

The Pentagon Attack and American Airlines Flight 77

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On the morning of September 11, 2001 I was at home in Washington, DC, about half a mile from the Pentagon, in Anacostia. I had been called by a friend to inform me of the first plane hitting the WTC tower in New York City. He sits on a transportation board for the county in Fairfax, Virginia, which includes Dulles Airport. He was immediately alarmed because he knew that no commercial flights come close to those buildings on their normal routes, and he suspected this was a terrorist attack. As we spoke, the second plane hit the second WTC tower at approximately 9:05 am, and at that point people across the United States were forced to agree with his thesis, since neither accident nor coincidence would have explained two such tragedies happening nearly simultaneously.

At that point, other planes that had gone off course and turned off communications with their control towers were still in the air. All four planes involved in the attacks had been identified as emergencies and potential hijackings by the FAA, NORAD, the National Military Command Center at the Pentagon, the Secret Service and other agencies linked into a phone bridge that was in place by at least 8:24 am, sharing critical information with the air traffic controllers and eventually with military pilots. By 8:18 am, according to published reports, they were aware of four commercial passenger planes off course and not responding normally, two from United and two from American Airlines.

American Airlines (AA) Flight 77 left Dulles airport that morning on its regular route to LAX airport in Los Angeles. For a few minutes it was lost to radar tracking when it turned off course and headed back to the east. But in a short time radar contact was renewed and its course was visible. It was coming towards Washington, DC. Much of the city is under P-56, one of the most secure airspaces in the world, protected under federal regulations from any over-flight by unauthorized planes, private or commercial, and guarded by fighter jets from Andrews Air Force Base (AFB) and Anacostia Naval Air Station, where the Air National Guard is located.

Not only did authorities know it was headed to DC, it was announced publicly on local TV and radio stations, and evacuation was ordered at the White House, the Capitol, the Pentagon and other federal buildings. This notice was given well in advance of the plane's arrival in DC airspace. I stood watching television news reports that morning, anticipating its arrival. A large explosion at approximately 9:43 am shook my windows, though it was not visible to me.

When newscasters announced the identity of the plane involved, American Airlines Flight 77 and its Dulles/LAX route, my heart sank. A dear friend and fellow researcher had been working as a flight attendant for American for many years, and that was her regular route, several times a week. I feared she had been trapped on the plane and died in the crash. Attempts to reach her by phone that day got her answering machine, nothing more.

Local reporters continued to cover the event on radio and TV. There was footage of the rescue and fire crews at the Pentagon site, and the smoke plume was visible across the city. Hundreds of witnesses had been stuck in traffic during the attack along major highway routes into the city that border the Pentagon, and had seen and heard the event close-up, as well as office workers in nearby buildings, others along the route who were outside and ducked because the plane was flying so low, and workers at the Pentagon site, both at the heliport and in the construction crews who had been reinforcing the building walls for several years. Many of these people were interviewed by local and national media and the press.

"Continuity of Government" was declared, bypassing Constitutional governing structures in favor of a small number of executive and legislative leaders working together with FEMA, the National Security Council and the Pentagon from a secure bunker in Bluemont, VA to function in the emergency. Metro, AMTRAK trains, and commercial flights were cancelled and government employees were excused from work and told to go home. Local highways became one-way routes out of town. Park Police could be seen on the streets with machine guns at ready.

DC came very close to martial law. And all day long, local witnesses to the event at the Pentagon were interviewed, describing the plane and its collision with the Pentagon and the explosion that resulted. Later, survivors from inside the building were interviewed, along with rescue crew. A massive rescue and clean-up operation began once the fire was contained.

As it turned out, my friend had not been on Flight 77, having taken the day off work to care for her sick father, and to my relief she had survived. She had lost her entire regular crew, both pilots and all the attendants, including her best friend at work. She was immediately invited in to a series of briefings and grief counseling sessions by both the airline and the Pentagon. These briefings continue to this day. She also attended a long series of memorial events at the gravesites of her co-workers and friends following the event. Her own father died shortly after that in November. I attended his funeral service at National Cemetery and got to meet some of her American Airline co-workers.

When questions arose about Flight 77, I contacted her to raise the issues that concerned me and the speculations of others who denied the plane hit the Pentagon. She was adamant in saying it had, and told me she had been to the crash site and had seen parts of the plane. I asked her about the speculation that the plane would have made a larger hole due to the wingspan. She informed me that the fuel was stored in the wings and that they would have exploded and broken off, as the fuselage slammed through the building walls.

I have spoken to dozens of other witnesses to the event, and to others who know the reports. Wayne Madsen, a respected local journalist, spoke to a camera person at WJLA-TV 7 who had been driving to the Pentagon on instructions from his office, expecting a public statement from authorities there in response to the events in New York City. Shortly after the crash he saw a woman standing by the road at the edge of the Pentagon, next to her car, and apparently in shock. He stopped to help her and found she could not speak. But she pointed him to the far side of her car. The passenger side had been sheared off in part and sections of the landing gear from the plane were on the ground nearby. Others I have spoken to, including pilots, either saw the crash happen and identified the plane, or saw parts of the plane in the wreckage days afterwards.

At the funeral service on September 20th in Annapolis for Charles Burlingame, the pilot of AA Flight 77, my friend was approached by another flight attendant to assist in support work for the rescue crews at the site. This work was being organized by the Salvation Army. The Pentagon was seeking people with security clearances that they could trust to be near the site and all the airline attendants qualified for that level of clearance. The shifts ran from 10 am to 10 pm, and then for the next twelve hours. She and her mother signed up for an overnight shift on Friday, September 21st.

She and her mother spent the entire night continuously providing drinks to rescuers from North Carolina. Burger King, McDonald's, Pepsi and Outback Steak House were the selected food and drink providers. She and her mother were given a special T-shirt to wear for the night, with red lettering for "Operation Noble Eagle". They did not wear the traditional Salvation Army outfits. No break came until early morning, the crews were large and worked continuously. The work was tedious and slow. She was in the second of five groups that were sent in that week. Rescue and clean-up work continued for months.

At the end of her shift on Saturday morning, September 22nd, she was approached along with other attendants to visit the crash site. One declined, but she and two others took a van driven by the Salvation Army to the area. They were forced to wait almost 45 minutes at a safety fence around the area before being admitted into the area of destruction. As they waited, members of a psychological support group talked to them about their feelings. She will never forget what she saw there.

The area was covered with rescue equipment, fire trucks, small carts, and ambulances. They were still hoping to find survivors. Small jeeps with wagons attached were being used to transport workers and others at the site. One flight attendant was driving one of these around the site. Once inside the fence, she was unable to clearly discern where the original wall had been. There was just a gaping hole. She got off the van and walked inside the crash site. The other attendants broke down crying once they were inside. But my friend went in further than the others and kept her emotions in check as she has been trained to do and usually does in emergency situations.

She saw parts of the fuselage of an American Airlines plane, a Boeing 757 plane. She identified the charred wreckage in several ways. She recognized the polished aluminum outer shell, an unpainted silver color that is unique to American Airline planes, and the red and blue trim that is used to decorate the fuselage. She saw parts of the inside of the plane, which she easily identified since she flew and worked in them for years. Upholstery, drapes

and carpeting she could identify by both color and design. The soft carpeting and padding of the inner walls had a cloud design and color she recognized from American Airline planes, though it has since been replaced. The blue coloring of drapes and carpet were also specific to the 757 or 767 larger planes, and were not used on the smaller planes. Seating upholstery also matched the AA 757 planes, including the blue color, tan squares and hints of white.

She saw other parts of the plane and engine parts at a distance but they were familiar to her. She did not see any galley supplies, which she would have recognized as well, nor any jump seats. All the parts were charred but colors were still visible. She also saw charred human bones but not any flesh or full body parts.

One area of fuselage had remaining window sections and the shape of the windows, curved squares not ovals, was also distinct to the 757's she had flown. She also saw parts with the A/A logo, including parts of the tail of the plane. Smaller A/A logos and "American" logos are also on the planes and she saw parts of those. One website shows pictures of wreckage inside the building, including sections of the fuselage with bright lime and yellow coloring, which is distinctive to Boeing parts. My friend confirmed this, having visited a Boeing plant where she saw the bright colors on the production line marking the inside of fuselage parts. She did not notice this coloring at the site, but the photos show it in some pieces of the plane.

She spent approximately 15 minutes in the crash area looking at parts of the wreckage, all of which she recognized as coming from a Boeing 757 American Airline plane, the same planes she flew regularly. She did not see any rubber, only metal pieces of fuselage, engine parts and sections of the inside of the plane.

She went to briefings by Pentagon people at the Sheraton for 3 months afterwards, and the clean-up lasted for a long period. She is a union representative for attendants as well, and briefings continue. Families and attendants were at the briefings, along with Pentagon and airline people. Hundreds of people saw the plane from windows of nearby buildings, from cars along the nearby highways, and some ducked because it flew over so low. Pentagon employees and construction workers at the site saw the events unfold before their eyes. Hundreds more took part in the clean-up operation and saw the wreckage. It is not difficult to find eyewitnesses to the event in DC.

The crew of Flight 77 who died in the crash included her personal friend Renee May. She had spoken to Renee's mother after the crash, and Renee had used a cell phone to call her mother during the hijacking. Her mother noted specific phone numbers to call American Airlines operations to report a hijacking. "There are six of them," Renee had told her, one more than in the official version. Her mother also heard the voices of other attendants calling out contact numbers for American Airlines during the call. At the time attendants had been trained to cooperate during a hijacking event, and it seems a group of them were at the back of the plane together as it approached DC. She was told at a briefing that pilot Charles Burlingame's throat was slit, but had no way to confirm it. She believes the co-pilot may have been forced to the rear with the attendants. She does not know exactly what happened to her friend Renee.

Cell phone calls made from the planes that day have become an area of contention as well. However, my friend told me that attendants regularly hear cell phones ringing during flights, despite the prohibition. In fact, the airlines are now ending the restriction while on the ground, having discovered that these devices do not actually interfere with communications or functions aboard the plane before take off. Some cell phones do not work as well as others at high altitudes and speeds, but major carriers have multiple towers and the calls do not even roam in connection. Other people I know have tested Verizon and other cell phones crossing the country and found them to work normally. In addition, many of the calls made that day were to family members who clearly recognized their relatives' voices.

Other American ground crew workers saw some of the suspects board American Airline Flight 77 and recognized them from the published photos. While questions remain about the identities of the hijackers, it is not the case that none of them were on the planes. The airlines have yet to release full passenger manifests, and those they have released are short of the total count, and do not contain the suspects' names. Rather than speculate that none were aboard, the more interesting question is why the names have not been released if they indeed match the official story.

My friend is therefore a credible and very knowledgeable eyewitness to the fact that American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. She has been vilified by those who refuse to believe the obvious, as have the many witnesses to the event. We lack clear footage of the event, some of which was confiscated by the FBI, or pictures showing all the wreckage and plane parts. Working from a few un-timed photographs, others have speculated that not only did AA77 not hit the Pentagon, but that a cruise missile or smaller plane did.

My friend is herself a researcher for many years into government misdeeds and cover-ups. If she did not see the parts, she would say so. She has no reason to lie about it. Nor is she confused about what she saw. She is a professional and is used to looking at evidence. Families of victims and others who work at the airlines, as well as many witnesses I have spoken to, are offended and shocked by these unfounded speculations. Those willing to do a modicum of investigative work here in DC will be quickly disabused of this disinformation. For a more thorough presentation of the range of witness testimonies, and linking sites, see the work on Flight 77 and the Pentagon attack by Penny Schoner at www.ratical.org.

My attendant friend knows and has put me in touch with other American Airline employees and pilots who were at the site and took photographs. We are busy locating these, as well as another attendant who was at the site with her that day. 9/11 CitizensWatch has also been pushing for public release of all photographic evidence relating to the Pentagon attack from federal agencies and other sources and plans to file a Freedom of Information request to get records from all federal agencies that might hold them.

There are many legitimate unanswered questions about the events of September 11, 2001, its sponsorship, and the official version of events. We benefit from serious research and the issues raised by victim's families seeking accountability. Not the least of these is the apparent lack of standard FAA/NORAD response to these emergency events. Rather than use our time proving and belaboring the obvious, or focusing on areas of total speculation that can only hurt our public credibility, I encourage serious researchers to focus on the

historical context of the event, the alleged conspirators, the funding, and the government response or lack of it.

American Airlines Flight 77 hit the Pentagon, killing passengers and crew, along with construction workers and a small number of Pentagon employees. It made an amazing spiraling descent, curving 270-degrees around the open area, and then flew dangerously close to the ground, skidding into the ground floor of the Pentagon. A huge fireball could be seen outside the building as it hit. Employees inside the building were also burned by jet fuel, which covered the lawn and front of the building. One employee saw the nose of the plane crash through her office wall. Pilots have disagreed about the piloting skills necessary to carry out this maneuver in a large commercial plane. Questions about the actual events remain but I hope that credible witnesses and the existing evidence will at least put to rest the wild speculation that have replaced Flight 77 with flights of fancy.