

What Happened on Flight 93

It is a recognized fact that, on September 11, 2001, five average Americans saved the United States Capitol Building from being partially destroyed.

By special request, this is the story of that flight.

On Tuesday morning, September 11, in a country home near Cranbury, New Jersey, Todd Beamer woke up at 5:45 a.m. His wife said good-bye, pulled a pillow over her head, and went back to sleep.

As an account manager for Oracle, Todd had to make another business trip, this one to San Francisco for a meeting with a software company. Taking such trips was a regular matter for Todd.

Normally, he would have left the night before from the Newark, New Jersey Airport. But he and his wife had just returned from a weeklong company trip to Italy, and Todd wanted some time with 3-year-old David and 1-year-old Andrew. So he decided to take United Flight 93 the next day—September 11.

Among the hundreds headed to the Newark Airport that morning were five men who little realized the effect they would have on United States history.

In all, 37 passengers boarded the plane at Gate 17 that bright morning. The promise of a beautiful day was ahead. Thirty-three were headed to the West Coast for business meetings or a vacation. Four men had different objectives. Each of them carried a knife.

The Boeing 757 is a plane with a single aisle. On each side of it are three seats. Understanding this will help you better understand the events which followed.

The lead man among those with the knives, Ziad Samir Jarrah, sat in 1B, the first seat on the left side of the aisle. If he had followed the instructions (entitled “*The Last Night*”) from his ringleader, Mohamed Atta, the previous evening he had bathed carefully and shaved “excess” body hair; for he was getting ready to go to heaven the next day and spend eternity with 72 virgins, plus all the wine and food he could want. Hundreds of years before, the prophet Mohammed had promised it.

According to instructions, as he sat in his seat on the plane, he was also supposed to be silently praying a thousand times the sentence, “There is no god but Allah.” He had been told to be “happy, optimistic, calm” because he was “heading for a deed that Allah loves and will accept.” The letter from Atta also said, “This is the day, Allah willing, you will spend with women in paradise.”

Of course, this was all part of the trickery to keep him from taking time to realize that he was foolishly going to kill himself.

Before embarking on the plane, this same Jarrah had written a note to his girlfriend back in Germany. “I have done what I had to do. I will not be coming home. You should be proud, because it is an honor and in the end you will see that everyone will be happy.” At least he would; he was leaving one woman for dozens of them. Was that something for her to be proud of?

Just behind him, in seats 3C, 3D, and 6B—all in the front first class part of the airplane—sat Ahmad Al Haznawi, Saeed Alghamdi, and Ahmed Alnami. From their photographs, Jarrah and Al Haznawi appear to be in their thirties. The other two, Saeed Alghamdi and Ahmed Alnami, look like they were barely out of their teens.

We owe a lot to five men. We can also thank the Newark International Airport. It was generally overcrowded, but this morning it was especially clogged. All flights were delayed this morning.

The Boeing 757 was to depart Newark at 8 a.m. It pulled away from the gate at 8:01, then sat on the tarmac for more than 40 minutes because of heavy traffic. Finally, it took off at 8:42 a.m.

Delayed for nearly 45 minutes, Flight 93 did not take off until 8:42, six minutes before American Flight 11 slammed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

Investigators believe that the plan had been for all four planes to hit their targets within a few minutes of each other.

But, because of this delay, the passengers learned of the crashes into the World Trade Center and Pentagon—and decided to take matters into their own hands.

Here is the timing of events (some news reports vary by a minute or two):

Scheduled departure: 8:00 a.m.

Actual departure: 8:42

North Tower hit: 8:46

South Tower hit: 9:03

Flight 93 U-turn: 9:36
 Flurry of phone calls
 by passengers: 9:31-9:53
 Flight 93 crash: 10:06

Among the 37 passengers, five were built big. Interestingly enough, each of those five Americans was larger and stronger than any one of the four Middle East terrorists. Makes for an interesting situation.

One of the five was Todd Beamer, whom we mentioned earlier. Along with his wife, Lisa, Beamer was a Sunday School teacher and a devoted Christian. He was 32 years old, 6 feet tall, and 200 pounds. "He was humble," said his wife afterward, "but he was very competitive. Winning was important to him."

In seat 4D was Mark Bingham, 31, 6 foot 5, and 220 pounds. Bingham was a public-relations executive who played on his college rugby team, ran with the bulls in Pamplona, Spain, this summer and once wrestled a gun from a mugger. He was also fiercely competitive. "He had no fear," said a close friend, "and he had to win."

Seated next to Mark was Tom Burnett, 38. He was chief operating officer of medical-device maker Thoratec. The father of three small girls, Burnett was a hockey player. He had been a quarterback in high school. A friend later described him as "exceptionally bright, driven, and competitive."

Both Bingham and Burnett sat in first class, close to the front, where the hijackers sat.

Back in coach (also called economy class), which was the rest of the passenger section, sat Jeremy Glick, 31, a salesman for a San Francisco internet firm. Six foot 1 and 200 pounds, he skied, golfed, and wrestled. He also happened to be a judo champion. His father-in-law, Richard Makely later said, "He was very competitive, but he channeled his aggressiveness into sports and business. Once he was home, he was a very gentle person."

Just behind Glick sat Lou Nacke, 42, manager of a toy-store distribution center. Shortest of the five, at 5 foot 9, he was a 200-pound weight lifter. His brother-in-law, Jeff Trichon later commented, "He was a man of strength and steel."

Several other capable men were also on that flight: Rich Guadagno, an enforcement officer with California Fish and Wildlife, had been trained in hand-to-hand combat.

Flight attendant, CeeCee Lyles, had been a detective on the Ft. Pierce, Florida, police force.

William Cashman was a former paratrooper with the 101st Airborne. At 60, the ex-ironworker was still fit.

Linda Gronlund, an attorney, had a brown belt in

karate.

Alan Beaven, 6 foot 3, was a rock climber and former Scotland yard prosecutor.

It is now known that the hijackers had been training for two years; the passengers had only a few minutes to prepare. But the odds were not hopeless. There was even a pilot among them! Don Greene, vice president of a company that made safety devices for airlines, had flown single-engine aircraft. With the right instructions from air-traffic controllers, he probably could have landed the highly automated Boeing 757. But, as we will learn later in this report, circumstances near the end rendered it almost impossible for him to do so.

With the plane now in the air (records indicate it reached cruising altitude at 9:00 a.m.), another crucial decision was made that greatly affected the outcome of that flight. Aboard the other planes, the hijackers moved quickly to seize control. But on Flight 93, the four terrorists waited for breakfast to be served! That, obviously, was a great mistake. They wanted to get a good breakfast before heading to where Mohammed and Allah lived.

There were about 32 rows of passenger seats, with six seats to a row (as mentioned earlier, three were on each side of the central aisle). That meant there was room for about 192 passengers, plus two other seats for stewards. But only 37 passengers were on this flight. Each of the four flights had purposely been selected by the terrorists with two objectives: (1) only a few passengers to deal with; (2) fuel tanks full of fuel for a trip to the West Coast. It is now known that the terrorists had made many flights while figuring out which ones were best suited for their purposes.

At about 9:25 a.m., in the sparsely filled main cabin, passengers were beginning to read magazines or books, open their laptops, or snooze.

But, up in first class, someone may have noticed a strange sight: Four men, who looked like they were from the Middle East, were tying red bandannas around their heads. What the Americans did not realize was that this was part of the jihad ritual of the religion of death they had inherited from a lifetime of instruction in the mosques of the Near East. Before killing the infidels, they had to dress in a prescribed manner.

Meanwhile, in the cockpit, the captain, Jason Dahl, and his first officer, LeRoy Homer, had already been warned to be on the alert for trouble. I have read in an Adventist publication that Homer's wife is a faithful Seventh-day Adventist.

Shortly after 9 a.m., a message, automatically sent to all United Airlines pilots by the home office, had flashed on the cockpit computer screen. It notified them that American Flight 11 had already crashed into the first World Trade Center tower and United 175 had just

plowed into the second tower. They were also told that American Flight 77 had been hijacked and was headed for Washington, D.C. That message was followed by a general warning and three ominous words: “Beware, cockpit intrusion.”

One of the pilots typed, “Confirmed.”

Unknown to the passengers till later, American Airlines Flight 11 had crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center at 8:46 a.m. United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the South Tower at 9:03.

Time passed. At about 9:25 a.m., one of the pilots checked in with Cleveland, Ohio, traffic control, with a cheery “Good morning!”

With the microphone still open to Cleveland, suddenly the air-traffic controller could hear the sound of screaming and scuffling over the open microphone. It was 9:28 a.m.

“Did somebody call Cleveland?” the controller asked. Muffled sounds of something happening. Then, total silence. Someone had turned off the microphone.

After 40 seconds of silence, one of the pilots turned on the microphone again, allowing Cleveland air control to hear more muffled noises. Then somebody—probably one of the pilots—shouted, “Get out of here! Get out of here!” Then the mike went dead again. The time was 9:29 a.m.

I will not here discuss events in the cockpit during the next few minutes, as recorded on the automatic cockpit voice recorder. But they were grim. Prior to September 11, pilots had been routinely instructed that they should not fight back in case of a hijacking. Back in the old days, the plane would be flown to an airport and the passengers released.

It is obvious that both pilots were killed. After they had taken control of the cockpit, from time to time, one terrorist was heard reassuring another, “Everything is fine.” Whether it be in Indonesia, Israel, Sudan, France, the Philippines, Algeria, or America, it is an interesting fact that, aside from Hitler, the only people in recent memory who focus on killing innocent civilians rather than soldiers are Muslims. That is what makes their warfare so difficult to deal with. Thirty of the 32 terrorist organizations killing people in the world today are Muslim.

What had happened in the passenger cabin? We know the terrorists had been instructed to “Shout ‘Allahu akbar’ [that means ‘Allah is great’ in Arabic; it has been shouted for centuries by Arabs as they went into battle against the infidel], because this strikes fear into the hearts of the unbelievers.” “When the confrontation begins, strike like champions who do not want to go back to this world,” was what they had been told.

When the terrorists arose from their seats, they

brandished their knives and herded the 27 passengers to the rear seats of the plane.

By 9:30 a.m., the passengers had all been herded to the back of the plane.

At Cleveland Center, the air-traffic controllers desperately tried to contact Flight 93. Other planes in the area began listening in to the traffic. Then the switch for calling out was again turned on by mistake. The Control Center and other planes in the area heard a breathless, heavily accented man’s voice muttering something from the Flight 93 cockpit. “It sounded like someone said they have a bomb on board,” said the pilot of a private jet. “That’s what we also thought they said,” agreed a controller.

Then a thickly accented voice announced: “Hi, this is the captain. We’d like you all to remain seated. There is a bomb on board. We are going to turn back to the airport. And they have our demands, so please be quiet.” This occurred at 9:38 a.m. The passengers had been told that the plane would safely land in a little while.

Investigators think the voice belonged to Jarrah, the leader and oldest terrorist. It is believed that he flipped the wrong switch and, instead of addressing the passengers over the PA system, spoke to Cleveland Control instead.

Then it was switched off. At this juncture, the cockpit voice recorder picked up sounds of their speaking in Arabic. They had realized their mistake; and, knowing they were being overheard by air-traffic control and other planes in the area, numerous clicks and snaps were heard as they tried to make sure their voices were no longer heard elsewhere.

From the time it took off from Newark, the plane had flown west for about 45 minutes across Pennsylvania toward Cleveland. But at 9:36 a.m., the 757 abruptly made a hairpin turn west of Cleveland and headed southeast toward Washington, D.C.

Unknown to the passengers till later, at 9:38 a.m., two minutes after the turnaround, American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon.

Now seated back in rows 30 through 34, the passengers grabbed their cell phones and in-seat phones and began calling people. Between 9:31 a.m. to 9:53 a.m. 24 calls were made from the GTE Airfones.

In San Ramon, California, an East Bay suburb, Deena Burnett was preparing breakfast for her three girls. The phone rang. It was her husband, Tom; and he sounded odd. “Are you okay?” She asked. “No,” he said, speaking quickly and in a low voice. “I’m on a plane. It’s United Flight 93, and we’ve been hijacked. They’ve knifed a guy, and there’s a bomb on board. Call the authorities, Deena.” Then he hung up quickly so she could make that call.

At about 9:45, Deena was on the phone with the FBI when she heard her call-waiting beep. It was Tom again. "They're in the cockpit now," he said. Deena told him about the World Trade Center. He sounded surprised and began peppering her with questions. Were the planes commercial? How many were involved? Deena said she didn't know. Then he said, "We're turning back to New York." A pause, then "No, we're heading south." Actually, the plane was now aimed toward Washington, D.C.

Shortly after, Tom called again. By this time, Deena had heard that a plane had crashed into the Pentagon, and she was sure it was Tom's. "Tom, you're okay!" she sobbed. "No, I'm not," he replied. Deena told him what had just happened at the Pentagon. "They seem," she said, "to be taking planes and driving them into designated landmarks all over the East Coast! It's as if hell has been unleashed!" Tom told her that the hijackers claimed to have a bomb, but he was skeptical. "I think they're bluffing," he said. "We're going to do something." She replied, "Who?" and he said, "A group of us." In later recalling the phone call to reporters, she said, "I pleaded with him to please sit down and not draw any attention to himself." His last words were, "No, if they're going to run this into the ground, we are going to do something. I've got to go."

Lyzbeth Glick had taken her 12-week-old baby to visit her parents in Windham, N.Y. Shortly before 9:45 a.m., the phone rang. It was Jeremy Glick, calling from Flight 93. He told her he loved her. They had only been married five years. Then he told about "these bad terrorists." He spoke of "three Iranian-looking men" wearing red headbands and saying they had a bomb.

For several minutes, they told one another of their love. Over and over they said it.

Jeremy told Lyz how important it was for her and their little girl, Emerson, to be happy; and he would respect any decision she had to make in the future. Then he began asking other questions. Another passenger, he said, had heard about other terrorist attacks during a call. What was this about a World Trade Center attack? He wondered aloud, "Is that where we're going, too, or are they just going to blow it up?" She told him there was nothing left of the Trade Center to crash into. She asked if the hijackers had guns. "No machine guns, just knives," Jeremy replied. He said the hijackers said they would get to their target or blow up the plane. Glick wanted advice: "Lyz, should we rush the hijackers or not?"

Jeremy was the 6-foot-1, 200-pound former NCAA judo champion. He told his wife there were some other big men on the plane. The passengers were beginning to

whisper among themselves about the possibility of "rushing the hijackers," he said. He asked his wife if she thought it was a good idea.

At 9:45, Mark Bingham called his mother, Alice Hoglan. It struck her as odd that he said, "This is Mark Bingham." He told her, "In case I don't see you again, I love you all. It doesn't look good."

We will return to this 15-minute phone call later in this report.

At 9:45, flight attendant Sandy Bradshaw, 38, called her home in Greensboro, N.C. "Have you heard what happened?" she began. "Have you heard? We've been hijacked."

Her husband, Phil, a pilot, was stunned speechless. She was calling from the coach-class galley in the rear of the plane.

He later said, "She said her flight had been hijacked by guys with knives. We are here in the back trying to get hot water to throw on them. Do you have any other ideas?" She and several of the other flight attendants were filling coffeepots with boiling water—to throw at the hijackers. (A really smart way to initiate a fight, I must say!) Phil told her, "Go with that." She promised Phil that, if she survived, she would quit and stay home with 1-year-old Nathan; Alexandria, almost 3; and Shenan, 16.

Apparently, three of the four hijackers were in the cockpit, enjoying the experience. They should have left three outside to watch the passengers. But, just as they made the mistake of enjoying breakfast before taking over the plane, they were not paying enough attention to the passengers.

They had stationed one terrorist (investigators believe it was 20-year-old Ahmed Al Haznawi) outside the cockpit. He had a red box strapped around his waist. He said it was a bomb; but, by now, the passengers had decided that they didn't believe it.

At 9:45, Todd Beamer tried to phone Lisa, his wife in New Jersey. He may have been having trouble with his credit card or, in his excitement, he may just have punched 0 into the Airfone. In any case, his call at 9:45 was routed to the GTE Customer Center in Oak Brook, Illinois. An operator told supervisor Lisa Jefferson that she had a call from a man who said his plane was being hijacked.

"This is Mrs. Jefferson," said the GTE supervisor, trying to be calm. "What is your situation?" Then she began going through the checklist in the GTE distress-call manual. (How many people on board? Any children? How many injuries? How many hijackers? Are they

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armed?)

Just as calmly, Beamer answered her questions (4 hijackers, 2 with knives; 10 passengers in first class, 27 in coach, 5 flight attendants; no children that he could see).

He said that a flight attendant (Sandy Bradshaw?) had told them that there were two people—she thought they were the captain and first officer—dead or seriously wounded on the floor in first class (the area outside the cockpit door). Beamer then asked Jefferson: “Does anybody know what they want? Money? Ransom? What?”

We will return later to this 15-minute phone call, which was in progress.

Many other phone calls were made, too many to mention here. Lauren Grandcolas left a message for her husband, Jack, on the answering machine. There had been a “little problem,” she said, “with the plane.” But she was “fine” and “comfortable. She paused and then added, “for now.” She sounded strong and steady. Choosing her words carefully, she repeated, “I’ll call, I’ll—.” Stopping mid-sentence, she told Jack how much she loved him and her family.

When Linda Gronlund phoned her sister, Elsa, she thought to mention her safe-deposit combination after, voice cracking, she told Elsa how much she loved her.

Elizabeth Wainio, 28, phoned her stepmother, Esther, in Catonsville, Maryland. She said she had been frightened, but a nice woman next to her had comforted her. Then, handing a phone to her, encouraged her to call home.

After a time, the girl fell silent. Then, apologizing, said she should be using the phone time to talk. “You don’t have to, Elizabeth,” her stepmother said, “I’ve got my arms around you.”

The conclusion of this phone call later.

One of the hijackers, going out of the cockpit and looking things over, decided that the situation did not look good. Large, strong men were among the passengers in the back of the plane, and they were all talking together. So they banged on the door. It was agreed that all four terrorists would enter the cockpit and lock the door. By the way, prior to September 11, cockpit doors could not withstand anything more than a force of 150 pounds.

On the cockpit voice recorder, one of the hijackers was heard telling another to let “the guys in now,” referring to the other two terrorists.

There was also a cryptic reference to bringing back

“the pilot,” but the meaning of that remark is still not clear. It is possible that this meant one of the other hijackers. From the best we can tell, the original two pilots were dead or nearly so.

Then one of the hijackers began praying to Allah while another suggested that they open the wall case, in the back of the cockpit, containing a fire ax—to frighten the passengers in case they approached the cockpit door.

Meanwhile, by now, when not on phones, clusters of passengers were walking around in the back two-thirds of the plane talking together. They were sharing news learned from phone calls and plotting their next move.

Still on the phone to his wife, Lyz, Jeremy Glick told her the passengers were taking a vote. “What do you think we should do?” he asked. “Go for it,” answered Lyz. She was calm now. It was obvious her husband was probably going to die. “Do what you have to do,” she told him. He said there was some discussion among the passengers about what weapons they should use. Jeremy said he had told them, half jokingly, that he still had his butter knife. Of course, the stewardesses had access to other kitchen and eating utensils.

Once again, for the third time, Tom Burnett phoned Deena. She told him a friend would be arriving shortly to take the three girls to school. It seemed best to have them go that day. Deena knew in her heart she would be at home weeping while they were gone.

“Have any more planes hit the ground since the Pentagon?” asked Tom. When Deena told him, no, he said again, “We’re going to do something.”

Deena told him she loved him and asked him what else she should do. “Just pray, Deena, pray.” He hung up the phone.

It is of interest that, at 9:56 a.m., Flight 93 asked the Federal Aviation Administration to change its destination to Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C. A minute later, the FAA approved it.

For some of my readers who have never been there, that is the airport diagonally across the Potomac River from the mall, with the nation’s Capital at the other end. As soon as the plane neared the mall, that easily recognized landmark would make it easy for the terrorists to fly right into the side of the Capitol Building. But that was not to happen.

Halfway through his 15-minute call to GTE supervisor Jefferson, Todd Beamer said the plane was flying erratically. This seemed strange, since it was perfect weather outside. More on this call ahead.

In the cockpit, the hijackers apparently decided to

try to subdue the restless passengers by using the plane to knock them off their feet. Switching off the autopilot, the terrorist pilot sent the plane lurching and bobbing. As the careening plane hurtled along, the passengers grabbed seats and sat down.

But at that moment, still on the phone, Todd Beamer's calmness cracked. It seemed to him that the plane was about to crash into something, or into the ground. "We're going down!" he spoke anxiously to Lisa Jefferson.

Then, in a moment, he calmed more. "We're rising again."

No longer businesslike, Todd said, "Lisa," "Yes," the GTE supervisor replied. "That's my wife!" ["That's my wife's name!"] "Well, that's my name, too, Todd," said Jefferson.

"I don't think we're going to get out of this thing [alive]. I'm going to have to go out on faith."

"Todd," she replied, "you don't know that [you'll die]."

Then Beamer asked Jefferson to promise to phone his wife, if he didn't survive. He told her about his little boys and the baby they were expecting.

Then he told her the passengers were going to jump the hijackers.

"Are you sure that's what you want to do, Todd?" Jefferson asked. "It's what we have to do," he replied.

Then Todd asked her to pray with him. He began reciting the Lord's Prayer, and she recited it with him.

"Jesus, help me," Beamer said, and then recited the 23rd Psalm over the phone.

Then the GTE supervisor heard Todd say to the others, "Are you guys ready? Let's roll."

Todd put the phone down, forgetting to turn it off. She heard commotion. No one returned to the phone. She stayed on until the line suddenly went dead.

Apparently, more people than Todd recited the Lord's Prayer. Phil Bradshaw (in their home in Greensboro, N.C., as he talked to his wife, Sandy, the flight attendant) could hear a group of men in the background reciting the 23rd Psalm. When it had ended, Sandy said simply, "It's time to go. We're running to first class now."

You will recall she had been one of those getting pots of boiling water ready.

CeeCee Lyles phoned her husband, Lorne. "Babe," she said, "my plane's been hijacked." They talked together for a time about their love for one another and for their four boys.

Suddenly Lorne heard screaming. CeeCee yelled, "They're doing it!"

Elizabeth Wainio was still on the line to her stepmother just then. Suddenly, she yelled, "I've got to go! They're breaking into the cockpit! I love you. Good-bye."

During his 15-minute call to his wife, Jeremy Glick

told her that they had taken a vote and they were going after the terrorists. After telling her he loved her, Jeremy said, "Hold the phone, and I'll be back."

But Lyzbeth couldn't bear it any longer and handed the phone to her father who was beside her.

Her father, Richard Makely, may have been the last of the callers to hear what happened.

"I heard two sets of screams," he recalls. "I presumed the first set was taking place when they attacked the people. They were rushing the cockpit. It was a chorus of screams and yells. And then, there was a second set a minute or so later. It was a little after 10."

The phone calls ceased at 9:53 a.m. Some reports say the passengers started their charge at 9:58, but most say 9:53.

The distance on a Boeing 757 from the rear galley, just behind row 36, to the cockpit door is 110 feet. It is not known who led the charge.

Perhaps it was Jeremy Glick, the judo champion. Perhaps Mark Bingham, who earlier ran with the bulls and wrestled a gun from a mugger. Or perhaps 200-pound Lou Nacke, the weight lifter.

Beginning at 9:57 a.m., the cockpit voice recorder began to pick up the sounds of a terrible struggle. The crash of galley dishes could be heard, along with trays being hurled. A man's voice screaming loudly.

A hijacker's voice is heard suggesting that they turn off the oxygen, to subdue the rebellion. Another tells his associates, "Take it easy."

The terrorists inside the cockpit are calling, "Hold the door, don't let them in!"

Then can be heard the sound of one of the passengers (who apparently has gotten the door opened) calling, "Let's get them!"

More crashing and screaming sounds.

Comparing the cockpit voice recorder with the instrument recorder, we know that the hijackers were screaming about finishing off the plane, just at the time it began to dive.

The terrorists cried, "Allah is great!"

Shouting by one of the male passengers is clearly heard.

"Give it to me!" This may have been a passenger trying to get into the pilot's seat.

Minutes before the crash, Eric Peterson of Lambertsville, Pennsylvania, saw the 757 flying extremely low, maybe 300 feet from the ground.

Suddenly, as he watched, it careened downward. "We could see more of the top side of the plane than the underside," he said. Peterson was standing a little east of the oncoming plane.

Eyewitnesses saw the plane rocking from side to side, like a sideways seesaw, as it plunged toward the earth.

To the present writer, that would indicate a terrorist was still at the controls, determined to take it into the ground while, at the same time, trying to keep passengers in the cockpit with him from taking the controls. As I see it, if the lone passenger who was a pilot had been at the controls, he would have taken the plane up and not wildly flapped it from side to side.

Looking back at it now, I will suggest this: If the men could have hidden their intentions better (so the plane would have remained at a high altitude) and broken that door down quickly; put their strongest men in there with butter knives to take out three hijackers fast; and then just as quickly put the passenger pilot into the pilot's seat, he might have been able to save the plane. The key problem was this: In anticipation of an attack from them, the terrorist pilot had already taken the plane down to 300 feet. That was the fatal problem. The plane was too close to the ground to provide time for the passengers to save the plane. In a few seconds it could dive into the ground.

At 10:06 a.m. (one report said 10:10 a.m.), United Flight 93 crashed into the green grass of an inactive strip mine in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, very close to the small town of Shanksville. All 45 people on board were killed.

The crater in the field was 50 feet deep after it hit,—far different than what the U.S. Capitol or the White House might have looked like, if Flight 93 had kept on its course for an additional 20 minutes or so.

On a map, you will find Shanksville is south of Johnstown, about halfway between it and the West Virginia border. The plane had less than a hundred miles to go before it would have arrived at the Capitol. By air-time, it was getting very close to its destination. One news report declared that the jetliner would have reached a crashing point in Washington, D.C. within 20 minutes.

As I review the entire situation, it was taking time to eat breakfast on the plane that ruined the carefully laid terrorists' plan, two years in the making. Perhaps they had spent so much time the night before in following Mohamed Atta's "*Last Night*" instructions, that they had not gotten up early enough on the morning of September 11 to eat something before boarding the plane.

But, by waiting for that onboard meal, the jetliner was able to travel all the way to Ohio, with a lengthy return trip needed. During that return trip, the passengers had time to make phone calls and learn that their plane was not destined to land safely at an airport, as had previous hijacked airplanes. The hijackers had given them time to plan an attack, which foiled the hijackers' scheme.

In the first few days after September 11, Lisa Beamer, in her rural home near Cranbury, New Jersey,

could not sleep for more than an hour. Then she would wake up and cry.

She worried about the boys (David, 3, and Drew, 19 months) and the new baby due in January.

Little David wanted to know why, if their father loved them so much, he had gone to be with Jesus.

And there was something else that deeply troubled Lisa. Why had Todd not phoned her before the crash? Why had he left no message for her at all? Other passengers had called home. Why had not Todd?

Then, three days later, on Friday September 14, Lisa received a phone call from her crisis counselor at United Airlines. Todd Beamer had, indeed, made a phone call. But, for some little understood reason, it had been routed to an Airfone operator, in Chicago, instead of to his wife.

Lisa's counselor told her that a phone supervisor had a message for her, but she had worried that it might be too much to emotionally handle.

"Read it to me right now," Lisa said. She did not ask why it had taken the Airline and FBI three days to let her know about her husband's last words. The counselor read to her what the supervisor had written down. It told something of that last 15-minute conversation, including quotations from some of his last words, words never to be forgotten. (Of course, Jefferson had the entire conversation on tape.)

The next morning, the two Lisas had a long, tearful conversation.

Jefferson told Beamer that her husband had been calm. Lisa Beamer was relieved; she had not wanted him to die in terror.

Actually, at times he had been afraid and cried to Jesus to save him. But, before the end, he overcame his fears. As we know, after reciting the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm, he had turned to the others and said, "Are you guys ready? Let's roll," and laid down the phone without turning it off.

On September 24, thirteen days after the crash, 93 families went to the White House at the invitation of President George Bush. The event was not heavily publicized. In the East Room, Bush said the plane could have been headed for the White House. He and his wife spent time with each family.

"He hugged me and shook hands," said Robert Weisberg, Lou Nacker's father-in-law. "He was very emotional."

About 100 staffers lined a hallway and thanked the families for their lives.

Vice-president Dick Cheney has credited the passengers with having prevented the hijacked flight from hitting a target in Washington, D.C.

Lisa Beamer has become something of a national hero as a result of what happened. Throughout it all, she has unashamedly declared her faith in God and the

Lord Jesus Christ. She has received many phone calls and letters from people who feel indebted to the plane load of heroes on Flight 93.

One woman, whose eighth-grade son had been on a field trip to the White House on the morning of September 11, told her “I owe everything to Todd and the other passengers because my son is still alive.”

All those contacts have proven to be a great comfort to Lisa. “Even if my life is still really bad right now,” she says, “someone else’s life isn’t because of what Todd and the other passengers did. They acted courageously and showed they were people of character even under the most difficult circumstances. It is something for us all to look to and strive for—not just in times of trial, but all the time.”

Amid all her sorrow, Lisa Beamer can laugh a little now about her strange celebrity as the Hero Widow of Flight 93. She recalls falling asleep sitting next to Mario Cuomo in the greenroom of a TV studio. And then there was the time in New York City that she asked the CNN limousine to stop at Macy’s so she could get a new maternity dress. It was taking her to an appointment with Larry King on the “Larry King Live” show.

Pregnant with a third child due in January, Lisa Beamer is busy these days.

In mid-October, she flew on United Airlines, from Newark to San Francisco—on the same flight her husband took about a month earlier (now called Flight 81).

She was headed for a meeting with Oracle executives (Todd’s employer), to start a foundation in Todd’s name. Amid all her difficulties, at such a time as this, Lisa Beamer has started a charity to care for children who lost parents on Flight 93.

Although no children were on board that flight, 22 children lost at least one parent when it crashed, killing all 45 on board.

The foundation will provide a wide range of services

to those surviving children and to others affected by future terrorism. It will work with businesses and non-profit associations to provide these services.

“My desire is that this foundation will enable many others to continue Todd’s legacy of character and faith in whatever events lie ahead for our world,” Lisa said in a written statement. “Todd’s sacrifice has already resulted in the saving of many lives. God will use this foundation to continue saving lives.”

Various corporations, including United Airlines and Oracle Corporation, have donated funds and equipment to the foundation.

Lisa explains that the idea for the foundation springs from her own difficult childhood. Her father died when she was a teenager, and the family was reduced almost to poverty.

She says that her own family will now be all right; for insurance and investments will provide for her two sons and the forthcoming child.

Lisa decided to give away many donations she received after her husband’s death. She wanted to help others who were less well-off.

William Beatty is a family friend and the foundation’s treasurer. He says donors have pledged more than \$250,000, including \$50,000 from overseas. Legal, financial, and nonprofit professionals from the Beamers’ church, Princeton Alliance in Plainsboro, New Jersey, have volunteered their services. Beatty, an accountant and vice president at Goldman Sachs, says the volunteers will make sure that as much as possible of each donation will go directly to future recipients.

From time to time, Lisa goes to Todd’s den. Some things need to be cleaned out before the new baby arrives, but she does not want to touch anything of Todd’s.

But, one day, on his desk she found, at the bottom of his in-box, a passage written by Teddy Roosevelt:

“The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena . . . who strives valiantly, who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in worthy causes. Who, at best, knows the triumph of high achievement and who, at worst, if he fails, fails while daring greatly—so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”

— Teddy Roosevelt