

FLIGHT 93 NATIONAL MEMORIAL MISSION STATEMENT

"A common field one day. A field of honor forever."¹

May all who visit this place remember the collective acts of courage and sacrifice of the passengers and crew, revere this hallowed ground as the final resting place of those heroes, and reflect on the power of individuals who choose to make a difference.

Origins

The purpose of this document is to lay the foundation for the planning and development of a national memorial at the place where United Airlines Flight 93 crashed on September 11, 2001, in Somerset County, southwestern Pennsylvania. Congress authorized the creation of the Flight 93 National Memorial to commemorate the actions of the passengers and crew who "courageously gave their lives, thereby thwarting a planned attack on the Nation's Capital."

This document has been developed through the collaborative efforts of four partner organizations:

- Families of Flight 93, a private non-profit organization established to help develop and sustain a permanent memorial to the passengers and crew of Flight 93
- Flight 93 Memorial Task Force, an 80-member grassroots organization comprised of family members, community residents, first responders, educators, and other local, regional, and national participants
- Flight 93 Advisory Commission, a federally appointed body charged with making recommendations for the planning, design, construction, and management of the memorial to the Secretary of the Interior and Congress
- National Park Service, long-term steward of the memorial

The founding vision embodied in this document provides a clear direction for the design of the national memorial and future development and management decisions.

CONTEXT

The events of September 11, 2001, are forever etched into the hearts and souls of the family members and loved ones of those who died, the nation, and the world. The United States experienced the worst incident of terrorism in its history. The coordinated hijacking of four commercial airliners, the planned attack on symbolic targets, and the murder of innocent people were all tragic and shocking events. The extraordinary responses of individuals to the challenges they faced are inspiring and worthy of remembrance.

On that day, two commercial airliners, American Airlines Flight 11 carrying 92 passengers and crew, and United Airlines Flight 175 carrying 65 passengers and crew, were hijacked shortly after departure from Boston. Both planes were deliberately flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, resulting in the loss of all on board and 2,635 occupants of the World Trade Center, rescue workers, and innocent bystanders. A third plane, American Airlines Flight 77, was hijacked after departure from Washington, D.C., and flown into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, taking the lives of 64 passengers and crew and 125 in the building.

The fourth plane, United Airlines Flight 93, was delayed in its scheduled departure from Newark, New Jersey, to San Francisco, California. About 45 minutes into the flight, as the Boeing 757 was nearing Cleveland, Ohio, it abruptly changed course, heading southeast in the direction of Washington, D.C. Shortly before 10 a.m., it was observed flying low and erratically over southwestern Pennsylvania. Just after 10 a.m., the plane crashed at a cruising speed estimated at more than 500 miles per hour into a reclaimed strip mine at the edge of a wooded area in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Emergency responders, arriving at the scene minutes after the crash, found no survivors. All 33 passengers, 7 crew members, and the 4 hijackers were killed.

In the hours and days that followed, an astounding story about what happened on board Flight 93 was revealed. When the terrorists took over the plane, passengers and crew were able to telephone family members, friends, and emergency dispatchers to report the hijacking. Through these conversations, those on board Flight 93 learned about the horrific events unfolding at the World Trade Center and at the Pentagon.

As their phone conversations revealed, the passengers and crew of Flight 93 realized that their plane was also part of the planned attack. This realization led to a collective decision by the passengers and crew to stop the terrorists from achieving their goal. The story of the heroic actions of the passengers and crew of Flight 93 later was confirmed when the contents of the many telephone conversations and the cockpit voice recorder were reviewed. Although the details of what took place on board the flight will never be fully known, all 40 of the passengers and crew are recognized as heroes.

While the nation mourned the loss of life on that day, the selfless act of the passengers and crew of Flight 93 evoked respect and appreciation from people around the world. In the days and weeks following the tragedy, the nation experienced a rekindled sense of unity, strength, and resolve. Actions of the terrorists, intended to divide and demoralize the nation, had the opposite effect, and the crash of Flight 93 became a symbol of courage in the face of adversity and death. The site of the crash became a place of impromptu gathering where the public memorialized and commemorated these events while they struggled to comprehend their meaning.

Following an exhaustive field investigation and recovery effort during the autumn of 2001, the crash site was reclaimed. The crater was backfilled, and the area was planted with grass and wildflowers. The site was also fenced, and security was posted. At the same time, county and regional leaders, members of the local community, the families of the passengers and crew of Flight 93, and representatives from the National Park Service began to realize the importance of the crash site as a place of honor and of the need to preserve and protect it. Within six months of the tragic event, federal legislation was introduced to create a national memorial. Congress acted quickly to approve legislation creating the Flight 93 National Memorial.

PURPOSE

On September 24, 2002, the Flight 93 National Memorial Act (P.L. 107-226) was passed by Congress and signed by President George W. Bush, creating the Flight 93 National Memorial. The following statements represent shared understandings about the purposes for creating the memorial:

- Honor the passengers and crew members of Flight 93 who courageously gave their lives, thereby thwarting a planned attack on Washington, D.C.
- Allow the public to visit the site and express their feelings about the event and the passengers and crew of Flight 93
- Respect the rural landscape and preserve the solemn and tranquil setting of the crash site of Flight 93

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SITE

The events of September 11 and the dramatic story of Flight 93 are forever linked to this peaceful field. The following statements summarize why this place is so important that it has been established as a national memorial:

- The crash site is the final resting place of the passengers and crew of Flight 93.
- The heroic actions of the passengers and crew of Flight 93 are part of the transformational events of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States.

INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The Flight 93 National Memorial will be a place for individuals to learn about the events of September 11 and to find meaning and inspiration in their experience. In the future, interpretive media and programs will be developed around the key stories and ideas that illustrate the significance of the memorial and help to place the memorial in its national and international contexts. The primary interpretive themes for the Flight 93 National Memorial are:

- Flight 93 was the only hijacked plane on September 11 that failed to hit its intended target. The crash of Flight 93, only 20 minutes by air from Washington, D.C., was the direct result of the actions of the passengers and crew who gave their lives to prevent a larger disaster at the center of American government.
- The events of September 11, 2001, revealed the extraordinary bravery of ordinary men and women who, when challenged, responded with spontaneous leadership and collective acts of courage, sacrifice, and heroism.
- The first responders, the community, and those individuals and organizations that provided assistance in the recovery and investigation demonstrated compassion and exemplary service.
- Knowledge of the events surrounding September 11 contributes to a realization of the impact of intolerance, hatred, and violence.
- The public reaction to the events of September 11, including the actions of the passengers and crew of Flight 93, led to a strong sense of pride and patriotism and an affirmation of the value of human life.

THE MISSION

The mission of the Flight 93 National Memorial is to

- honor the heroism, courage, and enduring sacrifice of the passengers and crew of Flight 93;
- revere this hallowed ground as the final resting place of heroes who sacrificed their lives so that others would be spared;
- remember and commemorate the events of September 11, 2001;
- celebrate the lives of the passengers and crew of Flight 93;
- express the appreciation of a grateful nation forever changed by the events of September 11;
- educate visitors about the context of the events of September 11;
- offer a place of comfort, hope, and inspiration.

¹ These are the words of Captain Stephen Ruda, Los Angeles City Fire Department, describing the Flight 93 crash site. Ruda wrote the words on a quilted wall hanging sent to the memorial as a tribute to the passengers and crew of Flight 93.