

## **This Compilation Contains The Following:**

1. William Langewiesche's text from *American Ground*, Farrar Straus, pp. 79-82, - Nov. 2002 [pp. 2 - 5]
2. Wall Street Journal article, October 15, 2001 [pp. 6 – 16]
3. LA Times – Sept. 21. 2001 - article [pp. 17 – 19]
4. BBC report that correctly cites LA Times article [pp. 20 – 21]
5. ABC report – July 18. 2002 - that correctly cites facts about Betty Ong [pp. 22 – 24]
6. Additional ABC report – Sept. 10. 2002 – cites correct facts about Betty Ong
7. Letter – Nov. 27. 2002 - from William Langewiesche to Harry Ong [pp. 25]
8. Letter from William Langewiesche to Harry Ong in total context – Aug. 2002 – Nov. 2002

o'clock position at about, uh, ten miles southbound, to see if you can see an American 767 out there, please."

Having heard the transmissions on the previous frequency, the United pilots must have known what this was about, but again they maintained the expected calm. The view from their cockpit was superb. Looking downsun, they spotted the airplane ahead and several thousand feet below, crossing fast from right to left. "Affirmative. We have him, ah, he looks, ah, about twenty, yeah, about twenty-nine, twenty-eight thousand."

Reflexively the controller directed them into the airspace above and behind American 11's tail. He said, "United 175, turn five . . . turn thirty degrees right. I want to keep you away from this traffic." The encounter was later reported as a near collision between the two airliners—a gross if typical exaggeration. Ultimately, of course, the turn did neither airplane any good.

The scene inside American 11 was very rough. There were five hijackers aboard, Islamic militants armed with box cutters and small blades. They were led by the now notorious Egyptian named Mohamed Atta, the chief conspirator behind all four of the attacks that day. The cabin of American 11 was less than half full, with seventy-six hapless passengers and nine flight attendants. One of the flight attendants, a forty-five-year-old woman named Betty Ong, dialed a seatback flight phone and reached a reservation agent on the ground. In terrified tones, gasping for air, Ong reported the hijacking. The agent passed her to a supervisor, who patched her through to American Airlines' national operations center, in Fort Worth, Texas. The manager on duty there, an airline veteran named Craig Marquis, pulled up her records and, concerned that the call might be a hoax, asked for her employee number and nickname. This she managed to give him. She said that two of the flight attendants had been stabbed,

one so severely that she was on oxygen, and that a business-class passenger had been killed by having his throat cut. She counted four of the hijackers, and reported their seat numbers. She said they had used a chemical spray that burned her eyes and made breathing difficult. Marquis could do nothing but keep her company. He asked Ong if there was a doctor on board. "No, no doctor," she said. As the airplane approached New York, he asked her if it was descending. She said, "We're starting to descend! We're starting to descend!" By then she may have felt more hope than horror. It was natural to assume that they were descending to land.

Apparently Ong could not see into the cockpit, which was just as well if the pilots inside it had been killed. Mohamed Atta was at the controls. Descending along the Hudson River, he pushed American 11 to over 500 mph, nearly twice the normal low-altitude speed, and hardly what you would expect from a 767 setting up for a landing. Still, no one yet guessed his purpose. At 8:40 he was six minutes out from the North Tower.

The pilots of United 175 had lost sight of him in the vastness behind their left wing. They checked onto a new frequency, now in New York Center's jurisdiction, with an abbreviated call: "United 175, at Flight Level 310."

The controller answered, "United 175, roger," but his mind, too, was on the airspace behind them. He radioed to another crew who had been asked, like the United pilots, to spot American 11 to estimate its altitude. "USAir 583, do me a favor. Were you asked to look for an aircraft, an American flight about eight or nine o'clock, ten miles, southbound, last altitude two-nine-zero? No one is sure where he is."

USAir answered, "Yeah, we talked about him on the last frequency. We spotted him when he was at our three o'clock posi-

tion. He did appear to us to be at twenty-nine thousand feet. We're not picking him up on TCAS."

The controller said, "No. It looks like they shut off their transponder. That's why the question about it." This was by then so obviously an inadequate explanation that the controller seemed to be talking in code—signaling that something very serious was occurring here. The frequency was quiet for a full minute, during which the United pilots apparently decided to drop any pretense that American 11's problem was merely a communication failure. Even so, when they radioed again their expression was tightly controlled. "New York, United 175 Heavy."

"United 175, go ahead."

"We figured we'd wait to go to your center. We heard a suspicious transmission on our departure from Boston. Sounds like someone keyed the mike and said, 'Everyone stay in your seats.'" He was referring, of course, to American 11's unintentional transmissions.

The controller said, "Okay, I'll pass that along."

The pilot said, "It cut out."

That was United 175's final call. The time was 8:42. Just afterward a team led by a twenty-three-year-old citizen of the United Arab Emirates named Marwan al-Shehhi invaded the cockpit. It is obvious that, as in American 11, they busted through the door. The attack was so sudden that the pilots had no chance to alert the world. Nonetheless these 767s were big things with hidden spaces and lots of telephones, and word quickly got out: a mechanic on duty at United's San Francisco center for in-flight complaints got a call from a flight attendant on board who, before the line went dead, blurted, "Oh, my God! The crew's been killed, and a flight attendant has been stabbed! We've been hijacked!"

The airplane held five hijackers, two dead pilots, seven flight attendants, and fifty-one passengers. United 175 turned and dove toward New York.

At about the same time, American 11 passed low over the George Washington Bridge. As best the last moments inside the cabin can be reconstructed, few passengers if any were looking through the windows, or were aware of the airplane's ominous flight profile—the combination of ultra-low altitude and high speed that characterized its final bombing run. The mood aboard must have been fearful but quieter now. In the back of the airplane another flight attendant was on the phone. Her name was Madeline Amy Sweeney. She had gotten through to an American flight-service manager in Boston, and with exceptional cool had given him a running account of the hijacking, fingering the terrorists and confirming much of Betty Ong's account, including the slaughter of the passenger in business class. It is likely that she added important details about the terrorists' techniques—for instance, how exactly they got into the cockpit or controlled the passengers—which for security reasons have not been made public. Seconds before 8:46 and the impact she looked through a window to give a position report, and to her surprise saw the city flashing by. She said, "I see water and buildings!" She may have been the first person to understand the hijackers' intentions. At the last instant she said, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

**A**cross the East River, in an industrial section of Queens, in a converted Chiclets factory now used as the headquarters of the DDC, Ken Holden had been delayed by the usual round of morning telephone calls. Holden was an observant, quick-eyed man of medium height, with close-cropped curly hair and a body

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Article 1 of 1

### **Flying Blind: On That Fateful Day , Two Airlines Faced Their Darkest Scenario**

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### **American, United Watched And Worked in Horror As Hijackings Unfolded**

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### **'We Didn't Have Time to Cry'**

By Scott McCartney and Susan Carey

10/15/2001

The Wall Street Journal

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Across America, skies were clear, a beautiful day for flying everywhere but in Atlanta, where low clouds draped a summery landscape.

Early in the business day, American Airlines and United Airlines each had more than 100 flights in the air, a fraction of the more than 2,000 flights they each had scheduled. Their top executives were digging through paperwork, meeting with other managers and answering e-mail from home.

Then, at 7:27 a.m. CDT, Craig Marquis got an emergency phone call.

Mr. Marquis, manager-on-duty at American's sprawling System Operations Control center in Fort Worth, Texas, heard a reservations supervisor explain that an airborne flight attendant, hysterical with fear, was on the phone and needed to talk to the operations center. In the background, Mr. Marquis could hear the flight attendant shrieking and gasping for air.

"She said two flight attendants had been stabbed, one was on oxygen. A passenger had his throat slashed and looked dead, and they had gotten into the cockpit," Mr. Marquis recalls.

In 22 years at American's operations center, Mr. Marquis has made split-second, multimillion-dollar decisions to cancel flights during storms, separate threats from hoaxes and set in motion the airline's

response to a crash. But none of that could have prepared him for the morning of Sept. 11, when all he and other American and United Airlines officials could do was listen and watch as the systems they control spun gruesomely out of control.

"I felt so helpless," says Mr. Marquis. "I was along for the ride."

A little more than 20 minutes later, at United's System Operations Control center in suburban Chicago, Rich "Doc" Miles, the SOC duty manager, received equally startling news: air-traffic controllers had lost contact with United Flight 175 from Boston to Los Angeles, and a flight attendant on that plane had called in word that the plane had been hijacked.

This is the story, recalled in detail in extensive interviews with senior executives and front-line managers, of what happened on Sept. 11 inside the command centers of American and United, each of which lost two jets to the terrorist attacks. It was there that normally unflappable aviation experts first started to unravel the puzzle that at first seemed too diabolical to be real. Hijackers were supposed to coerce pilots to land someplace that the hijackers wanted to go. Never had hijackers murdered pilots, taken control of planes and used them as giant suicide missiles.

Jim Goodwin, United's chairman and chief executive, knew instantly that the ramifications went well beyond his airline and American. "The enormity of this is going to change everyone's life profoundly," he recalls thinking to himself.

As American and United lost communications, one by one, with a total of four hijacked planes, confusion set in. Managers couldn't tell right away which particular plane had been ensnared in the catastrophes that unfolded on TV sets all around them. There was an unprecedented flurry of intercompany calls; even the two chief executives spoke by phone.

Quickly, people at the football-field-size command centers began executing the biggest shutdown in commercial aviation's 80-year history, orders that pre-empted even the Federal Aviation Administration's grounding of planes and may have prevented other hijackings. Beyond that, UAL Corp.'s United and AMR Corp.'s American also had to attend to victims' relatives, secure hundreds of stranded airplanes and accommodate tens of thousands of stranded passengers and crew.

"I remember thinking, I'm in one of those B-movies, with a script so bizarre no one would believe it. It cannot be happening," says Donald J. Carty, American's chairman and chief executive officer.

Sitting in the middle of a horseshoe of desks surrounded by screens, phones and computers when his hotline began blinking, Mr. Marquis didn't have time to imagine the unimaginable that was about to take

place. Calm and quick-thinking, he told others in the operations center of the call he'd just received from a woman who identified herself as Betty Ong, an attendant aboard Flight 11, a Boeing 767 wide-body that had left Boston 30 minutes earlier. Fearing a hoax, he called up her personnel record and asked her to verify her employee number and nickname.

She did. This was real.

"Is there a doctor on board?" Mr. Marquis remembers asking.

"No. No doctor," Ms. Ong said.

The plane had been headed to Los Angeles, but it turned south over Albany, N.Y., and began flying erratically, most likely when hijackers were killing the plane's two pilots. FAA air-traffic controllers told American's operation center that they could hear arguing over the plane's radio. Ms. Ong, screaming but still coherent, said the four hijackers had come from first-class seats 2A, 2B, 9A and 9B. The fatally injured passenger was in 10B. The hijackers had hit people with some sort of spray that made her eyes burn. She was having trouble breathing, Mr. Marquis recalls her saying.

"Is the plane descending?" Mr. Marquis asked.

"We're starting to descend," Ms. Ong said. "We're starting to descend."

Air-traffic controllers couldn't get a response to frantic voice and text messages to the cockpit. Hijackers had turned off the plane's transponder, which identifies an airplane among hundreds of other blips on a radar, but Mr. Marquis had an aide tell the FAA that American had confirmed a hijacking.

"They're going to New York!" Mr. Marquis remembers shouting out. "Call Newark and JFK and tell them to expect a hijacking," he ordered, assuming the hijackers would land the plane. "In my wildest dreams, I was not thinking the plane was going to run into a building." Mr. Marquis says.

Even as the line to Flight 11 was still open, American's executives were rushing to the operations center to deal with the crisis. Gerard Arpey, American's executive vice president of operations, had been in Boston the day before for his grandmother's funeral, and had arrived at his desk in Fort Worth at 7:15 a.m. CDT to work through a pile of issues that needed attention. The 43-year-old executive called American's operations center to say he couldn't participate in the daily 7:45 a.m. system-wide operations call.

Joe Bertapelle, the manager at American's operations center, told him of Ms. Ong's phone call that had just come in. Mr. Arpey slumped



back in his chair and sat stunned for 30 seconds. "Something inside me said this had the ring of truth to it," Mr. Arpey recalls. He called the office of Mr. Carty, who was at home answering e-mails, and left word of a possible hijacking, then hurried to the operations center a few miles west.

As he walked in, he was met immediately by Mr. Bertapelle and Craig Parfitt, manager of American's dispatch operations, a 29-year American veteran nicknamed "Ice Man" for his even keel. Mr. Marquis had confirmed the hijacking, they told Mr. Arpey, and they had to open American's crisis command center, a room perched one floor up in the operations center. The facility is used in the event of crashes, military troop movements and other emergencies.

A page went out to American's top executives and operations personnel: "Confirmed hijacking Flight 11." The regular 7:45 CDT conference call started, but was almost immediately interrupted: "Gentlemen, I have some information here I need to relay," Mr. Bertapelle announced.

The FAA had tagged the radar blip that Flight 11 had become, and it was now isolated on an Aircraft Situation Display, a big radar-tracking screen. All eyes watched as the plane headed south. On the screen, the plane showed a squiggly line after its turn near Albany, then it straightened. "All we knew for sure was that he's not going to LAX," said Mr. Bertapelle.

Big centers deal almost daily with unusual events, from bomb scares to blizzards to unruly passengers, and they hold frequent crisis drills. In those few minutes of uncertainty, American's operations experts were trying to anticipate the plane's next move. But they were in new territory here.

At 7:48 a.m. CDT, the radar image stopped moving and showed Flight 11 "frozen" over New York. A blink more, the plane simply vanished from the screen.

Three minutes later, a ramp supervisor at Kennedy airport in New York called to say a plane had flown into a World Trade Center tower. Someone shouted to turn on CNN but workers realized they didn't get CNN, so they switched to ABC.

Mr. Arpey was on the phone with Mr. Carty. "The press is reporting an airplane hit the World Trade Center. Is that our plane?" Mr. Carty remembers asking.

"I don't know, Don. We confirmed it was hijacked, and was headed south from Boston," Mr. Arpey told him.

Mr. Carty had a bad feeling that it was indeed his plane that had hit the north tower. But when his wife asked him point blank, he replied: "No, it couldn't be. In my brain, I knew. But I couldn't say it." Mr.

NO, IT COULDN'T BE. . . . IN MY BRAIN, I KNEW. BUT I COULDN'T SAY IT," MR. Carty recalls.

Outside Chicago, at United's SOC, Mike Barber, the dispatch manager, had his eye on a large overhead screen that happened to be tuned to CNN. "My God, the World Trade Center's on fire," Mr. Barber remembers blurting out.

Bill Roy, United's SOC director, wheeled to look at the pictures. "It looks like a small airplane," he said to the others. "Maybe they veered off the La Guardia flight path?" But within minutes, United got a call from the FAA saying it was an American Airlines jet.

Mr. Roy called over to the adjacent headquarters building, where Mr. Goodwin, United's chairman and chief executive, was having his morning session with senior officers. Today, he was sitting with Andy Studdert, 45, the chief operating officer; Rono Dutta, United's president, and three or four others.

Maryann Irving, Mr. Studdert's secretary, took Mr. Roy's call and ran to Mr. Goodwin's second-floor office, knocked and burst into the room. "Andy," she said, "Call the SOC. An American plane just went into the World Trade Center."

Mr. Goodwin remembers thinking, "This is rather bizarre," and flipped on the TV.

Mr. Studdert, a former banker who joined United only six years ago, ran across the bridge between the two buildings and entered the SOC, thinking about American: "My God, what are they going to go through?" Upon reaching the command post, he barked out, "Confirm -- American into World Trade Center."

A manager at the post had other news: "Boss, we've lost contact with one of our airplanes."

A few minutes later, Doc Miles, the SOC shift manager, heard from United's maintenance center in San Francisco, which has a system to take in-flight calls from flight attendants about cabin items that need repairs. The mechanic had gotten a call from a female flight attendant on Flight 175, who had said, "Oh my God, the crew has been killed, a flight attendant has been stabbed. We've been hijacked." Then, the line from the plane went dead.

"No, the information we're getting is that it was an American 757," Mr. Miles recalls protesting.

The mechanic insisted, "No, we got a call from a flight attendant on 175."

The dispatcher monitoring Flight 175, a Boeing 767 from Boston to Los Angeles, sent messages by radio and to the cockpit computer,

and got no response. At 8:03 CDT, the group -- now assembling in the crisis room off the SOC under Mr. Studdert's command -- watched as a large, dark jet slammed into the second tower of the World Trade Center.

While United was trying to understand what happened to Flight 175, American's operations experts received a call from the FAA saying that a second American plane, Flight 77 out of Washington-Dulles, had turned off its transponder and turned around. Controllers had lost radio communications with the plane. Without hearing from anyone on the plane, American didn't know its location.

That raised the disaster to a whole new level. Mr. Arpey looked across the crisis room at Ralph Richardi, a vice president in charge of operations planning, and saw his eyes widen in horror. "That was the first time we realized this was something other than a hijacking," Mr. Richardi says.

Mr. Arpey instantly gave an order to ground every American plane in the Northeast that hadn't yet taken off. Within minutes, American got word that United also had an airliner missing and out of contact.

"The minute we heard that, we all agreed we needed to ground-stop the whole airline," Mr. Arpey said. At 8:15 a.m. CDT, the order went out on the command center's loudspeaker: No new takeoffs. The decision, though it clearly would lead to monstrous logistical headaches, could save lives. "I never sensed any fear or panic. We were too shell-shocked," says Mr. Arpey.

Meanwhile, United was making similar decisions. Mr. Studdert ordered all international flights frozen on the ground at 8:20. Ten minutes later, United began diverting its domestic flights and putting them on the ground.

Just as these orders were being given, the American command center heard television reports of a plane hitting the south tower of the trade center. Many in the room instantly assumed it was American Flight 77, the missing plane from Washington.

"How did 77 get to New York and we didn't know it?" Mr. Bertapelle recalls shouting.

Mr. Arpey looked at Mr. Carty, who had just arrived. "I said, 'I think we better get everything on the deck' " and shut down the whole airline.

Mr. Carty replied: "Do it."

American ordered planes to land at the nearest suitable airport. It activated crash teams to deal with the accidents and the families of passengers and began beefing up security at American's headquarters

and major stations. Mr. Carty called his counterpart at United, Mr. Goodwin. Each man told the other he thought he had a second missing plane. "We focused entirely on what was transpiring -- the physical takeover of our planes," recalls Mr. Goodwin.

Mr. Carty and Mr. Goodwin also were talking on the phone with Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, who was in a government command bunker with Vice President Dick Cheney. Mr. Carty told Mr. Mineta that American was ordering all 162 of its planes out of the sky; United already had ordered its 122 planes down. About five minutes later, the FAA shut down the skies over the U.S. completely to all but military aircraft.

At 8:45 a.m. CDT, American lost contact with a third flight, a Boston-to-Seattle trip. Everyone in the room was convinced it was a third hijacking. But it turned out to be a radio glitch, and the panic ended when radio contact was restored in 10 minutes.

Soon, reports began pouring in that a plane had crashed into the Pentagon. Maybe it was the missing United plane? American still believed its Flight 77 had gone into the second World Trade Center tower. The command center ordered a plane readied to take crisis response teams to New York to assist investigators and relatives of passengers.

Capt. Ed Soliday, United's vice president of safety and security, talked to AMR Vice Chairman Bob Baker trying to sort out the confusion. "We did not want to mislead families and loved ones," said Capt. Soliday. "American was really pressing us. They thought our airplane had crashed in Washington, and that both their planes had crashed at the World Trade Center. We weren't sure." Finally, he and Mr. Baker agreed the government should make the final confirmation.

Mr. Carty recalls quizzing Mr. Mineta for confirmation of which plane had hit the Pentagon. "I was frustrated. I remember saying, 'For God's sake, it's in the Pentagon. Can't somebody go look at it and see whose plane it is?'"

"They have," Mr. Mineta responded, according to Mr. Carty's recollection. The problem, Mr. Mineta told him: "You can't tell."

At about 8:30 CDT, air-traffic controllers and United lost contact with United Flight 93, a 757 bound from Newark to San Francisco. The dispatcher who had handled Flight 175 had been sending messages to all 13 of his assigned flights that were airborne, instructing them to land at the nearest United station because of two World Trade Center crashes. One flight didn't answer: Flight 93.

The dispatcher, a 42-year veteran of United still so shaken by the tragedy he asked that his name not be used, kept firing off messages, but there was no response.

In the United crisis center, managers isolated Flight 93 on the big Aircraft Situation Display screen. The plane had made a wide U-turn over Ohio and seemed to be heading toward Washington. Everyone in the room by now knew that a flight attendant on board had called the mechanics desk to report that one hijacker had a bomb strapped on and another was holding a knife on the crew. There also were reports that passengers were calling their families from cell phones and seatback air phones.

"This was worse because we watched it until the end of the radar track . . . and then, poof," says Mr. Roy, director of system operations control. "We didn't have time to cry." That was at 9:03 a.m. CDT.

After Flight 93 crashed, Mr. Studdert dispatched Pete McDonald, United's senior vice president of airport services, to Pennsylvania. Mr. McDonald had himself been in the air on a flight that was diverted from Washington's National Airport to Dulles. Because the no-fly order made flying to the crash site uncertain, Mr. McDonald recruited 40 United volunteers at Dulles, all trained in humanitarian relief duties, rounded up eight vans and cars, and set off at noon. In Pennsylvania, two state trooper squad cars met the caravan to give it a speedy escort.

After reaching the site, Mr. McDonald went up in a helicopter to take a look and all he could see was "very small pieces" of debris, since the plane itself was deep in the trench it created when it crashed.

With each twist and turn, airline officials also had the grisly task of trying to understand who was on board and who the hijackers were. Early on, American officials pulled up computerized passenger lists from Flights 11 and 77. With seat numbers from their flight attendant's call, they quickly identified suspects. United, working with the FBI, did the same. Other Middle Eastern names jumped out, and as calls poured in from worried relatives, they quickly realized that they hadn't gotten calls for those very passengers.

The tally: 19 suspected hijackers, 213 passengers, eight pilots and 25 flight attendants.

Within two hours, all of United's and American's domestic flights were on the ground and accounted for. Late in the afternoon, however, United still had some planes over the Pacific. These were nerve-racking times. United said it had to press hard on Canadian authorities and even Alaskan airport officials who initially refused to let the planes land. "Until we got the last airplanes on the ground, we were biting our fingers," CEO Mr. Goodwin recalls. "By then, we were spooked. Every time we got an unusual communication from an airplane, we thought, 'my God, is there another one?'"

Once all planes were safely on the ground, the airlines sat stunned at the logistical quagmire before them. They would have to figure out

where each of their hundreds of planes were and how to get tens of thousands of stranded passengers back to their destinations. They had to instantly create new security procedures. The days would turn into a blur of conference calls to regulators. Plans constantly changed. There was no time to go home and watch TV reports, no time to reflect.

For many in the command center that day, grief was delayed for days, if not weeks, by the workload. "Some of the reality of what happened both to our country and our company didn't set in until much later," says Mr. Arpey, who stayed in the crisis center all through the night.

For most, going home brought the first real emotional shock. "It hit me when I first looked in my kids' faces," pictures of shock and sorrow, says Kyle Phelps, manager of administration for the operations center and a 27-year veteran with American.

Mr. Parfitt, the "Ice Man," says it didn't hit him until much later, when he began to realize that his son in the Army might be headed to war. "The grief for the people on the airplanes, for the crews, for the people of New York in the World Trade Center is all-encompassing," Mr. Parfitt says.

Mr. Bertapelle says that when he is home now he craves the Comedy Channel, hungry for a laugh. On the Friday after the hijacking, Mr. Carty came on American's intercom system, piped through its headquarters, operations center, flight academy and other facilities, to observe a moment of silence. "That's the first time I remember just stopping to think about it," Mr. Bertapelle said. "Any moment of silence is hell."

Some now are angry. Others say their emotions are frozen much like the radar image of the plane flying over New York, only to disappear.

Mr. Marquis, who talked with flight attendant Betty Ong, says he's met twice with a psychologist. He hasn't had a real night of sleep since. "It's still like a dream," he says. "I've been through lots of stuff before, but nothing like this."

The United dispatcher who handled both Flight 175 and Flight 93 stayed at his post on Sept. 11 and helped the remaining planes under his watch land. Then, he says, "I went home and got drunk," after running several red lights in the stress of the moment. He took three days off and availed himself of a company counselor. When the counselor said, "it's OK to cry, I broke down" the man says.

It's been touch and go since. The dispatcher says he won't watch TV. "My wife had a dream she was seated on an airplane with her wrists bound, along with all of the other passengers," he says, weeping. "The hijackers were walking down the aisle, slashing throats."

The dispatcher, who has worked some days and taken off some, says he takes solace in talking to colleagues who have lost friends in wartime. "When we're busy, I like it," he says. But then he is reminded again of what happened, like when a United pilot recently told him, "Your name is all over this airline," as word spread of who handled both doomed flights.

The man wept again in the interview. "Something inside me died," he said.

Mr. Studdert, United's chief operating officer, got a call three days after the terrorist attacks from an old friend. "How you doing, kid?" the friend asked. "There is no kid left in me anymore," Mr. Studdert replied. "I'll never be the same person. We'll never be the same company or the same country."

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#### Doomed Flights

Chronology of the response to the four Sept. 11 hijackings. (Eastern daylight times.)

- 7: 58: United 175 departs from Boston Logan
- 7: 59: American 11 departs from Logan
- 8: 01: United 93 takes off from Newark, N. J.
- 8: 20: American 77 leaves from Washington Dulles
- 8: 27: Call from an AA11 flight attendant patched into American's operations center
- 8: 35: Pager message goes to American officials: "Confirmed hijacking Flight 11"
- 8: 40: American activates its crisis command center
- 8: 48: American 11 crashes into north tower of World Trade Center
- 8: 50: FAA informs United it has lost contact with Flight 175
- 8: 55: A flight attendant on Flight 175 calls in to report a hijacking, United activates its crisis center
- 9: 03: United 175 crashes into south tower of World Trade Center
- 9: 05: FAA tells American air-traffic control has lost contact with Flight 77. American orders all its planes in the Northeast to stay on the ground
- 9: 15: United starts ordering its planes to land at the nearest suitable airports, and orders those on the ground not to take off
- 9: 18: FAA shuts down New York-area airports
- 9: 25: FAA issues national ground stop, United loses contact with Flight 93
- 9: 40: American Flight 77 crashes into Pentagon
- 9: 50: South tower of World Trade Center collapses. United gets call that a flight attendant on Flight 93 reported a hijacking.
- 10: 03: Radar contact lost with Flight 93. It crashes into Pennsylvania field 80 miles southeast of Pittsburgh.
- 10: 29: North tower of World Trade Center collapses
- 10: 50: All 96 diverted United domestic flights have landed safely.
- 11: 45: All American domestic flights have diverted and landed safely.

#### American Flight 11

- Plane: Boeing 767
- Route: Boston to Los Angeles
- Crew: Two pilots, nine flight attendants
- Passengers: 81 people, including five alleged hijackers
- Fate: Hijacked into north tower, World Trade Center

#### United Flight 175

- Plane: Boeing 767
- Route: Boston to Los Angeles
- Crew: Two pilots, seven flight attendants

- Passengers: 56 people, including five alleged hijackers
- Fate: Hijacked into south tower, World Trade Center

#### American Flight 77

- Plane: Boeing 757
- Route: Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles
- Crew: Two pilots, four flight attendants
- Passengers: 58 people, including five alleged hijackers
- Fate: Hijacked into the Pentagon

#### United Flight 93

- Plane: Boeing 767
- Route: Newark, N.J., to San Francisco
- Crew: Two pilots, five flight attendants
- Passengers: 37 people, including four alleged hijackers
- Fate: Crashed in Pennsylvania

Sources: the companies, WSJ research

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## Aboard Flight 11, a Chilling Voice

By ERIC LICHTBLAU, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON -- A chilling telephone call from a flight attendant aboard American Airlines Flight 11 details for the first time the frantic struggle aboard the doomed airliner as hijackers slit the throat of a passenger and stormed the cockpit.

"I see water and buildings. Oh my God! Oh my God!" Madeline Amy Sweeney told a ground manager in Boston after the hijacked plane took a sudden and unexpected detour, according to an investigative document compiled by the FBI and reviewed by The Times.

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In recent days, snippets of cell phone calls that originated from the four hijacked flights have revealed tearful goodbyes and valiant pledges of resistance.

But Sweeney's phone call, with details that coincide with the hijackers' takeover of the cockpit, could provide investigators with one of their most valuable pieces of evidence in reconstructing the hijackings.

FBI officials in Dallas, where American Airlines is based, were able, on the day of the terrorist attacks, to piece together a partial transcript and

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Madeline Sweeney

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an account of the phone call. American Airlines officials said such calls are not typically recorded, suggesting that the FBI may have reconstructed the conversation from interviews.

Sweeney, a 35-year-old mother of two young children, had worked for American Airlines for 12 years, usually taking weekend duty so she could spend more time during the week with her family in Acton, Mass. She was one of nine flight attendants working Flight 11, which left Boston's Logan International Airport with a light load of 81 passengers at 7:45 a.m.

The plane lifted off uneventfully, but investigators think it was commandeered within about 15 minutes.

Sweeney (identified in the law enforcement report as Amy Sweeney) called American flight services manager Michael Woodward on the ground at Logan. She displayed remarkable calm as she related numerous details about the unfolding events.

"This plane has been hijacked," Sweeney said, according to the FBI report.

Two flight attendants, whom she identified by their crew numbers, had already been stabbed, she said. "A hijacker also cut the throat of a business-class passenger, and he appears to be dead," she said.

Investigators have identified five suspected hijackers on the flight-- Satam Al Suqami; Waleed M. Alshehri; Wail Alshehri; Mohamed Atta; and Abdulaziz Alomari. They are believed to be part of a well-orchestrated network of 19 hijackers who used box cutters, razors and even small knives concealed in cigarette lighters to take control of the four planes.

But Sweeney apparently saw only four of the five men.

All four were Middle Eastern, Sweeney told Woodward. Three of them, she said, were sitting in business class, and "one spoke English very well."

Investigators noted that Sweeney even had the presence of mind to relay the exact seat numbers of the four suspects in the ninth and 10th rows, although a few of those seats do not match up with the seats assigned to the hijackers on the tickets they purchased.

It is unclear from the phone account where Sweeney was when she was talking to the ground manager or what type of phone she used. But even as she was relating details about the hijackers, the men were storming the front of the plane and "had just gained access to the cockpit."

Then, she told Woodward, the plane suddenly changed direction and

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began to descend rapidly.

"At that very point, Sweeney tried to contact the cockpit but did not get a response," according to the investigative report. The pilot reportedly also was trying to alert authorities of the situation by surreptitiously clicking his radio transmission button.

Woodward then asked Sweeney whether she knew her location.

The chilling reply: "I see water and buildings. Oh my God! Oh my God!"

At that point, according to the report, the conversation ended.

Officials at American Airlines said information about the phone call was turned over to the FBI, but they refused to discuss details. "The FBI has told us not to discuss anything," said airline spokesman John Hotard. Officials at the FBI also declined to discuss the call.

But one official familiar with the phone conversation who asked not to be identified said that Sweeney's account could aid the investigation significantly. "She was very, very composed, very detailed. It was impressive that she could do that."

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## The last moments of Flight 11



AP

Ms Sweeney's plane was the first to be crashed

A flight attendant's desperate telephone call has provided new details of the last moments of Flight 11 before it hit the World Trade Center.

According to the FBI transcript, part of which was published in the Los Angeles Times, Madeline Amy Sweeney described how hijackers stabbed passengers and then diverted the plane.

A US official praised Ms Sweeney's ability to keep calm and describe the crisis as it unfolded but the mother-of-two's words ended in horror and disbelief.

“  
I see water and buildings. Oh my God! Oh my God!”

**Flight attendant  
Madeline Amy  
Sweeney**

When Ms Sweeney came on the phone to ground staff in Boston it was to report that a hijack was in progress.

Four attackers had cut the throat of a passenger in business class and stabbed two others, she said.

Three of the hijackers had been sitting in business class themselves and one spoke very good English.

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## Composure

As Ms Sweeney was giving their seat numbers, they reached the cockpit and it was then, as the plane suddenly changed course, that she spoke her last reported words:

"I see water and buildings. Oh my God! Oh my God!"

Officials at American Airlines have been asked not to discuss the telephone call with the press, but one unnamed member of staff praised the dead flight attendant.

### The suspected hijackers on Flight 11

**Waleed M Alshehri**  
**Wail Alshehri**  
**Mohamed Atta**  
**Abdelaziz al-Omari**  
**Satam Al Suqami**

"She was very, very composed, very detailed," he said.

"It was impressive that she could do that."

Ms Sweeney's account of the hijacking provides unique evidence of what took place but it also appears to conflict with previous information.

The FBI has named five hijackers on board Flight 11, whereas Ms Sweeney spotted only four.

Also, the seat numbers she gave were different from those registered in the hijackers' names.

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### Calm Before the Crash

Flight 11 Crew Sent Key Details Before Hitting the Twin Towers



**July 18** — On the morning of Sept. 11, American Airlines ground manager Michael Woodward received a phone call that immediately got his full attention.

Flight attendant Amy Sweeney called ground staff after American Airlines Flight 11 was hijacked on Sept. 11. (ABCNEWS.com)

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"Listen, and listen to me very carefully. I'm on Flight 11. The airplane has been hijacked," said the voice on the other end. The caller was Amy Sweeney, a flight attendant on board American Airlines Flight 11, which had just been hijacked on its way from Boston to Los Angeles.

Over the next 25 minutes, Sweeney, a 13-year veteran with the airline, calmly relayed information to Woodward that would later be crucial in helping the FBI identify the men who hijacked the plane and flew it into the north tower of the World Trade Center.

Another flight attendant, Betty Ong, who had been with American Airlines for 14 years, also called colleagues on the ground.

#### Seat Numbers Identified Hijackers

Flight 11 had taken off from Boston's Logan Airport at 7:59 a.m., with a light load of 81 passengers. There were 11 crew on board: a captain, a first officer, and nine flight attendants.

A few minutes into the flight, five men got up from their seats and made their way to the cockpit, soon taking control of the plane.

Sweeney and Ong were in the coach section of the plane. Using crew telephones, they made the calls to their colleagues on the ground, Sweeney to Woodward, a flight services manager at Logan Airport, and Ong to the airline's reservations line.

Woodward said Sweeney spoke "very, very calmly... in a way which was quick but calm." She gave him the seat numbers for four of the five hijackers, allowing airline staff to pull up their names, phone numbers, addresses — and even credit card numbers — on the reservations computer. One of the names that came up was Mohamed Atta, the man the FBI would later identify as the leader of all 19 of the Sept. 11 hijackers.

Sweeney told Woodward the hijackers seemed to be of Middle Eastern descent and said they had gone into the cockpit with a bomb with yellow wires attached.

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members to confront the hijackers. She said they had also slashed the throat of a business class passenger, who was bleeding severely.

The flight attendants gave the injured people oxygen, and made an announcement over the PA system asking if there was a doctor or nurse on board. Sweeney told Woodward the passengers in the coach section were calm and that they believed there was some type of medical emergency at the front of the plane.

### Flight Attendants Gathered Information



**Betty Ong** (ABCNEWS.com)

Ong's call came through to Vanessa Minter, an agent at the airline's reservation center in Raleigh, N.C. Minter conferenced in Nydia Gonzales, whose responsibilities include dealing with security issues.

Ong told the two women the hijackers had sprayed something in the first-class cabin to keep people out of the front of the plane. The two women could hear that other flight attendants were going back and forth in the coach section to relay information to Ong. "There was total teamwork," said Gonzales. Ong said the hijackers had not made

any demands.

The first four minutes of Ong's call were recorded, but the FBI has not released the tape to the public. Sweeney's phone call was not recorded, but Woodward took notes that would later become crucial to the FBI's investigation. Without Sweeney's calm reporting, the plane might have crashed with no one certain the man in charge was tied to al Qaeda.

### 'Rapid Descent'

About 15 minutes after the women first called, the plane suddenly lurched, tilting all the way to one side, then becoming horizontal again. Ong said the plane was flying erratically, and Sweeney said it had begun a rapid descent. "For a flight attendant to say rapid descent, it's rapid and it's quick. We don't use those terms very loosely," said Woodward.

They were now nearing New York and the World Trade Center, but on board the plane it was quiet. "You didn't hear hysteria in the background. You didn't hear people screaming," said Minter.

Woodward asked Sweeney to look out of the window and see if she could tell what was going on. "I see the water. I see the buildings. I see buildings," she told him.

On the line to Raleigh, Ong said over and over again, "Pray for us. Pray for us." Gonzales and Minter assured her they were praying.

Sweeney told Woodward the plane was flying very low. Then, he said, "She took a very slow, deep breath and then just said, 'Oh, my God!' Very slowly, very calmly, very quietly. It wasn't in panic."

Those were the last words Woodward heard. "Seconds later," he said, "there was a very, very loud static on the other end."

While Woodward was still holding the telephone, hoping Sweeney would come through, his operational manager came into the room and said that a plane had just crashed into the World Trade Center.

Woodward did not make the connection immediately. "I almost at that point said, 'Not now, we have a serious situation here,'" he said. But moments later, he realized that Sweeney's flight was the one that hit the World Trade Center.

### Professionalism and Courage

The ground staff who spoke to the two flight attendants were astonished by their

"It was never about 'Help me, pray for me,'" said Gonzales. "It was about 'Pray for us, help us.' That's a totally selfless person." ■

*A Madeline "Amy" Sweeney Memorial Golf Classic to benefit the families of Sept. 11, 2001 will be held on Friday, Sept. 20 and Saturday, Sept. 21, 2002 in Lynnfield, Mass. The proceeds will go to families being assisted by the Massachusetts 9/11 Fund, Inc. (www.massfund.org). For more information, please contact The Madeline A. Sweeney Foundation at 978-688-4292 or via email at masgolfttee@yahoo.com.*



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Received: from mel-rto4.wanadoo.fr (smtp-out-4.wanadoo.fr [193.252.19.23]) by mtaw1.prodigy. net (8.12.3/8.12.3) with ESMTP id gAQGjso1015007 for <hadokama@pacbell.net >; Tue, 26 Nov 2002 08:45:54 -0800 (PST) Received: from mel-rta9.wanadoo.fr (193.252.19.69) by mel-rto4.wanadoo.fr (6.5.007)

id 3DDA133FO04CB168 for hadokama@pacbell.net; Tue, 26 Nov 2002 17:45:53 +0100 Received: from [193.253.33.166] (193.253.33.166) by mel-rta9.wanadoo.fr (6.5.007)

id 3DD3EB760066D425 for hadokama@pacbell.net; Tue, 26 Nov 2002 17:45:53 +0100 User-Agent: Microsoft-Entourage/10.0.0.1309

Date: Tue, 26 Nov 2002 17:47:42 +0100 Subject: Atlantic Monthly

From: William Langewiesche <wlang@theatlantic.com>

To: Harry Ong [hadokama@pacbell.net](mailto:hadokama@pacbell.net)

Message-ID: <BA09643E.1EB%wlang@theatlantic.com>

Mime-version: 1.0

Content-type: text/plain; charset="US-ASCII" Content-transfer-encoding: 7bit X-Mozilla-Status2: 00000000

>Dear Mr. Ong--

>I apologize for the confusion of crossed signals which has delayed my  
>response to you and your family. While it is true that my brief reporting  
>on the subject of your sister was based on the Wall Street Journal's  
>first-person account, I believe you may notice that my writing was more  
>subdued, and in no way cast aspersions on her memory. That being said, I am

>of course willing to accept that factual errors may have crept in--or even a  
>fundamental misunderstanding of the confusing and tragic events of that  
day--and I would be very interested to learn your view.

>Thank you.

>William Langewiesche

>

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