

Advertisement

AFTER THE ATTACKS: AMERICAN FLIGHT 11

# AFTER THE ATTACKS: AMERICAN FLIGHT 11; A Plane Left Boston and Skimmed Over River and Mountain in a Deadly Detour

By JOHN KIFNER

Published: September 13, 2001

American Airlines Flight 11 to Los Angeles took off on schedule out of the tangle of construction choking Logan International Airport in Boston, right on time at 7:59 Tuesday morning.

Capt. John Ogonowski was at the controls, a 50-year-old veteran pilot who lived on a farm north of the city and was looking forward to a family picnic on the weekend.

His co-pilot was First Officer Thomas McGuinness, and there were 9 flight attendants and 81 passengers, a seemingly everyday mixture: a television producer, some businessmen, a retired ballet dancer, an actress and photographer, a young man who had made a success in the new technology economy.

And several hijackers.

The plane held on course, almost due west, for only 16 minutes.

Just past Worcester, Mass., instead of taking a southerly turn, the Boeing 767 swung to the north at 8:15. It had been taken over.

Shortly after the plane took off, Justice Department officials said, an ugly, bloody scene -- almost identical on each of the four airliners that were hijacked Tuesday -- played itself out in the cabin.

On each plane, the officials said, three to six men pulled out knives and box cutters that they had apparently concealed in their carry-on luggage, perhaps in shaving kits. They threatened or slashed the flight attendants, possibly to get the pilots to open the cockpit door.

Five minutes later, at 8:20, Flight 11 failed to follow an instruction to climb to its cruising altitude of 31,000 feet. It was this point that air controllers suspected something was wrong. And just about then the plane's transponder, a piece of equipment that broadcast its location, went out.

Captain Ogonowski apparently tried to signal air controllers by "keying" the microphone, pushing its button intermittently to signal that something was wrong and at one point allowing them to hear the voice of the hijacker, The Christian Science Monitor reported.

"Don't do anything foolish; you won't be hurt," the newspaper reported that the hijacker said, quoting air controllers. "We have more planes. We have other planes."

In the cabin, meanwhile, one flight attendant made a telephone call -- either on a cell phone or on a phone on the back of a seat -- to the American Airlines Operations Center, officials said, warning that a hijacking was in progress and giving the seat number of one hijackers, providing a crucial lead to investigators.

Neither the airline, the flight attendants union nor federal investigators would reveal the name of the flight attendant.

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

FROM THE DIRECTORS OF LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

Advertise on NYTimes.com

MOST E-MAILED

MOST VIEWED



1. DAVID BROOKS  
The Opportunity Gap



2. WELL  
Relief for Joints Besieged by Arthritis



3. OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR  
Let's Draft Our Kids



4. In Dieting, Magic Isn't a Substitute for Science



5. GENETIC GAMBLE  
A Life-Death Predictor Adds to a Cancer's Strain



6. ESSAY  
A Blip That Speaks of Our Place in the Universe



7. Novel Blood Treatment Lures Athletes to Germany

8. Seeking to Lure the Crowds Again. But Hold the Borscht.



9. States Face Tough Choices Even as Downturn Ends



10. On the Beach, in the Buff. In Wisconsin?

Go to Complete List »

Show My Recommendations

On a beautiful late summer day, Flight 11 headed northwest, where the Berkshires, the Taconic Range and the beginning of the Green Mountains mark the spot where the borders of Massachusetts, New York and Vermont intersect.

Crossing into New York, the plane flew into the area known as the Albany-Schenectady-Troy triangle then veered left over Amsterdam and headed due south to New York City.

It was 8:29.

The flight path was straight now, along the Hudson Valley and then right above the broad river itself.

It should have been a leisurely flight to Los Angeles, the time passed, perhaps, with one of those paperback novels in which heroes battle the schemes of terrorists. But now the schemes were real.

In the cabin were David Angell, an executive producer of the television comedy "Frasier," along with his wife, Lynn. Officials at NBC said the couple were on the way home from a vacation on Cape Cod. Also returning home from Cape Cod was Berry Berenson Perkins, 53, an actress and photographer and the widow of the actor Anthony Perkins. There was Daniel Lewin, 31, a co-founder of Akamai Technologies Inc., based in Cambridge, Mass., an Internet content provider, and Sonia Puopolo, a retired ballet dancer. There was Robert Hayes, 37, a salesman for machinery to record compact discs and a surfer who worked mostly from home so he could spend time with his wife and sons, 4 years old and 6 months old. He had met his wife, Debora, when she was a customer service agent for Trans World Airlines dealing with a flight he had missed. Somehow, she said yesterday, he had a premonition about this flight, taking a walk alone the night before and hugging her tight before he left for the airport.

The plane was low now, only about 900 feet high, and the silvery twin towers of the World Trade Center rose above the tip of Manhattan.

In the Windows on the World restaurant on the 107th floor of the north tower, dozens of businessmen, members of the exclusive World Trade Center Club, were enjoying a leisurely breakfast and the spectacular view when Flight 11 slammed into the building 20 floors below.

It was 8:48 a.m.

Photo: Capt. John Ogonowski, American Airlines pilot on Flight 11. (Associated Press) Map of the east coast shows the route of American Flight 11.

 SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

 PRINT

FROM THE DIRECTORS OF  
**LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE**

 Get 50% Off The New York Times & Free All Digital Access.

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



WORLD »



Spreading Faith Where Faith Itself Is Suspect

DINING & WINE »



A Welcome Family Outing

N.Y. / REGION »



Waiting for Moonlight on Jamaica Bay

OPINION »

**Op-Ed: A Confucian Constitution**  
The longstanding Confucian tradition of "humane authority" is most likely to drive debates over China's political future.

ART & DESIGN »



Scenes From the Meadowlandscape

OPINION »



Borderlines: Oh, (No) Canada!

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y./Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Autos](#) | [Site Map](#)  
[© 2012 The New York Times Company](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Your Ad Choices](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Terms of Sale](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Advertise](#)