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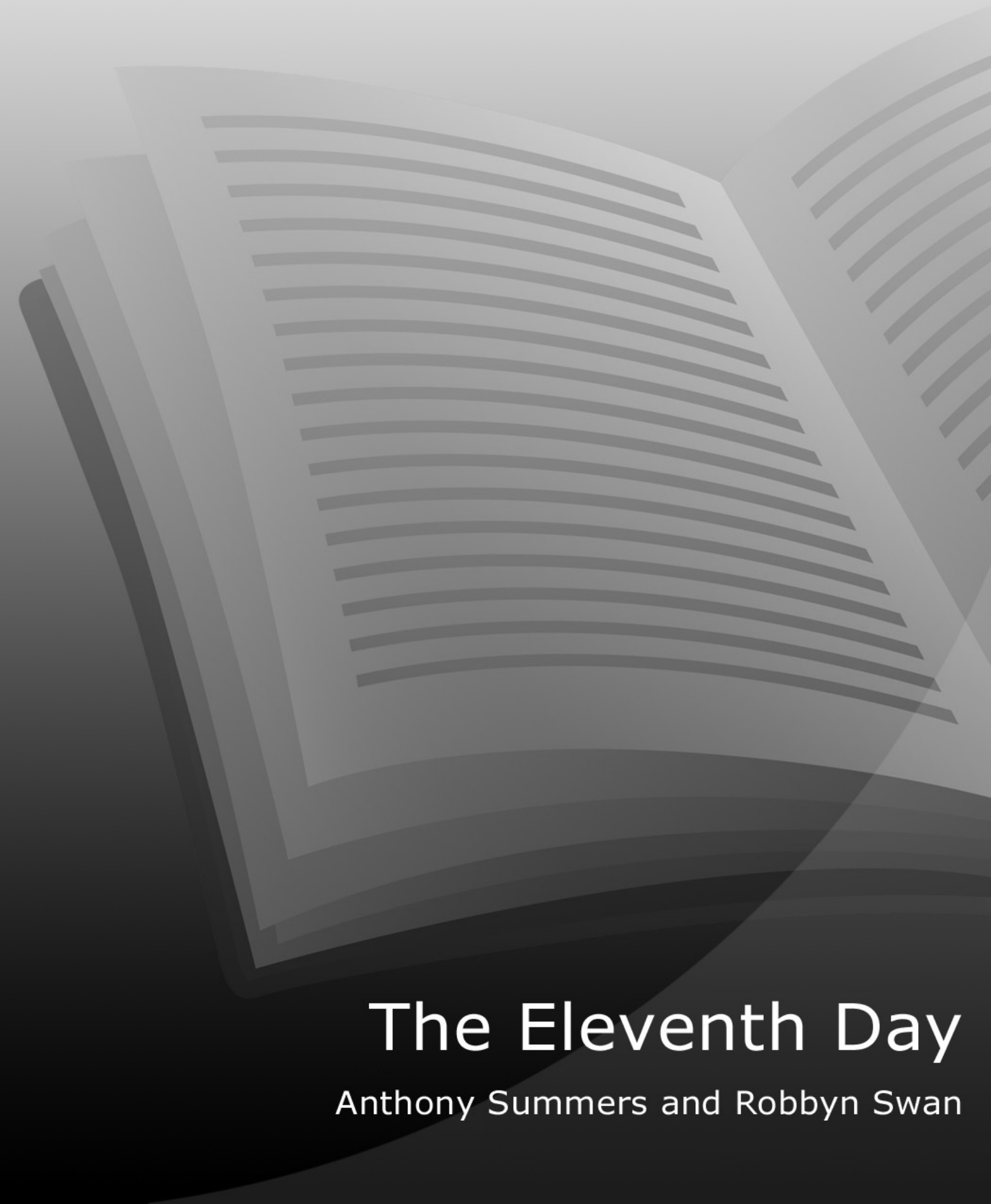

The Eleventh Day

Anthony Summers and Robbyn Swan

About the Book

Anthony Summers and Robbyn Swan have written the ultimate account of 9/11. The shockwaves of the September 11, 2001 attacks in America reverberate to this day. Though Osama Bin Laden has been killed, questions remain. What exactly happened? Could 9/11 have been prevented? How and why did so much acrimony and misinformation arise from the ashes of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a quiet field in Pennsylvania? And what has yet to be revealed?

The Eleventh Day, written with access to thousands of recently released official documents, is updated for this edition. It includes information, discovered exclusively by the authors, that the former chairman of Congress' 9/11 describes as the 'most important in years'.

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THE ELEVENTH DAY

THE ULTIMATE ACCOUNT OF 9/11

Anthony Summers and **Robbyn Swan**

For Angela Santore Amicone
and
Chris and Gaye Humphreys

“I don’t believe for a minute that we got everything right. We wrote a first draft of history.”

—Lee Hamilton,
vice chairman, 9/11 Commission

AUTHORS' NOTE

OVER THE YEARS, the event to which the world gave the brief name "9/11" has burgeoned into a universe of facts and factoids. Our approach to the writing of this book was to build a chronology, which eventually ran to well over a thousand pages, to gather information from a multitude of sources, including published material in both paper and electronic form, and to conduct interviews of our own. We read as deeply as possible the many thousands of pages of staff reports, original memoranda, and other 9/11 Commission records that began to be released as of 2009.

Additional information on numerous points can be found in the Notes and Sources section at the back of the book. These are linked to the text by page number.

For ease of reading, we have adopted a single standard for Arabic names that are rendered differently in different texts. The name "bin Laden," for example, can be found elsewhere as "bin Ladin" or even "ben Ladin," and the organization associated with him as "al-Qaeda," or "al Qida"—and more. We have stuck to "bin Laden" and "al Qaeda."

The full rendering of many Arab persons' names is lengthy, and we have in many cases shortened them. After a full first mention, for example, "Khalid al Mihdhar" becomes just "Mihdhar." We render "Ramzi bin al-Shibh," as have many other texts, simply as "Bin-alshibh." Though perhaps not strictly correct, or satisfactory to the purist, this makes for smoother reading.

Our aim has been to make readable sense out of a kaleidoscopic story, to offer rational explanation where there has been confusion or unnecessary controversy, and to serve history as well as possible.

A.S. R.S.
May 2011

PREFACE

TEN YEARS ON, memory and loss. Where two wonders of the modern world once soared high over the city, two great cascades feed reflecting pools of shimmering water. The abyss into which it flows is now a hallowed place of remembrance. Pilgrims about to descend to the underworld, the underworld of what once was the World Trade Center, will pass a ribbon of names etched into parapets of bronze.

They identify those killed in New York City on September 11, 2001: the 206 passengers and crew aboard the three planes that were used as missiles that day; the forty who died when a fourth airliner fell from the sky in Pennsylvania; the 2,605 office workers and visitors and would-be rescuers known to have died in and around the Trade Center; and the 125 men and women who died at the Pentagon in Washington. Included, too, are the names of the six people killed eight years earlier, in 1993, in the first attempt to bring down the towers with a truck bomb.

The memorial[1] names 2,982 men, women, and children as of the spring of 2011. The true tally of 9/11 fatalities, however, is incomplete. Some of those who labored in the rubble of the fallen towers have died since, agonizingly slowly, from respiratory disease contracted in the fire and poisoned dust of the place they called Ground Zero. Some nineteen thousand others are reported to be sick and receiving treatment. By one prediction, disease will eventually cripple and kill as many again—more perhaps—as died on the day of the attacks.

We do not know, shall never know, how many have died in the far-off wars that followed the onslaught launched that September day. Fighting men aside, the vast majority of the dead have been civilians: unknown thousands—conservatively, many tens of thousands[2]—of men, women, and children killed in Afghanistan and in Iraq.

Of the three thousand who died on 9/11 itself, fewer than half have graves.[3] Some bodies were consumed by fire, others reduced to minute fragments of mortality, morsels of burned bone, decaying flesh, a single tooth with a silver filling. To this day, forensic pathologists are confronted by a monstrous human jigsaw, one they know they will never complete.

Consider five of the names that are etched, lettered in bronze, above the curtain of water at the 9/11 memorial.

Jimmy Riches, a New York firefighter, died in the lobby of the North Tower. His father, James, himself a Fire Department battalion chief, recovered his son's mangled body months later.

Donald McIntyre, a Port Authority police officer, also died at the Trade Center. His handcuffs, recovered at the scene, were given by his widow to a colleague assigned to hunt down terrorists in Afghanistan.

No identifiable remains were ever found for Eddie Dillard, an American Airlines passenger who died at the Pentagon. His widow, by odd happenstance, had been American's base manager in Washington, D.C., when his plane took off that day.

Ronald Breitweiser, a money manager, died in the South Tower of the Trade Center. Only his arms and hands were recovered, identified by fingerprints—and by his wedding ring, which his widow now wears.

Only part of a leg and one foot were found—six years later—to account for Karen Martin,[4] chief flight attendant on the plane that plunged into the North Tower. Attendant

Martin was probably the first person harmed by the hijackers on 9/11.

SOMETHING ELSE WAS lost that day, something precious that touches on the stories of all the thousands who have died. The Greek tragic dramatist Aeschylus, twenty-five centuries earlier, understood well what it was. “In war,” he wrote, “the first casualty is truth.”

James Riches worked in the rubble for months, motivated in part by the hope of recovering his own son’s dead body. He labored, like thousands of others, buoyed by the assurance of the Environmental Protection Agency, that the air in Lower Manhattan was safe to breathe.[5] Today, no longer a fire chief, Riches Sr.’s health is irreparably damaged, his lung capacity reduced by 30 percent.

Like so many others, meanwhile, Riches wants vengeance against those who killed his son. The Saudi exile Osama bin Laden, said to have ordered the 9/11 attacks, became—in the West—a constant demon, a symbol of the dark forces of terror. President George W. Bush at first promised to get him “dead or alive,” only to backtrack months later and say, “I don’t know where bin Laden is … and really don’t care. It’s not that important.”

In 2009, at the White House, Riches and others met Bush’s successor, Barack Obama. “I pulled out Jimmy’s bracelet and funeral mass card and gave them to him,” the former fire chief said later. “I told him that I’m frustrated that I haven’t seen justice for my son Jimmy … Please capture Osama bin Laden.” Obama promised “swift and certain justice.”

Police officer McIntyre’s handcuffs, engraved “Mac,” were later snapped on to the wrists of a fugitive named Abu Zubaydah—a native of Saudi Arabia like bin Laden. Imprisoned ever since, Zubaydah remains today the subject of serious controversy. For U.S. interrogators treated him with extreme brutality, using duress that has been defined

by the International Committee of the Red Cross, and many others, as torture.

Eddie Dillard's widow, Rosemary, for all her grief, was one of a number of bereaved family members incensed by the ill treatment of prisoners and by plans to try them before military tribunals. "The secret and unconstitutional nature of these proceedings," they said, "deprives us of the right to know the full truth about what happened on 9/11."

Ronald Breitweiser's widow, Kristen, for her part, has been one of the most articulate of those whose lives were devastated. She testified to a joint House-Senate inquiry and fought for a further, full, independent investigation. When that aspiration was realized—in the shape of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States—Breitweiser excoriated its failings. She believes that much is still hidden, and wants convincing explanations. The CIA, she points out, identified two of the hijackers as terrorists more than eighteen months before 9/11, learned they had visas to enter the United States, yet kept the information from U.S. law enforcement. Why?

Though the final chapter of the congressional report into 9/11 is said to discuss Saudi financial links to the hijackers, all but one page of the chapter was kept secret on the orders of President Bush. Why? At a 2009 meeting with bereaved families, Breitweiser says, President Obama said he was willing to declassify the suppressed material. As of this writing, two years later, the chapter remains classified. Why?

Though less than complete, and though it left some questions open, the Final Report of the National Commission—known as the 9/11 Commission Report—was overwhelmingly well received by an uncritical media. It went to the top of *The New York Times* best-seller list, and was nominated for a National Book Award. The CIA obstructed the Commission's work, as its chairmen—former New Jersey governor Thomas Kean and former

congressman Lee Hamilton—later acknowledged. Senator Bob Kerrey, who served on the Commission, shared their concerns. Alleging a Bush White House cover-up, Senator Max Cleland had resigned from the Commission early on. It was, he said, a “national scandal.” The final Report was in fact not final, Hamilton said, merely “a first draft of history.”

A 2006 *New York Times*/CBS poll found that only 16 percent of those responding thought Bush administration members had told the truth about 9/11. Fifty-three percent of responders thought they were “mostly telling the truth but hiding something.” Twenty-eight percent thought Bush’s people were “mostly lying.” A year later, a Scripps Howard poll found that 32 percent thought it “very likely” that the government had chosen to ignore specific warnings of the 9/11 attacks. A further 30 percent thought that “somewhat likely.” A Zogby poll found that 51 percent of Americans wanted a congressional investigation of President Bush’s and Vice President Dick Cheney’s performance in the context of the attacks.

In 2008, a poll conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes—at the University of Maryland—asked questions of sixteen thousand people in seventeen countries. Only 46 percent of those responding thought al Qaeda had been responsible for the attacks. Fifteen percent thought the U.S. government was itself responsible for the attacks, as a ploy to justify an invasion of Iraq. A large number of Americans, meanwhile, have thought Iraq was behind the attacks—a notion encouraged by the Bush administration but unsupported by the evidence. As late as 2010, though, an Angus Reid poll indicated that one in four Americans still thought 9/11 was “a fabrication designed to facilitate the campaign against terrorism.” This all reflects an epidemic of doubt and disbelief. It has been spread in part, to be sure, by conspiracy theorists—the “9/11 truth” movement, as it has

become known—preaching to the gullible through the phenomenal influence and reach of the Internet. Less well known is the prevalence of doubt in people one would expect less likely to challenge official orthodoxy.

Those who have expressed grave doubt or called for a new investigation have included five past or present U.S. senators, four members of the U.S. House of Representatives, a former governor, three state deputy or assistant attorneys general, members of state legislatures, numerous public officials and civil servants, diplomats, engineers, and twenty-six former Army, Navy, or Air Force officers. In 2010, two gubernatorial candidates in Texas, a Republican and a Democrat, both said they had questions as to whether the U.S. government had been involved in the 9/11 attacks.

Former CIA officers, FBI agents, and intelligence officials from other agencies have also spoken out. Twenty-five of them expressed their views in a letter to the Congress. Louis Freeh, who was FBI director until the summer of 2001, raised specific issues on television and in a 2005 *Wall Street Journal* article.

Three sometime presidential contenders have expressed concerns. Former Vice President Walter Mondale said he favored a new investigation. “We’ve never completed the investigation of 9/11,” said General Wesley Clark, former Supreme Allied Commander Europe, “and whether the administration actually misused the intelligence information it had.” Former U.S. senator Bob Graham, who had been cochair of Congress’s Joint Inquiry into 9/11, pointed the finger at Saudi Arabia. The investigation, he said, found grounds for “suspicion that the Saudi government and various representatives of Saudi interests supported some of the hijackers and might have supported all of them.” President Bush, he said, “engaged in a cover-up.”

TEN YEARS ON, there is a lingering sense that the nation and the world have been let down, deprived of the right to know—deceived, even—on a matter of greater universal concern than any event in living memory. It need not have been that way.

The release in the past two years of some 300,000 pages[6] of 9/11 Commission documents, a plethora of other material, and new interviews make it possible to lay some of the perceived mysteries to rest.

With access to the new information, we strive in this book to blow away unnecessary controversy, to make up for omissions in the record, and to throw light into the shadows of deception. In a time of anxiety, to tell the story as honestly as it can be told.

PART I

ATTACK

ONE

DID THE STORY begin twenty years ago during the Gulf War, when a great American army was installed in Saudi Arabia, a land sacred to Muslims? Did it begin in 1948, when the United States recognized[1] the declaration of a Jewish state to be known as Israel? Or on the day in 1938 when Americans discovered in Saudi Arabia one of the largest reserves of oil on the planet? From then on, certainly, the West began an addictive dance with danger, one that it dances to this day.

This is a story, moreover, rooted in a world and a culture that few Westerners really know or can begin to understand, yet played out in the heart of the United States. Mystery and terror, a frightening mix. Yet there is a simple point of entry, a routine event on an ordinary American morning.

IN THE DAWN of September 11, 2001, in Massachusetts, ninety-two people were getting up, breakfasting, heading for Boston's Logan Airport. They were the passengers and crew of American Airlines Flight 11, one of some forty thousand planes scheduled to crisscross the country that day.

To glance at some of the names on the passenger manifest, to learn a little about them, is to glimpse the melting pot nature of the country. Philip Rosenzweig, an executive for Sun Microsystems; Thelma Cuccinello, a grandmother on her way to see a sister in California; Peter Gay, a vice president for Raytheon Electronic Systems,

traveling with two colleagues; Laura Lee Morabito, U.S. sales manager for the Australian airline Qantas; photographer Berinthia Berenson, widow of the actor Anthony Perkins; David Angell, executive producer of the television series *Frasier*, accompanied by his wife, Lynn; Jeffrey Mladenik, an ordained minister and acting CEO of a trade publishing company; Lisa Gordenstein, an executive with a discount clothing company; Michael Theodoridis, on his way to a wedding with his wife, Rahma, who was six months pregnant; Walid Iskandar, a business strategy consultant for a British company, setting off to visit his parents; Alexander Filipov, a retired electrical engineer; Daniel Lewin, chief technology officer for Akamai Technologies in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Also on their way to the flight were five young men[2] from the Middle East, an Egyptian and four Saudis.

The pilot who was to fly these people to California, John Ogonowski,[3] flew twelve days a month and worked the rest of the time on his 150-acre farm. At fifty, he was a veteran of twenty-three years with American, married to a flight attendant. He had hoped to attend a farming event on the 11th, but the schedule proved unchangeable. At 5:00[4] that morning Ogonowski awoke, kissed his wife, peeked in at their three sleeping teenage daughters, and climbed into his pickup to drive to the airport. His copilot that day would be Tom McGuinness, a former Navy fighter pilot.

Flight 11, a “turn-around”—an airplane that had flown through the night from San Francisco—was parked at Logan’s Gate 32. Captain Ogonowski arrived to a scene of busy activity. The cleaners were working their way through the plane, the fuelers delivering 76,000 pounds of jet fuel. The nine flight attendants in their blue uniforms were gathering.

Karen Martin, in First Class, was in charge. At forty, she was renowned for her efficiency—“organized … on the stick to a fault.” Her backup, Barbara “Bobbi” Arestegui, was

diminutive—small enough, crews joked, to fit on the luggage rack. Several colleagues who had been scheduled to fly were not on board. One had called in sick, another had switched to a different flight—she wanted to accompany her father to a doctor's appointment. Two others, waiting on standby, were told they were not required.

The check-in process went normally. No one knew until later that, even before they reached the terminal, three of the Arab passengers had been involved in an odd incident. A driver next to them in the parking lot would remember how they had dawdled, leaving the door of their rental car open, "fiddling with their things." Irritated, he pushed at the offending door, shoved it against one of the Arabs, half expecting a shouting match. Instead, studiously avoiding a scene, the three Middle Easterners said not a word.

In the terminal, though, the check-in attendant found only passenger Filipov, the electrical engineer, to be acting out of the ordinary. He seemed nervous, paced up and down, seemed to know nothing of airport procedure. The attendant found it a little "suspicious." Otherwise, no one else's behavior caught her attention.

The copilot of the incoming flight, however, deplaning as the fresh crew took over, would remember a strange encounter. As first officer Lynn Howland left the airplane an Arab man stopped her to ask if she would be piloting the soon to depart Flight 11. When she said she would not, he turned away in an "extremely rude" way. Later, shown a picture of the Egyptian passenger on Flight 11, she at once identified him as the man who had approached her.

At check-in, a computer profiling system had selected three of the five young Arab passengers as potentially suspect. Their checked baggage was screened for explosives, the men themselves given special scrutiny by security. Like the carry-on bags of all passengers, theirs were X-rayed. Nothing was spotted.

All five young Arabs, one reportedly carrying a wooden crutch, then proceeded to the gate. One of them—the Egyptian, the agent thought—arrived “sweating bullets … his forehead was drenched.” With no good reason to stop him, she handed the man his boarding card. He and a companion were the last to board, there to be greeted by senior attendant Karen Martin.

The Egyptian settled down in First Class in aisle Seat 8D, next to passengers David and Lynn Angell. One of the Saudis sat next to him. Two of the others sat further forward, near the cockpit, next to Laura Lee Morabito. Another sat directly behind Daniel Lewin.

The food was on board by now, the in-flight movies loaded. Her final checks completed, Karen Martin prepared to recite the airplane’s safety features. Her colleague Madeline Sweeney, whom everyone knew as “Amy,” had grabbed a few moments to call her husband. She wanted to say she was sorry not to have been able to see her five-year-old daughter off to kindergarten. Now, though, it was time to switch off all cell phones.

Flight 11 pushed back from the gate at 7:40 and by 8:00 it was soaring skyward. September 11 was a glorious morning for flying, with virtually no cloud or wind—“severe clear” in pilots’ parlance.

The Air Traffic Control transcript of air-to-ground exchanges shows that Flight 11 flew routinely for thirteen minutes. “Departure. Good morning. American 11 heavy with you,” Captain Ogonowski told Boston control. “Passing through, ah, 2,000 [feet] for 3,000.” Boston alerted him to a small Cessna nearby, asking him to climb and turn right. Then, with a “So long,” management of Flight 11 passed to other controllers.

The laconic back-and-forth continuing, Ogonowski climbed his plane toward its assigned altitude of 29,000 feet. Then, just after 8:13, Federal Aviation Administration controller Pete Zalewski, at Boston Center—one of the

FAA's twenty-one Air Route Traffic Control Centers—told the pilots to turn twenty degrees to the right. "20 right. American 11," a pilot acknowledged, and the plane turned.

Sixteen seconds later, when Zalewski told them to climb, Flight 11 did not reply. The controller would try again and again for the next eleven minutes. "American one one … do you hear me? … American eleven, if you hear Boston Center, ident please …" Only static came back across the ether, with one exception—later to be logged as "a brief unknown sound (possibly a scream)."

At 8:18, unbeknownst at the time to the controllers, a telephone rang at an American Airlines office almost a thousand miles away, in the town of Cary, North Carolina. Vanessa Minter, an employee accustomed to dealing with calls about reservations, heard a woman's voice say, "I think we're being hijacked."

Flummoxed, failing to find the emergency button on her phone, Minter transferred the call to a colleague. He did press the button, automatically starting a recording, and brought in a supervisor named Nydia Gonzalez. Soon Gonzalez was passing on what she heard to American's security office in Texas.

The woman calling was a senior Flight 11 attendant, forty-five-year-old Betty "Bee" Ong. Using a seatback Airfone, Ong had dialed a number that crews knew well—they used it to help passengers with onward travel plans. She sounded "calm, professional, and poised," and we know exactly what she said for four and a half minutes, the standard duration of the recording system. The rest of the conversation—Ong talked for about twenty-eight minutes—is as remembered by the employees who dealt with the call:

> Ong: [I'm] number 3, in the back. The cockpit's not answering. Somebody's stabbed in business class and, ah, I think there's Mace that we can't breathe. I don't know. I think we're getting hijacked.

The seconds ticked by. Time was lost as the staff on the ground asked repetitive questions, mostly to confirm Ong's identity. Then:

> Ong: … Somebody is coming back from business … hold on for one second … Karen and Bobbi got stabbed. [This last sentence, the tape shows, was spoken by a fellow attendant close by.] … Our number 1 got stabbed … our galley flight attendant and our purser has been stabbed. And we can't get into the cockpit. The door won't open.

An airline employee on the ground made an unhelpful interjection. "Well, if they were shrewd they would keep the door closed … Would they not maintain a sterile cockpit?"[5]

"Karen" was lead flight attendant Karen Martin, "Bobbi" her backup Barbara Arestegui. Martin, Ong said, lost consciousness, then came around and was being given oxygen. Arestegui appeared not to be seriously injured. The passenger in First Class Seat 9B, however, appeared to be dead.

The man in Seat 9B had perhaps tried to intervene and fight the hijackers. He was Daniel Lewin, an American-Israeli who had served in a crack Israeli commando unit. Lewin spoke Arabic, and may have understood before anyone else what the hijackers intended. Ong said the passenger in Seat 10B, directly to his rear, had stabbed Lewin to death. The man in 10B[6] was one of the five young Arabs who had boarded that morning. The killer and another hijacker, Ong said, had gotten into the cockpit. The sound of "loud arguing" had been heard.

Four minutes into the call, Ong's colleague Amy Sweeney began trying to phone American Airlines back at the airport in Boston. At 8:32, using a borrowed calling

card,[7] she began speaking with duty manager Michael Woodward.

Sweeney, who also reported the stabbings, said the hijackers had “boxes connected with red and yellow wire”—a bomb, she thought. One, she said, spoke good English. So far, passengers in Coach seemed unaware of what was going on.

If the cockpit door had been locked, as required by FAA rules, how had the hijackers gotten in? All American flight attendants held keys,[8] and that was almost certainly why the attendants in First Class—Martin and Arestegui—had been attacked.

There is no knowing exactly what happened when the hijackers erupted into the cockpit. “There was no warning to be more vigilant,” Captain Ogonowski’s wife, Peg, would later say. “These people come in behind him. He’s sitting low, forward, strapped in—the same with his copilot. No warning …”

Ogonowski and copilot Tom McGuinness had been trained not to respond to force with force. FAA policy was still geared to hijackings designed to take over airliners, not destroy them. It called for pilots to “refrain from trying to overpower or negotiate with hijackers, to land the aircraft as soon as possible, to communicate with authorities, and to try delaying tactics.” According to an FAA security report, the agency did know that “suicide was an increasingly common tactic among terrorists in the Middle East.” Its brief to its pilots, however, offered no guidance on how to deal with hijackers bent on suicide.

Attendant Ong had not sounded panicky as she reported from Flight 11. From time to time, though, she asked staff on the ground to “Please pray for us.” There were moments, she said, when the plane was being flown erratically, “sideways.” It was descending. The phone line had started to fade in and out. Her colleague Amy Sweeney said she could see they were now “over New York City.”

Then Ong exclaimed, “Oh, God!. … Oh, God! …” and began to cry. Sweeney screamed and said, “Something is wrong. I don’t think the captain is in control. We are in a rapid descent … We are all over the place … I see water! I see buildings! …” Next, a deep breath and, slowly, calmly, “Oh, my God! … We are flying low. We are flying very, very low. We are flying way too low.” Seconds later, again, “Oh, my God, we are way too low …”

American Airlines’ people on the ground could no longer hear either flight attendant. In Boston, duty manager Woodward got only “very, very loud static.” In North Carolina, Gonzalez was saying, “Betty, talk to me. Betty, are you there, Betty? …”

And finally, “I think we may have lost her.”

TWO

IT WAS JUST over half an hour since the hijackers had struck.

In an offuce in Lower Manhattan, high in the North Tower of the World Trade Center, a data processor[1] glanced up from his computer. On the horizon to the north, a dot in the sky got his attention. Unusual to see a plane over there, he thought, and turned back to his work.

Moments later, from his perch on a structure on East 77th Street, a steelworker was startled by the sight and the roar of an airliner flying so low that—it seemed to him—it almost hit the antenna atop the Empire State Building. At Madison Avenue and 45th Street, construction workers stared in astonishment. In SoHo, twenty blocks north of the Trade Center, a composer seated in a restaurant window heard a jet thunder overhead. Pigeons, normally blasé, rose in alarm. A window-gazing student at Stuyvesant High—on the banks of the Hudson River—glimpsed the plane for a second and blurted a stunned, “Did you see that?”

A “freakish noise” sent author-photographer Lew Rubenfien rushing onto the roof of his apartment building.

> It was the sound jet engines make on a runway when they have been powered all the way up for takeoff—though much more violent, somehow enraged. … The plane was moving far faster than you ever saw one go so low in the sky. … I began to shout telepathically, “Get away from the building, get away from the building.” …The plane made a perfect bull’s-eye, leaving a jagged tear … and then, just as

> it happens in dreams, everything stretched a long way out. … There could only have been a fraction of a second. … Then, at last, the building exploded. Hot and orange, the great gassy flower blew out.

It was 8:46[2] A.M.

The impact had been caught on film thanks to the snap reaction of French documentary maker Jules Naudet, filming nearby with a unit of the New York Fire Department. “I look up, and it’s clearly an American Airlines jet,” the Frenchman said later. “I turned the camera toward where it was going to go … I see it go in. I’m filming it.” The image he shot, destined to become iconic, precisely matches Rubenfien’s[3] verbal description—orange burst at the core, great bloom of gray smoke or vapor to the left.

In the North Tower, the man who had seen the plane as a distant dot had not been looking when it came right at him. To Chuck Allen of Lava Trading, busy in his 83rd floor office, the memory instead would be of a “muffled, sucking, unbearably loud noise. Like the sound of two high-speed trains crossing in high proximity to each other.”

Through the windows, still unbroken, he saw debris falling, paper floating. Liquid was running down the windowpanes. There was a grinding and squeaking in the walls and—Allen was vividly conscious of it—the entire building leaned to one side. Then, gradually, it righted itself.

On the 86th floor, the windows had shattered. James Gartenberg, a broker with Julian Studley real estate, reported by phone that the glass had blown “from the inside of the building out.” And that: “The core of the building, the interior core part of the building, collapsed.”

American Flight 11 had sliced into the tower between the 93rd and 99th floors. The liquid Allen saw on the windows was almost certainly jet fuel from the plane’s wing

tanks, a dribble of the ten thousand gallons said to have been on board.

Filmmaker Naudet, far below, stayed with the crew of firefighters as it switched from exercise mode to rapid response and rushed to the tower. Minutes later, in the downstairs lobby, he saw what exploding aviation fuel can do. Fireballs had shot down some of the many elevator shafts, detonating on several floors and then in the lobby. “The windows had all been blown out,” Naudet said. “The marble had come off the walls. I saw two bodies burning on the floor. One was screaming, a woman’s scream … I just didn’t want to film that.”

Some fourteen thousand people worked each day in the Trade Center towers. Its Twin Towers—North and South, each 110 stories high—loomed more than a fifth of a mile over Manhattan. They were the tallest buildings in the city of skyscrapers, symbols of America’s financial power, the heart of a great complex that housed offices, a shopping mall, a hotel, and two subway stations. Vast numbers of workers had not yet been at work when Flight 11 hit. They had been milling around on the lower levels, buying newspapers, grabbing a coffee or a snack. It was primary election day in the city, moreover, and many had stopped to vote before going to the office. Some commuters had been delayed, too, by especially heavy traffic through the tunnels in Manhattan. Innumerable lives were saved that morning by being late.

As filmmaker Naudet had seen, some were killed or terribly injured in the North Tower lobby. It was the 91st floor far above, though, just below the impact point, that became the frontier between certain death and possible, even probable, survival. Above, on levels 92 to 105, were the hundreds of international bankers, the bond traders, investment and insurance managers and their staffs, who regularly came in early to get a jump on the markets. Higher still, near the tower’s summit, were the customers

and staff of Windows on the World, the celebrated restaurant atop the Trade Center—and engineers who manned television and radio transmitters.

Of the 1,344 souls on those upper floors, none would survive. Some had died instantly, and hundreds had no way of escaping.

On the 92nd floor, which was intact for a while, debris blocked the stairways. At Carr Futures, John San Pio Resta; his wife, Silvia, seven months pregnant; and trader Damian Meehan were trapped. So, too, was Michael Richards, a sculptor who used studio space on the same floor—an anomaly in a building dedicated to commerce—provided by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council.

Meehan had time to phone one of his brothers, to tell him the elevators were gone and that there was smoke. His last words were “We’ve got to go,” as he headed for one of the blocked stairways. We know nothing of the last moments of the San Pio Restas and Michael Richards. Richards had last been seen at midnight, saying he planned to work till morning. Long preoccupied with the theme of aviation, his final work had been a bronze of himself amidst flames and meteors, pierced by airplanes.

The area immediately above the 92nd floor was a tomb. Fred Alger Management lost thirty-five people, Marsh and McLennan, spread over several floors, 295. For Marsh analyst Patricia Massari, on the phone to her husband when the plane hit, there had been time only for “Oh, my God!” Then the phone went dead. The remains of one of her colleagues would be found five blocks away.

Cantor Fitzgerald, the bond trading company, had occupied floors 100 to 105. Six hundred fifty-eight people had been in their offices at the moment of impact. Michael Wittenstein had hung up in the middle of a call to a customer, then—courteous to a fault—phoned back to apologize. “I believe,” he had time to say, “there was an explosion in the boiler room.”