

# LAND NOW!

## 9/11 AN ANNIVERSARY WORTH REMEMBERING BY SHANNON SALINSKY

*We at Flight Journal consider it to be an honor to present stories of those who were directly involved in the events of 9/11 as pilots or flight crew. This is yet another view of the event that has shaped our present and our future.*

**“Our plane has been hijacked.**

Flight attendant #1 stabbed. Flight attendant #5 stabbed. A business class passenger’s throat has been slashed and he is bleeding severely and may be dead. The captain is not flying the aircraft. Something’s terribly wrong. I see the water. I see the buildings.” After a short pause, she says, “We are flying low. We are flying very, very low. We are flying way too low! Oh my God!” The phone went dead.



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SHANNON S.  
SALINSKY  
AMERICAN AIRLINES  
MANAGEMENT

"A colleague relayed this information to us on a conference call at approximately 10:30 a.m. central time at American Airlines headquarters in Fort Worth. One of the flight attendants aboard hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 was able to connect with a manager at her base in Boston and relayed crucial information shortly before the aircraft crashed into the World Trade Center.

"Earlier, I was driving into work on a gorgeous Tuesday morning. The DJ of my favorite radio station said it was the 11th day of September and just in from the newsroom was a report that a small general aviation aircraft had hit one of the World Trade Center towers. I thought to myself, 'How horrible' and figured that someone flying solo had probably had a heart attack at the yoke or something.

"I continued my commute and, just as I whipped into the parking lot, the DJ broke in and said something I'll never forget. 'I don't mean to start a rumor and this is completely my personal opinion ... I could be wrong, but this doesn't feel like an accident to me.' And with the hair standing on the back of my neck, I grabbed my briefcase and headed into my job at American Airlines headquarters office in Ft. Worth, Texas."

Shannon Salinsky had just started the longest day at work she would ever have.

Every minute of that day seemed like an eternity for most Americans, but most especially for airline crew members and pilots everywhere.

## Overseas, Captain Jon Smith begins his day

CAPTAIN JON SMITH  
PILOT, UNITED  
AIRLINES FLIGHT 22  
BOEING 767

FLIGHT PLAN:  
FRANKFURT,  
GERMANY BOUND  
FOR DALLAS/FT.  
WORTH (DFW)



In Frankfurt, Germany, flight operations was buzzing with the familiar sound of dot matrix printers kicking out flight plans. It was 9:00 a.m. in Frankfurt and 3:00 a.m. in New York. A sea of pilots in navy blue made small talk over cups of coffee while milling about operations. As the smell of jet fuel filled his lungs, the first officer conducted a routine "walk-around inspection" of the Boeing 767 aircraft.

In command of United Airlines Flight 22, bound for Dallas/Ft. Worth (DFW) was Capt. Jon Smith. After the crew preflight briefing and as the flight prepared for boarding, station personnel notified Capt. Smith that there was a sensitive security issue with a small group of passengers regarding proper documents and more scrutiny would need to be applied to the passenger manifest before the flight could depart. The security officials eventually cleared all the passengers for boarding and the flight departed 40 minutes late.

A few hours into the flight and typical for a long haul flight, the crew tuned the VHF radio to the common radio frequency where pilots exchange general information such as turbulence levels as they cross the Atlantic Ocean.

It was reported over the common radio frequency that a small aircraft had hit the World Trade Center. Capt. Smith and crew thought it was sad, but shrugged it off as perhaps bad weather or fog. Fall was approaching the East Coast and that would not be out of the ordinary given the time of year. What they couldn't know at the time was how gorgeous the weather was along the entire eastern seaboard and it was not fog that caused this crash.

**7:45 a.m. EST: Terrorists begin boarding in Boston**

Mohamed Atta and Abdulaziz al-Omari board American Airlines Flight 11. It departed 14 minutes late from Boston Logan International (BOS) bound for Los Angeles (LAX) with five other hijackers onboard. None of the passengers seated near them could know that their seatmates had been training for years for a mission they would soon execute that would change America forever.

## An airline captain and a Green Air Force lieutenant arrive at work

Capt. Wayne Weyer of American Airlines hadn't yet heard that anything unusual was happening in New York. He was on the fourth of a four-day



CAPTAIN WAYNE  
WEYER  
PILOT, AMERICAN  
AIRLINES FLIGHT 156  
BOEING 757

FLIGHT PLAN:  
DALLAS/FT.  
WORTH (DFW)  
TO SAN JUAN (SJU)

trip. The B757 aircraft taxied to the runway and made its scheduled departure time of 7:30 a.m. EST time.

American Airlines Flight 156 lifted off on a beautiful Caribbean morning for a short hop back to San Juan (SJU). From there it was scheduled to fly to Miami International Airport (MIA) and then back to DFW.



AIR FORCE  
FIRST LT.  
HEATHER  
PENNEY  
PILOT  
ANDREWS AFB  
F-16

As Weyer climbed his airliner up to cruise altitude in the Caribbean, Air Force First Lt. Heather Penney saluted the Andrews AFB gate guard on a beautiful autumn day as she drove onto the base. She was in awe, as always, on the drive past the flightline as the jets lined up like soldiers. The familiar smells of jet fuel filled the air and the sounds of APU carts and the high-pitched whistle of an engine running at idle in the distance reverberated in her ears.

"For a time it was just another Tuesday morning. We had just returned from a Red Flag operations training mission. You never hope to go to war, but there is still a tremendous satisfaction in exercising the skill sets and capabilities for such. Red Flag was a tremendous success. Our commander had given us that Monday off to reconnect with our families, so Tuesday was our first day back."

Penney was a young first lieutenant, freshly qualified on the F-16, and was totally by the book and still learning her craft.



CLIFF ROBERTSON  
ACTOR AND ACTIVE  
PILOT  
FLIGHT PLAN:  
LONG ISLAND,  
NEW YORK  
LOS ANGELES, CA

## Terrorists depart Boston, Newark and Washington and actor Cliff Robertson prepares to take off

General aviation pilot and Academy Award-winning actor Cliff Robertson was at his East Hampton, Long Island, New York, hangar kicking the tires of his Beechcraft Baron 58 and methodically completing his preflight checklist shortly after 8:00 a.m. EST. He was headed westbound to California for a business meeting.

**8:14 a.m.:** United Airlines Flight 175, Boeing 767, departs from BOS bound for (LAX) with five hijackers aboard.

**8:20 a.m.:** American Airlines Flight 77, a Boeing 757, departs from Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD) for LAX with five hijackers aboard.

**8:42 a.m.:** United Airlines Flight 93, a Boeing 757, takes off from Newark International Airport (EWR), bound for San Francisco International Airport (SFO), with four hijackers aboard.

**8:44 am:** Only minutes into the flight, Flight 175 from BOS is hijacked.

**8:46 a.m.:** Flight 11, the first LAX-bound flight out of Boston, crashes at roughly 466mph, or 425 knots, into the north face of the North Tower of the World Trade Center (WTC), between floors 93 and 99.

**8:50 a.m.:** Hijacking begins on Flight 77.

**8:58 a.m.:** Flight 175, another Boston to LAX flight, takes a heading toward New York City.





## The Air Force gets the word

Lt. Penney's squadron bay was empty and very quiet as some of their people were still on leave. It was a crystal blue and gorgeous September day. They were gathering for a long-range scheduling meeting, trying to nail down who was on first base as they began to move into a different training phase.

She remembers, "There was a knock at the door and someone said, 'Hey, an airplane just flew into the World Trade Center.' We thought, 'Gosh, it's a gorgeous day here. New York isn't that far away ... what kind of bozo would hit such a large building, was there a layer of scud running up and down the Hudson?'"

Another knock came and someone reported, "A second plane has hit the second World Trade Center tower, and it may have been on purpose."

Penney and others went into the squadron bar and turned on the news. "The whole world had made the assumption that it was small aircraft that hit the towers, yet we were just then discovering they were airliners.

"We stood in the doorway watching the coverage for what felt like eternity, but was probably only a minute or so. We all said the same thing: 'We're fighter pilots. We absolutely HAVE to get airborne.' "

***"THAT IS CORRECT. 2 ACFT—APPARENTLY AAL HAVE HIT THE WORLD TRADE CENTER IN NYC. UAL HAS ALSO LOST A FLIGHT."***

## An actor in a real-life drama

Robertson, a lifelong pilot says, "Just as I got east of Manhattan, I saw a big puff of smoke on the south end of the island, but I really didn't think much of it. I just thought it was some kind of industrial activity around the New York area."

Keeping a westbound heading, he didn't see any other aircraft in the sky. "I could see the smoke and I wondered what it was. I wasn't really alarmed at first. It was a beautiful day and you could see the smoke from the building so clearly from my altitude.

"I got lower, about 7,000 feet, because I was curious to know what was happening and then I saw the second puff of smoke. By now I'm thinking it was a bomb of some kind. I called

the flight center and asked what the story was. The said they didn't know yet."

A few minutes later, after a pattern of events had developed and decisions were being made, ATC called Robertson and said, "527 Romeo, land at the nearest immediate airport."

He remembers, "All I could think was that I'd never been asked to land my aircraft—ever. That just doesn't happen in America. But, given that I'd just seen two huge smoke clouds coming from New York City and the fact that I was flying solo with no one else to help analyze this information, I felt it prudent to follow the instructions I'd been given and land as soon as possible."

New York was well behind him, so he flew to Allentown, Pennsylvania and there was still no answer from ATC. He thought that maybe there was a national disaster like an atom bomb. He landed in Allentown.

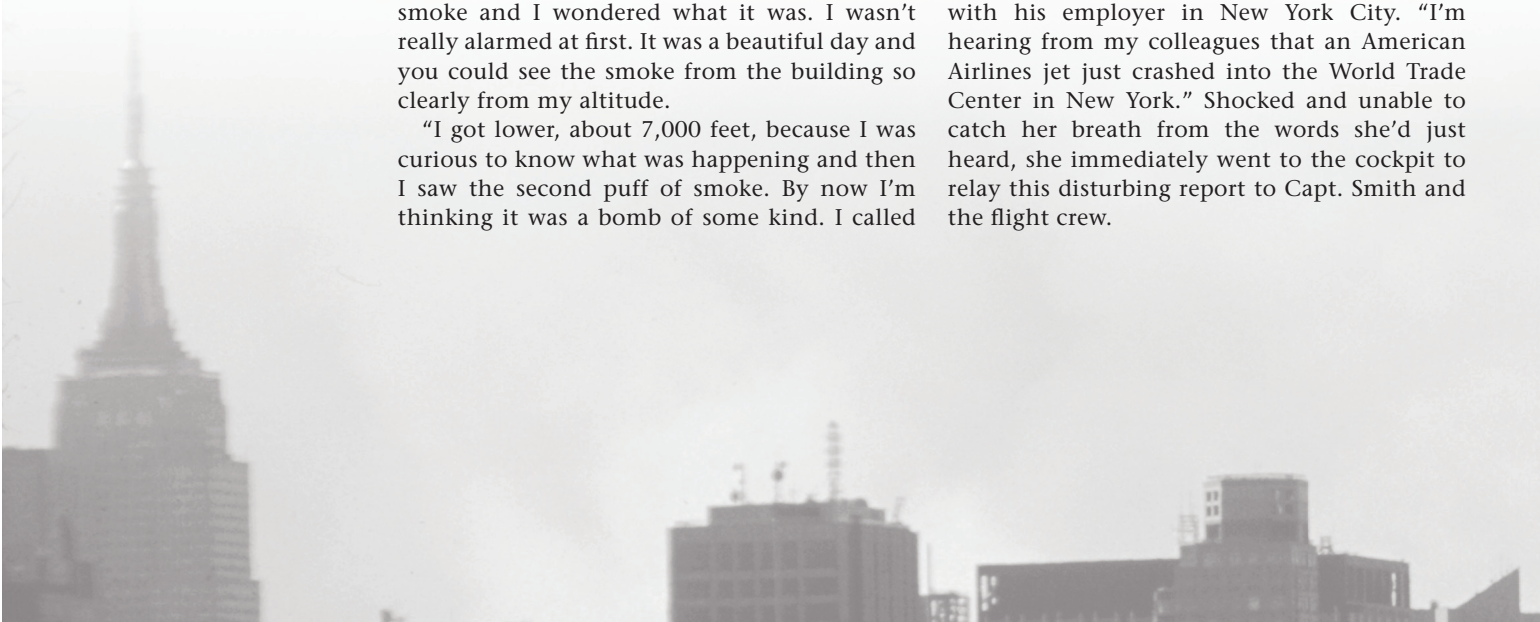
"There were a couple of pilots on the tarmac when I landed. Everybody was in the same boat I was, wondering what the hell was going on."

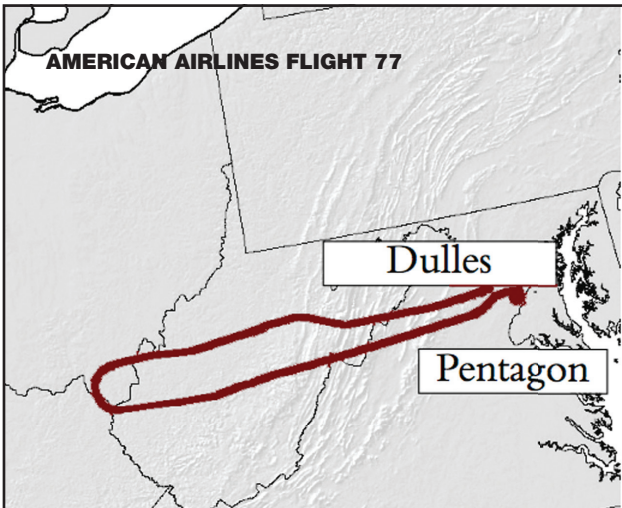
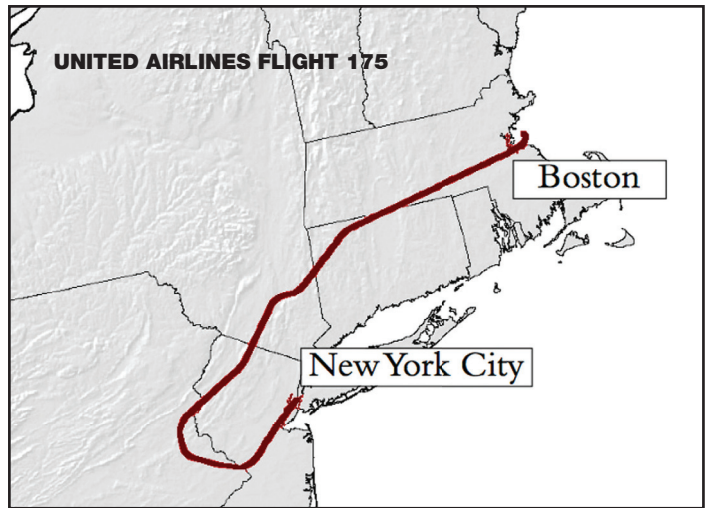
One of the other pilots said, "We don't know, but we're hearing about more problems on a farm in Pennsylvania," Robertson went into the Fixed Base Operation (FBO). They had very little information as everyone gathered around the TV trying to understand what was happening.

## Inbound over the Atlantic: the threat becomes personal

At approximately 9:00 a.m. EST, Capt. Smith and United Airlines Flight 22 had left Germany behind and were over the Atlantic well en route to DFW. The cabin crew was looking forward to their days off when they returned to base. Summer was over, children were back in school and that first cool breeze would soon blow across the scorched DFW metroplex.

A flight attendant working in first class was stopped by a passenger who had been a participant on a conference call via airphone with his employer in New York City. "I'm hearing from my colleagues that an American Airlines jet just crashed into the World Trade Center in New York." Shocked and unable to catch her breath from the words she'd just heard, she immediately went to the cockpit to relay this disturbing report to Capt. Smith and the flight crew.





Capt. Smith and the flight deck crew immediately sensed that the report they had heard earlier and this rumor may be connected. With his chest pounding, Smith sent an Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting System (ACARS) message to Air Traffic Control (ATC) in hopes of learning more information. Never in his wildest imagination did he dream what the ACARS message system would return. "THAT IS CORRECT. 2 ACFT—APPARENTLY AAL HAVE HIT THE WORLD TRADE CENTER IN NYC. UAL HAS ALSO LOST A FLIGHT."

Capt. Smith stared at the incoming ACARS message in utter disbelief. His head was reeling and he immediately thought about the group of passengers on board his flight, which had required an extra security screening out of

Frankfurt. He had a chilling thought: could his aircraft be in danger as well?

He told the Purser, "Send the flight attendants up, a couple at a time. We need to devise a plan."

**9:03 a.m.:** Flight 175, Boston to LAX, crashes at about 590mph into the south face of the South Tower of the World Trade Center, banked between floors 77 and 85.

### Reality hits the airline community

"I was taking my first day off in over a year," said Capt. Tim Adam, director of the Flight Training Center Operations at United Airlines, "when my pager began to buzz with a text message

**Three of the four hijacked flights found their targets. The immediate shutdown of all flights reportedly foiled an unknown number of other hijackings.**







**Lt. Heather Penney taxiing out on a mission before 9/11. When she took off on that day, she had barely enough ammo for a 1-second burst and no missiles.**

that read 'airplane hits world trade center.' That was followed with 'United 175 missing.' I was just pulling into my friend's driveway. It was around nine o'clock and we had planned on golfing that day."

Adam and his friends were no longer in the frame of mind to play golf and he headed straight to the Crisis Center in Denver, which was already activated.

"My boss was already there and, as soon as I walked in, he told me it was Jason." When Adam asked what he meant, his boss said, "Jason—he was on 93."

Adam had hired Jason Dahl as the standards captain. "I had become good friends with him and his wife. In fact, we were at their house a few weeks before that fateful day. Jason volunteered to fly the trip because it would get him home in time to celebrate his fifth wedding anniversary. It was a nice, easy two-day trip. It



**TIM ADAM DIRECTOR  
UNITED AIRLINES  
FLIGHT TRAINING  
CENTER OPERATIONS**

could have been any of our flight managers on that trip, including me."

Adam and his colleagues knew, like the three crashes earlier that day, that there were no survivors on board. He also knew that Jason always left his schedule with his wife.





the first time in history, a national ground stop had been instituted.

### **Frustrated fighter pilots straining at the bit**

At Andrews Air Force Base, the problem with getting fighters airborne that morning was that the D.C. National Guard, which was on Andrews Air Force base, did not belong to NEADS/NORAD. "We were not an alert squadron. We did not belong to the Air Defense system for the U.S.," said Lt. Penney.

The civilian chain of command for a normal guard unit runs up through the Governor, which allows them to take care of regional emergencies. The D.C. International Guard command goes to the President through the Secretary of Army, the Secretary of Defense, the Vice President and finally to the President.

"We had never had to exercise that part of our command before. How on earth do we get airborne? We didn't belong to NORAD or Air Defense First Air Force and we had no idea how we would begin to energize our civilian chain of command in order to get airborne. We couldn't get airborne unless we had permission. We were real-time ad hoc-ing.

Penney says, "The weapons officer said we needed missiles on the aircraft, so he quickly called the ammo guys and said they needed to get some live AIM-9s (heat seekers).

"Those were the only missiles we had and you have to build those babies up. They're located in a non-populated area and the trucks that they use to haul these things to us move very slowly. It was going to be at least a couple of crucial hours before they got those to us. There was so much confusion. Who do we talk to? How do we get airborne? How do we get permission to take off?"

"I have no idea what I said to her; to this day I still can't remember. This was the most stressful professional day of my life. I have a strong faith and I believe God gave me the words I needed that day. I gave her confirmation that her husband was in command of 93 and there were no survivors. I just listened after that. I'll never forget I was sitting on her steps trying to comfort her while the media was putting his photo on TV."

Adam said the first few hours were a blur. Soon the Dahl residence phone was ringing off the hook with people like Connie Chung and Peter Jennings wanting an interview. "We protected her privacy the best we could."

### **An unprecedented decision: all traffic is grounded**

At 9:26 a.m. EST, the FAA banned takeoffs of all civilian aircraft regardless of destination. For

**9:28 a.m.:** Hijackers storm the cockpit on Flight 93 over Pennsylvania and take over the flight.

**9:37 a.m.:** Flight 77 crashes into the western side of the Pentagon.

### **Stranded in San Juan**

After landing at San Juan, Captain Weyer taxied to one of the gates on the south side of American's terminal. With a short ground time, Captain Weyer left his first officer to do the walk-around as he went into operations to check the weather and gather the paperwork and the flight plan.

While standing in operations, he saw news footage covering the north World Trade Center tower. "When I looked up it was belching black smoke from what looked like a hole in the side of the building."

Someone in operations said, "A small aircraft crashed into World Trade Center in New York."



LAND NOW!

FAA flight status of aircraft in the air after 9/11 attack in 2001, Chantilly, Virginia.



Then, unbelievably, a few minutes later, a second aircraft, which looked eerily like a commercial airliner, crashed into the second tower.

“Shaken, I returned with the paperwork to the aircraft. My co-pilot had heard from some of our ground personnel what was happening,

### ***“U.S. AIRSPACE IS CLOSED TO ALL AIRCRAFT, STATE YOUR INTENTIONS.”***

and I told him what I had just seen on TV. About that time, our push-out crew chief called us on the intercom and said that he had heard that one of our (AA’s) airplanes had just crashed into the Pentagon.

“My first officer and I just looked at each other in utter disbelief. I remember how it seemed to become much more real and much more personal to me when I heard that one of our airplanes was involved. A few minutes later, with all passengers on board, the entry door closed and the jet bridge pulled back, my first officer called Ramp Control for our clearance to be pushed back and to start our engines. Just then, out of the corner of my left eye, I saw our agent standing in the jetbridge doorway waving her arms wildly to get our attention. Almost simultaneously, our push crew relayed to us that the push-back was cancelled and that ‘They’re shutting the whole thing down.’” What happened next is one of my most vivid memories of that day that I’ll never forget—my first officer slowly and methodically took off his headset, took a long breath, turned to me and said, ‘You know, Wayne, this feels different.

This job will never be the same again.’ I later learned that those were prophetic words.”

Capt. Weyer stood at the entry door as the passengers deplaned; partially to console them and partially to be consoled. He shared what little information he had with the passengers because many of them had no idea what was happening.

The crew called a nearby hotel to secure rooms, knowing that it would likely be days before they would fly home.

“The hotel lobby had two large TVs, which were attracting a steadily growing crowd. I stopped to watch (how could you not?) and it was there I saw the collapse of the first tower. Having just been at the top of that tower six weeks prior after taking my nephew to New York for a short trip as a graduation gift, I was well aware of the size of the World Trade Center towers. Unbelievable! Even an airliner shouldn’t be able to bring down something that huge, should it?”

“I went to my room, unpacked and turned my cell phone on. Over 30 messages were waiting for me. Concerns from a lot of people definitely made me feel better. I guess experiencing the love and decency of family and friends was an antidote to the utter inhumanity unfolding around us.”

The crew met up for lunch. Several of the flight attendants were very distraught. Capt. Weyer’s cabin crew, which he had just picked up in San Juan, was Boston-based and they had just flown in that morning on an early departure from (BOS). They knew, and had even spoken with, some of the Boston-based flight

attendants who had perished that morning when Flight 11 crashed into the first Tower.

## **Providing a defense wasn't easy**

The frustration level on Andrews Air Force base was growing. Lt. Heather Penney remembers, "I felt very unemotional—my main frustration was we plan, we study, we train, we practice how to go to war yet here we were, involved in something where we had no idea what was happening or what the threat was. We had no idea how to energize our chain of command. We all wanted to contribute and do what we had trained to do, but no one knew how to get there from here. We were not dealing with a well-oiled machine.

"Finally someone said the Vice President had called the Tower and said, 'Get someone airborne!' and that was all that we needed. 'We had a ton of gear to put on and, as a fresh, young lieutenant, I was trying to remember everything. Finally, we got to the jets.'"

Penney says, "This was not a scheduled takeoff and everything was happening on the fly. Typically, there is a very regimented scheduled take off time; maintenance is down there two hours prior to departure going through their checks, the forms are ready. The pilots show up and shake the crew chief's hand, take a look at the 781s, do your walk around, and then start to build your nest in the cockpit. There is a very specific order of how to fire the aircraft—pilots say the same thing every time. The crew chief says the same thing every time. It's all of these things that put you into the zone to go fly. It's totally memorized and almost like a well-choreographed dance. This day, the dance was moving to a different rhythm. "

Flight 77 had already hit the Pentagon and by the time Penney took off, the FAA had closed all the airspace. Penney said that basically, after they launched, she was a VFR F-16 equipped with radar and headed westbound and looking for "something." Exactly what, she didn't yet know. By the time they started off in a westerly direction, Flight 93 had already crashed in Pennsylvania.

"Not knowing yet if any other aircraft were going to be hijacked, after we were airborne, a free fire zone was exerted; essentially, those were our rules of engagement. This meant that each fighter pilot had total authority to hit the button if we thought it was warranted. It was an incredible testament of courage, professionalism and diligence of everyone who flew those three days. No one got trigger-happy.

"We had such permissive rules of engagement and yet we had no one with a happy finger on the button. It was a true testament to the professionalism and restraint of the individuals

who flew during that first week.

"In addition, the rigor to which we investigated and do what we needed to do that day was amazing. All of it strengthens my faith in the military."

The actual facts are that the only permissions given were to take off and there were no official rules of engagement given the pilots. Those were issued long after the fact that night. When the aircraft took off, all they were told was to protect the airspace at all costs. Do whatever was necessary to make sure that no aircraft penetrated the DC-area airspace. This was a tall order considering the aircraft were essentially unarmed: the missiles wouldn't arrive until entirely too late and all they were able to procure prior to takeoff was 100 rounds of 20mm practice ammunition per aircraft. Practice ammo would have been of limited use because they are solid slugs, not high explosive. Plus, 100 rounds wasn't even a one-second burst. Hidden in the grim order to protect the airspace at all cost, even though unarmed, was an unspoken expectation that to complete their mission a pilot may have to ram an airliner and eject, if possible.

## **Are there bad guys on board?**

While Lt. Penney was milling around the East Coast at 500mph, out over the Atlantic, Capt. Smith was still devising a strategic plan to protect his cockpit and the rest of the crew and passengers. After communicating with his entire cabin crew, he then instructed the first officer to disable the airphone system. If

***"FINALLY SOMEONE SAID THE VICE PRESIDENT HAD CALLED THE TOWER AND SAID, 'GET SOMEONE AIRBORNE!'"***

there were terrorists on his flight, at least they wouldn't be able to communicate with any other planes.

Knowing he still had his relief pilot if needed, next on his impromptu plan was to have the first officer change his clothes before he left the cockpit. Captain Smith wanted him to blend in with the rest of the passengers. He then instructed him to sit in first class, where he was close to the cockpit.

"Prior to 9/11, it was not at all uncommon for pilots to have a small pocketknife on them. I instructed my first officer to sit in the cabin and watch every move every passenger made. I instructed him to keep his pocketknife on him and readily available. The last set of instructions I gave him was to get physical, if needed, and not let anyone come near the cockpit for any reason."

As they closed in on U.S. airspace, they made their initial contacts with air traffic. ATC