The Flight 93 Story

On the morning of September 11, 2001, al Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners in a strategically planned attack against the United States. These terrorists intentionally flew two jet airliners into the World Trade Center's Twin Towers in New York City and a third aircraft into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. A fourth aircraft, United Airlines Flight 93, crashed into an open field in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, killing all passengers, crew members, and terrorists on board. The four aircraft strikes killed nearly 3,000 people, the deadliest attack on American soil by a foreign entity. This is the Flight 93 Story.

It began as just an ordinary day.

Seven crew members assigned to Flight 93 began to prepare for the early morning non-stop flight from Newark, New Jersey to San Francisco, California. Thirty-three passengers were traveling for ordinary reasons. Flight 93 was a Boeing 757, with a capacity of 182 passengers. The terrorists targeted domestic flights that normally had few passengers so they would have less resistance, used the type of aircraft that they had been trained to pilot, were non-stop, coast-to-coast flights with full fuel tanks that would cause the maximum amount of destruction, and were departing at approximately the same time so they could make a coordinated, surprise attack.

The hijackers on September 11, 2001, were terrorists on a suicide mission. This was the first time hijackers used commercial airliners as weapons to destroy symbolic targets, commit mass murder, and spread terror.

On that morning, three of the four hijacked flights departed on schedule. However, Flight 93 was delayed more than 25 minutes due to typically heavy morning traffic. Just four minutes after Flight 93 departed, hijacked Flight 11 struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center. At 9:03 a.m., a second hijacked plane, Flight 175, hit the South Tower.

At 9:37 a.m. hijacked Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon. The Federal Aviation Administration, at 9:42 a.m. ordered all aircraft to land at the nearest airport at 9:42 a.m. An estimated 4,500 aircraft landed safely without incident. This was the first time such an order had been given in United States aviation history. By that time, though, Flight 93 was not responding to any orders.

"Mayday! Get out of here!"

At about 9:28 a.m., after 46 minutes of routine flight across Pennsylvania, the terrorists on Flight 93 overtook the cockpit, turning the plane southeast on a course directed toward Washington, D.C., the nation's capital. The passengers and crew were forced to the back of the plane and told

to be quiet. Using airfones, passengers and crew began making calls to report the hijacking. They soon learned the shocking news about the other hijacked planes and quickly realized that Flight 93 was part of a larger attack on America. This realization led to a vote and a collective decision to fight back.

In just over 30 minutes, this diverse group of people on Flight 93 developed a plan and put it into action. The cockpit voice recorder captured the sounds of their struggle: shouts, screams, calls to action, and sounds of breaking glassware. To stop the uprising, the terrorist piloting the aircraft began to roll it to the left and right, and pitch the nose up and down. In its final moments, the plane turned upside down as it passed over rural Western Pennsylvania. The terrorists remained in control of the plane and chose to crash it rather than risk the passengers and crew regaining control of the aircraft.

At 10:03 a.m., Flight 93 plowed into an empty field at a speed of 580 miles per hour. Upon impact, the 7,000 gallons of jet fuel on board the aircraft exploded, creating a ball of fire that rose higher than the trees.

Quick and determined actions.

The flight data recorder that was recovered from the crash site revealed that the terrorists had reprogrammed the aircraft's autopilot system for a new destination – Washington, D.C. Recovered evidence and responses to interrogations revealed that the terrorists' intended target was most likely the United States Capitol, where the nation's legislators were in session. Flight 93 crashed only 20 minutes flying-time from Washington, D.C.

Because of the quick and determined actions of the passengers and crew, Flight 93 was the only one of the four hijacked aircraft that failed to reach the terrorists' intended target that day. The passengers and crew showed unity, courage, and defiance in the face of adversity.

Today the National Park Service, its volunteers, and its partners work to honor their sacrifice and to try to understand more fully the legacy of Flight 93 and the other events of 9/11.

http://www.nps.gov/flni/historyculture/index.htm