot the bright orange color of the boxes.
Photo by Pennsylvania State Police, Chris Pushart

On Thursday, September 13 at 4:20 pm, workers uncovered the FDR from the crater at a depth of 15 feet. The cylinder-shaped box was photographed as it was uncovered in the crater. FBI agents assumed custody of the box, logged it as evidence, and immediately removed it from the site, flying it to the NTSB laboratory in Washington, DC where its contents could be analyzed.



The FDR as first seen in the crater excavation on September 13.
Photo by Ron Horak

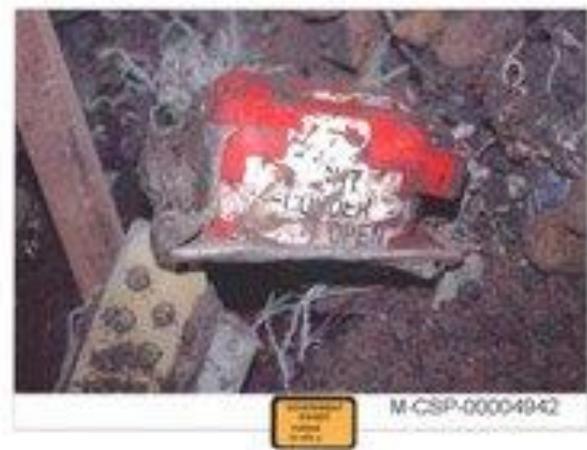
THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

Because the memory board showed signs of impact damage, the FDR was taken from Washington, DC to Honeywell facilities in Redmond, Washington for evaluation and downloading. The data were extracted and electronically transferred to the NTSB.

Meanwhile at the crash site, the search continued for the second black box. On Friday, September 14 at 8:30 pm, the CVR was recovered from the crater at a depth of 25 feet. Again, the FBI assumed custody of the box, and flew it to NTSB headquarters in Washington, DC.



Flight Data Recorder as recovered at the Flight 93 crash site on September 13, 2001.



Cockpit Voice Recorder as recovered at the Flight 93 crash site on September 14, 2001.

In the weeks following September 11, 2001, the fact that both flight recorders from Flight 93 were recovered and yielded evidence took on increased importance. At the World Trade Center site, none of the four recorders on the two

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

hijacked aircraft were recovered in the building rubble. At the Pentagon site, both boxes from Flight 77 were recovered, but the CVR was so badly damaged that it did not yield usable information.

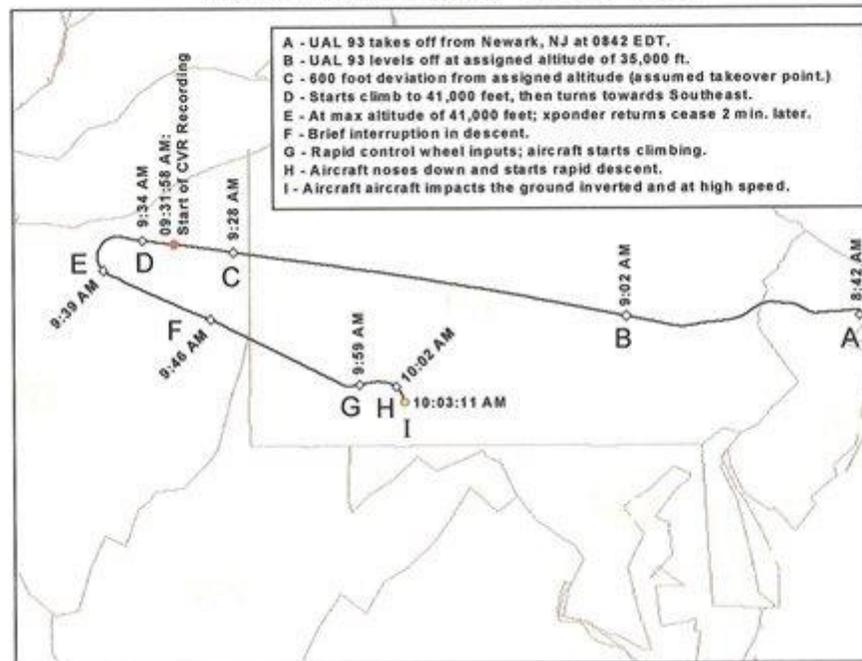
Releasing information from the FDR

In February 2012, the NTSB released four reports utilizing data from the Flight 93 FDR: the “Factual Report of Investigation” of the FDR consisting of graphs and tables summarizing the output of the FDR during the entire flight, the “Recorded Radar Study,” the “Study of Autopilot, Navigation Equipment, and Fuel Consumption Activity,” and the [“Flight Path Study.”](#) The “Study of Autopilot” report includes graphs illustrating the values of speed, altitudes, headings, and climb/descent rates over the duration of the flight and describes changes in the magnetic heading entered in the Mode Control Panel that indicate that Flight 93 was on a heading for Washington, DC. The report also indicates that the VOR (very high frequency omnirange station) receiver on Flight 93 was set to correspond with the VOR station at Washington Reagan National Airport (DCA), suggesting “that the operators of the airplane had an interest in DCA and may have wanted to use that VOR station to help navigate the airplane towards Washington.” Data retrieved from the FDR allowed the NTSB to calculate that Flight 93 had about 37,500 pounds of fuel remaining when it crashed in Pennsylvania. The “Flight Path Study” shows the flight path of the aircraft and its altitude for the 1 hour and 21-minute duration of the flight and includes a transcript of aircraft-to-ground communications. The report concludes with this summary of the flight’s final moments of erratic flight:

At 9:59 the airplane was at 5,000 feet when about 2 minutes of rapid, full left and right control wheel inputs resulted in multiple 30-degree rolls to the left and right. From approximately 10:00 to 10:02 there were four distinct control column inputs that caused the airplane to pitch nose-up (climb) and nose-down (dive) aggressively. During this time, the airplane climbed to about 10,000 feet while turning to the right. The airplane then pitched nose-down and rolled to the right in response to flight control inputs and impacted the ground at about 490 knots (563 mph) in a 40-degree nose-down, inverted attitude. The time of impact was 10:03:11.

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

Figure 1. UA-93 Radar Ground Track



3

Releasing information from the CVR

Normally, the audio of a CVR recovered from a crash scene is heard only by the team of investigators and representatives of the airline and the aircraft manufacturer and others who can assist in accurately interpreting the recording. In the case of Flight 93, family members of the passengers and crew began lobbying for permission to hear the recording within months of their loved ones' death. Eventually, permission was granted, and in April 2002, the FBI invited representatives of each family to a secure, private location to listen to the audio while viewing the transcript. They were asked not to speak with the media or others about what they heard pending use of the recording in criminal proceedings against terrorists associated with the hijacking.

The transcript of the Flight 93 CVR was issued publicly during the April 2006 sentencing trial of Zacarias Moussaoui, an al Qaeda associate who "unlawfully, willfully and knowingly combined, conspired, confederated and agreed to kill and maim persons within the United States . . . resulting in the deaths of thousands of persons on September 11, 2001." The jury was permitted to listen to the audio of the Flight 93 CVR and then, at the request of the Flight 93 family members, the judge in the trial ordered that the audio be "sealed" and only a transcript released.

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

Major newspapers across the country published the transcript on April 12, 2006. Later, the FBI released a more comprehensive version of the transcript which included details about which microphone source picked up the transmission, descriptive words, and phrases such as “sound of seat belt” and “sound of loud click” and “the start of series of very loud crashes,” and details about the gender and language of the speaker, such as “a very loud shout, by a native English-speaking male.”

The words in bold in the transcript are translated Arabic text and those in *Italic font* are English text. (The hijackers are known to have spoken in both English and Arabic.) Words in upper case are shouted. The transcript also includes transmissions recorded from Cleveland Air Traffic Control Center as Air Traffic Controllers attempted to contact the flight crew. This more-detailed transcript is reproduced [here](#).

The recording from Flight 93’s CVR begins at 9:31:57 am and continues until the time of the crash at 10:03:11. Unfortunately, the moment when the flight was overtaken by terrorists, 9:28, and the first few minutes of the hijacking event are not part of the audio retained by the CVR because the CVR retains only the most recent 30-31 minutes of audio. [Note: Air Traffic Control recordings from 9:28:19 and 9:28:54 help fill in this audio gap. The “Mayday” call from Captain Dahl and First Officer Homer, along with the sounds of a struggle, is heard by personnel at the Cleveland Air Route Traffic Control Center and by pilots of other aircraft using the same radio frequency. See “Summary of Air Traffic Hijack Events, September 11, 2001,” Federal Aviation Administration.]

Tony James, the FAA investigator in charge, summarized what it meant to recover the black boxes from Flight 93: “From the time I got there, I knew how important this was going to be for them to find those boxes . . . The voice recorder and the flight data recorder [were] the most critical of all the evidence because the, the cockpit voice recorder . . . basically told the story of what happened inside the airplane. The flight data recorder told what happened to the airplane itself.”

For those who are able to decipher and translate the muffled, chaotic, and overlapping sounds and voices recorded by the CVR and decode the thousands of pieces of data captured by the FDR, the black boxes are indeed critical pieces of evidence. There will always be unanswered and unanswerable questions about what happened during the final moments on board Flight 93. It is because the recorders functioned properly and because investigators were able to find and safely recover them that we do know something about the unimaginable situation faced by the passengers and crew on Flight 93 and their courageous response.

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

The Four Terrorists Who Boarded Flight 93

United Airlines Flight 93 was hijacked by four individuals identified as Ziad Samir Jarrah, Saeed al Ghamdi, Ahmed Ibrahim A. al Haznawi, and Ahmed Abdullah al Nami, armed with cutting instruments and stating that they had a box containing a bomb. The hijackers of United Airlines Flight 93 were led by Jarrah, the only hijacker of this group trained as a pilot.

The following profiles are based on findings of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

ZIAD JARRAH

Age:	26
Place of Birth:	Al-Marej, Lebanon
Education:	degree in Aviation Mechanics, University of Applied Sciences, Hamburg, Germany, between 1996 and 1999.
Arrival in the United States:	first known entry into the US is June 27, 2000 through Atlanta, Georgia; received a multi-entry visa from the US Consulate in Berlin, Germany; entered the US to pursue flight training in Florida.
Flight training:	attended flight training at Florida Flight Training Center, Venice, Florida, from June 28, 2000 to December 2000, obtained a FAA Private Pilot License in November 2000 and had additional training for multi-engine aircraft and Boeing flight simulators for multi-engine aircraft.
Travel prior to 9/11:	made several international flights, mainly to Germany, but also to Lebanon (December 2000 and February 2001); flew numerous times within the US. It is believed that these flights were

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

surveillance operations on how airlines, airports, and airport security operate. He flew from Baltimore-Washington International to Los Angeles in early June 2001.

associated with the following hijackers while in the US: Mohammed Atta (Flight 11), Hani Hanjour (Flight 77), Khalid al Midhar (Flight 77) and Majed Moqed (Flight 77). Lived at 4641 Bougainville Drive, Lauderdale by the Sea, Florida. While in Miami he attempted to purchase four Garmin Global Positioning System units but was only able to obtain one unit. He purchased a poster set of cockpit control systems for a B757 aircraft on August 22, 2001 and three aeronautical charts of the US on August 27, 2001.

Known activities prior to attack:

flew from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida to Newark, New Jersey on September 7, 2001, along with al Ghamdi, al Haznawi, and al Nami. Jarrah rented two rooms at the Newark Airport Marriott, stayed for two nights, and then moved to the Newark Days Inn for an additional two nights. Was ticketed for speeding in Maryland on September 9.

Preparing for the Attack:

7:39 am

Check-in time at Newark:

7:48 am

Boarding Time:

1B

Seat Location:

SAEED AL GHAMDI

21

Age:

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

Saudi Arabia

Place of Birth:

entered the US on June 27, 2001 through Orlando, Florida;

Arrival in the United States:

obtained a Florida State ID card, opened a SunTrust bank account with a deposit of \$4,500, purchased and used a two-month gym membership at Y2 Fitness Center, Boca Raton, Florida.

Purchased two, one-way tickets from Newark to San Francisco for himself and Ahmed al Nami using a Visa credit card. He lived at 755 Dotterel Road, Apartment 1504, Delray Beach, Florida and 1690 Dunn Avenue, Daytona Beach, Florida.

Known activities prior to attack:

flew from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida to Newark, New Jersey on September 7, 2001, along with Jarrah, al Haznawi, and al Nami. Stayed for two nights with the others in rooms at the Newark Airport Marriott, then stayed for two additional nights at the Newark Days Inn.

Travel:

7:03 am

Check-in Time at Newark:

7:40 am

Boarding Time:

3D

Seat Location:

AHMAD AL HAZNAWI

20

Age:

Saudi Arabia

Place of Birth:

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

entered the US on June 8, 2001, traveling from the United Arab Emirates, transiting through London onto Miami.

Arrival in the United States:

was treated at Holy Cross Hospital, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, for a leg infection and listed Jarrah as next of kin. He obtained a Florida State ID card and opened a bank account. Lived with other hijackers at 4532 and 4641 Bougainvillea Drive, Lauderdale by the Sea, Florida. Purchased a ticket for United Airlines Flight 93 through Travelocity.com using a Kinkos internet connection. Purchased a one-way ticket from Ft. Lauderdale to Newark using cash. Was issued a Florida ID card on July 10, 2001, and a duplicate Florida ID card on September 7, 2001.

Known activities prior to attack:

flew from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida to Newark, New Jersey on September 7, 2001, along with Jarrah, al Ghamdi, and al Nami. He stayed for two nights with the others in rooms at the Newark Airport Marriott, then stayed for two additional nights at the Newark Days Inn.

Travel:

7:24 am

Check-in Time at Newark:

7:39 am

Boarding Time:

6B

Seat Location:

AHMED AL NAMI

23

Age:

Jeddah-Safa, Asir Province, Saudi Arabia

Place of Birth:

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

May 28, 2001 from United Arab Emirates transiting through London into Miami, traveling with hijackers al Sheri (Flight 175) and al Ghamdi (Flight 175).

Arrival in the United States:

opened a SunTrust bank account with a deposit of \$4,700. His ticket for United Airlines Flight 93 was purchased by al Ghamdi, via telephone using a Visa credit card.

Known activities prior to attack:

flew from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida to Newark, New Jersey on September 7, 2001, along with Jarrah, al Ghamdi, and al Haznawi. He stayed for two nights with the others in rooms at the Newark Airport Marriott, then stayed for two additional nights at the Newark Days Inn.

Travel:

7:03 am

Check-in Time at Newark:

7:40 am

Boarding Time:

3C

Seat Location:

The Capitol as a Target on 9/11



US Capitol - photo credit: Architect of the Capitol

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

What target did the hijackers have in their sites when they took over United Airlines Flight 93? While we will never know with 100% certainty, information available at this time indicates that the US Capitol was the most likely target for hijacked Flight 93. Both the Senate and the House of Representatives were in session on September 11. Thousands were at work on Capitol Hill that Tuesday morning, taking up the work of the nation. Visitors were lining up for guided tours of the Capitol. The Architect of the Capitol was preparing for an evening unveiling of plans for the new Capitol Visitor Center. First Lady Laura Bush was at the Russell Senate Office Building, adjacent to the Capitol, preparing to speak to the Senate Education Committee. When the plane crashed in Western Pennsylvania, Flight 93 was only 20 minutes flying time from the nation's capital.

What evidence points to Washington, DC, and the Capitol as the target? The Flight Data Recorder (FDR), one of the black boxes recovered from the crater where Flight 93 crashed, recorded thousands of bits of data about how this plane was being flown. This data allowed authorities to construct a flight path map that clearly shows Flight 93 on a heading for Washington, DC from the time it made a U-turn near Cleveland. More specifically, the 9/11 Commission, in reviewing FDR data, learned that at 9:55:11 am, eight minutes before the crash, the hijacker pilot Ziad Jarrah "dialed in the VHF Omni-directional Range (VOR) frequency for the VOR navigational aid at Washington Reagan National Airport, further indicating that the attack was planned for the nation's capital."



Flight 93 National Memorial Visitor Center exhibit illustrates the plane's flight path.

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

Prior to the attacks, both the White House and the US Capitol were discussed as possible targets by the terrorists. We know this through the words of two terrorists now in custody at the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba: Ramzi Binalshibh, the communications liaison, moneymen, and general facilitator for the plot, and the man known as KSM – Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, frequently referred to as the mastermind of the plot.

Information about the KSM and Binalshibh connections to the plot comes from two main sources. First, the pair was interviewed, at their request, by Al Jazeera television in June 2002, three months before they were taken into custody for their role in the 9/11 attacks. According to published sources, the pair claimed in this interview that the US Capitol was the target of hijacked United Airlines Flight 93. Binalshibh said that he and Mohamed Atta, the eventual pilot of Flight 11, communicated in code about the targets, referring to the World Trade Center as "The Faculty of Town Planning," the Pentagon as "The Faculty of Fine Arts," and Capitol Hill as "The Faculty of Law." The pair also stated that after a July meeting in Spain, Atta was given full authority to select the targets.



Ramzi Binalshibh (left) & Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (right) - photo credit: FBI

More information about the choice of 9/11 targets comes from statements made by KSM and Binalshibh since they have been in US custody. A compilation of their statements was submitted by the defense in the sentencing trial of their fellow terrorist, Zacarias Moussaoui, in 2006.

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

Recounting the evolution of "the planes operation," KSM and Binalshibh described earlier planning sessions at which dozens of targets were discussed. In these sessions, they stated that bin Laden's desire was to simultaneously hit the Pentagon, White House, and US Capitol building and his plan to hit a military, political and economic target.

Still later, KSM said that bin Laden presented Atta with a list of targets from which he could make a preliminary selection. Quoting from the summary statement, "Bin Laden told Atta that Atta must hit both towers of the WTC, the Pentagon, and the US Capitol, but that additional targets from which Atta could choose included the White House, the Sears Tower, and a foreign embassy in Washington." Following this conversation, Atta also suggested adding to the list a nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania, and bin Laden agreed. The targets that were not included in the 9/11 attacks were to be carried forward to the next operation.

KSM said, under interrogation, that "the plane that crashed into the field in Pennsylvania was targeted at the Capitol building." KSM said that the final decision on targets "was entirely in the hands of the pilots."

The 9/11 Commission Report describes the July meeting in Spain as an opportunity for Binalshibh to convey final instructions from Osama bin Laden to the hijackers. Binalshibh said that Atta understood bin Laden's interest in striking the White House, but Atta said he thought this target too difficult.

Atta explained his plan for matching pilots to targets, telling Binalshibh that "Hanjour was assigned to attack the Pentagon, Jarrah the Capitol, and that both Atta and al Shehhi would hit the World Trade Center. If any pilot could not reach his intended target, he was to crash the plane. If Atta could not strike the World Trade Center, he planned to crash his aircraft directly into the streets of New York."

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

THE 9/11 COMMISSION REPORT



9/11 Commission Report

According to the 9/11 Commission, Binalshibh communicated with Atta again in August about targets: "Binalshibh reminded Atta that Bin Laden wanted to target the White House. Atta again cautioned that this would be difficult. When Binalshibh persisted, Atta agreed to include the White House but suggested they keep the Capitol as an alternate target in case the White House proved too difficult. Atta also suggested that the attacks would not happen until after the first week in September, when Congress reconvened. In another exchange between Atta and Binalshibh which reportedly occurred on September 9, two days before the attacks, it appears as though the White House was the primary target for the fourth plane and the US Capitol the alternate."

These sources, and perhaps other documents not yet made public, led the 9/11 Commission to state:

"Jarrah's objective was to crash his airliner into symbols of the American Republic, the Capitol or the White House. He was defeated by the alerted, unarmed passengers of United 93." (9/11 Commission Report, p. 14)

"The nation owes an eternal debt of gratitude to those who took action to ensure that Flight 93 never reached its target." (9/11 Commission staff statement #4)

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

The Last Night Document:

Instructions for the September 11 Attack

On September 28, 2001, the FBI announced the recovery of important evidence relating to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. They released [photos of a four-page document](#), handwritten in Arabic, identical copies of which were recovered among the hijackers' belongings in Boston, in Washington, DC, and at the Flight 93 crash site in Western Pennsylvania.

Attorney General John Ashcroft made this statement at the press conference in Washington, DC:

I wanted to take this opportunity to provide some details and context to reports of a letter that was found belonging to three of the hijackers. Copies of this letter in its original language will be provided. A four-page, hand-written letter was found in the suitcase of Mohamed Atta, one of the hijackers on American Airlines Flight 11. You may recall there was a suitcase that did not make it to the plane and was recovered by the FBI in Boston. A second copy of the letter was also found at Dulles Airport in a vehicle that was used by Nawaf al Haznawi, one of the hijackers on American Airlines Flight 77.

Additionally, a third copy of the letter was found at the crash site of United Airlines Flight 93 in Pennsylvania. These three documents, this letter, is clear evidence linking the hijackers on the three separate flights on September 11th.

The letter is written in Arabic and contains instructions to the hijackers, as well as Islamic prayers. It is a disturbing and shocking view into the mindset of these terrorists. The letter provides instructions to the terrorists to be carried out both prior and during their terrorist attacks.

Let me make clear that while this letter contains a number of religious references, I do not believe it to be representative of Muslims or the Islamic faith.

The letter is a stark reminder of how these hijackers grossly perverted the Islamic faith to justify their terrorist acts.

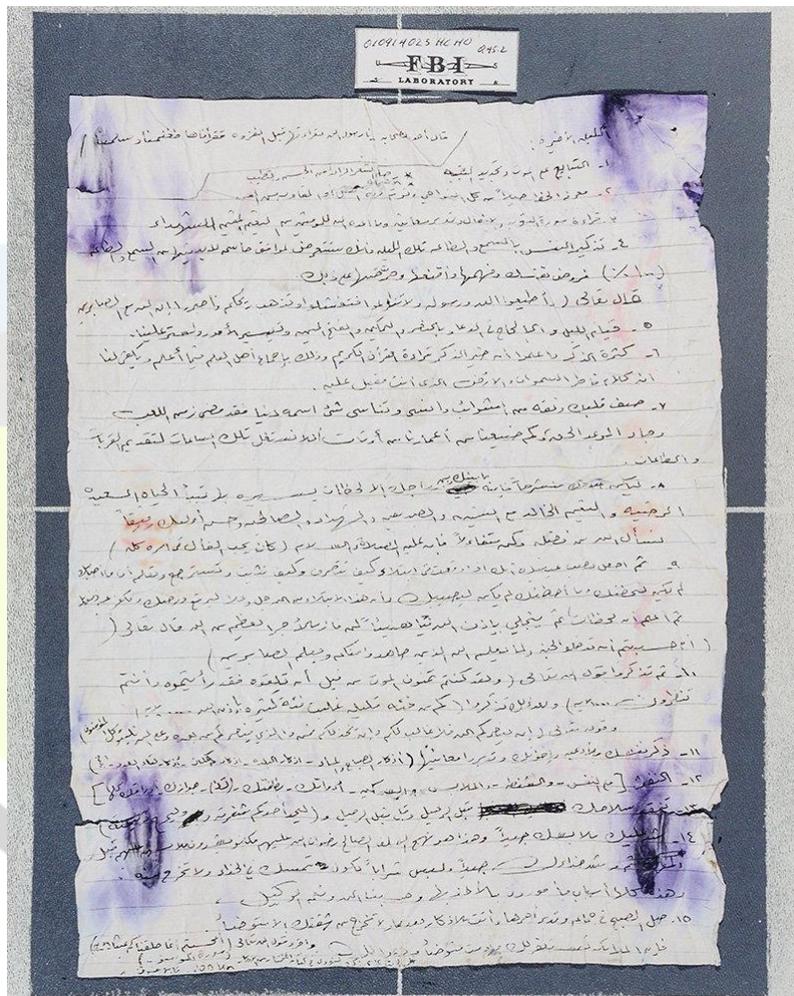
Media reports from the press conference referred to the document as "The Last Night," the words that appear as a title on page 1. Because the FBI did not immediately provide a translation of the document, various media sources had the

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

letter translated to appear with their reports published on September 28-October 1, 2001. Therefore, a number of different translations of the document have circulated.

Five years after its discovery, the copy of the document that was recovered from al Haznawi's car at Logan airport and an [English-language translation](#) prepared by the FBI were entered as evidence in the 2006 sentencing trial of Zacarias Moussaoui.

["The Last Night"](#) document exhibited at Flight 93 National Memorial is a photographic reproduction of the one recovered from Zone A, the crater, at the Flight 93 crash site. It appears to differ from the other versions only in its condition.



Page 1 of the The Last Night Document
recovered at the Flight 93 crash site.

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

Scholars analyze “The Last Night”

Scholars studying the original Arabic language document have viewed it as a practical and spiritual guide for preparing for and carrying out the attack, with instructions for three stages: Part 1 – how to prepare, both physically and spiritually, throughout the night before; Part 2 – what to do during the period between leaving their rooms on the morning of September 11 and boarding the aircraft; and Part 3 – what to do while inside the aircraft.

While some of the more familiar passages of this document, i.e., “Shave the extra body hair and wear cologne” and “tighten your shoes well and put on tight socks so that they would not come out of the shoes,” are matters of practical advice, most of the document relates to spiritual preparation. The hijackers are instructed to pray specific prayers at certain times and places and to read and reflect on specific passages from the Koran. University of Chicago scholar Bruce Lincoln, in his 2003 book, *Holy Terrors*, notes that “God himself is mentioned a full 89 times and appears in more than three-quarters of the document’s paragraphs (30 out of 38).”

Lincoln also points out 25 mentions of the Prophet and the first generation of Muslims and discussion of these topics: “purification (5 times), martyrdom (5 times), the need to struggle against infidels (11 times), and the promise of heavenly reward (6 times).” Admonitions to pray are also a central theme of the document. The hijackers are reminded to “remember God constantly” and offer specific prayers every time they enter a new place.

German scholars Hans G. Kippenberg and Tilman Seidensticker call “The Last Night” a document of “extraordinary historic importance,” and refer to it as “A Spiritual Manual” in their published work, *The 9/11 Handbook*. Their analysis also points out the “enormous role assigned to the recitation of prayers,” and describes the three phases of instructions for the attack. The first is for the night before, when the terrorists are to “attain a state of purity” by using Koranic recitals, prayers, meditations, and purifications. During the second stage, at the airport, Kippenberg says the document directs the terrorists in “overcoming the fear of the satanic power of western civilization.” The third stage of the spiritual manual provides guidance for actions inside the aircraft relating to “attacking the infidels and the gift of martyrdom.”

Who wrote “The Last Night” document?

Some early reports cited Flight 11 hijacker-pilot Mohamed Atta as the author of “The Last Night” document since it was found in his luggage. Later, however, as samples of Atta’s handwriting were discovered, they did not match that of the

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

recovered document. Investigative reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* Terry McDermott, in his 2005 book, *Perfect Soldiers: the Hijackers: Who They Were, Why They Did It*, states his belief that this “handwritten set of instructions, admonitions, suggestions, and encouragements” was written by Abdul Aziz al-Omari, one of the other hijackers who died with Atta on Flight 11. McDermott’s information source is the Yosri Fouda interview with 9/11 co-conspirator Ramzi Binalshibh described in his 2003 book, *Masterminds of Terror: The Truth Behind the Most Devastating Terrorist Attack the World Has Ever Seen*. Fouda writes that Binalshiebh had a copy of “The Last Night” among his “souvenirs,” and told Fouda that it was written by al-Omari. According to Fouda, al-Omari, though one of the youngest of the hijackers, “was recognized by the rest as having an exceptional knowledge of Islam – and a neat hand.”

Kippenberg and Seidensticker conclude that the Spiritual Manual, which at least three of the 9/11 hijackers carried with them as they prepared for their mission, “achieved its purpose in preparing and motivating nineteen young men to undertake four suicide missions.” The document and its implications are certain worthy of examination for the insight that can be gained into the minds and motives of these terrorists.

Undelivered Mail

United Airlines Flight 93 was carrying 2,858 pounds of US mail when it took off from Newark, New Jersey on September 11, 2001. Wedding invitations, bank statements, advertisements, personal letters . . . neatly packed in sturdy plastic mail containers, destined to arrive at west coast homes and businesses once the plane landed in San Francisco at 11 am.

When hijacked Flight 93 crashed at 10:03 in rural western Pennsylvania, 2,858 pounds of mail were scattered across the fields and forests or burned in the aircraft’s fiery explosion. First responders reported seeing so much mail on the ground at the crash site that, at first, they thought (and hoped) that the plane might have been carrying only mail. In the days following the crash personnel from the Pittsburgh Division of the US Postal Inspection Service were dispatched to review the mail that was recovered by the FBI Evidence Response Teams working at the crash site. After completing that assignment, the team was invited to stay for approximately a week to assist with the recovery and evidence gathering mission of the FBI.

Melted fragments of the plastic containers which held the mail were recovered at the crash site and are now part of the exhibit at Flight 93 National Memorial, and part of the collection at the National Postal Museum of the Smithsonian

THE STORY OF 9/11 AND UNITED FLIGHT 93

The five men charged in this indictment are:

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed who was "closely associated with Usama Bin Laden, participated in the formulation of the plot resulting in the September 11, 2001 attacks, and was the plot's operational leader."

Walid Bin Attash who was "closely associated with Usama Bin Laden and participated in the plot resulting in the September 11, 2001 attacks by, among other things, collecting information on matters related to airport and airplane security measures."

Ramzi Bin Al-Shibh who "tried to become one of the pilot hijackers, but failed to obtain a visa for entry into the United States; instead, Bin Al-Shibh managed the plot resulting in the September 11, 2001 attacks by, among other things, sending money to hijackers in the United States from abroad."

Ali Abdul Aziz Ali who "facilitated the plot resulting in the September 11, 2001 attacks by, among other things, sending money to hijackers in the United States from abroad."

Mustafa Al-Hawsawi who "facilitated the plot resulting in the September 11, 2001 attacks by, among other things, helping the hijackers travel to the United States and facilitating their efforts upon arrival."

As of December 2015, these five remain in US custody at the detention center at Guantanamo Bay Naval Station in Cuba. A trial date has not yet been determined.