

These two stories also validate points I made earlier in this book explaining why the current economic system creates an inextricable interdependence between the major press, whose gigantic parent companies trade on Wall Street, and the government, which serves Wall Street. Corporate media in America is inherently unable to tell some truths, or even contemplate certain issues; it must survive in a diseased political and economic ecosystem, dependent upon its own food chain, and therefore bound to participate in its crimes.

In the mind of an air traffic controller

The easy task on 9/11 was confirming that hijackings were in progress. The impossible task was locating them.

If the September 11th air traffic controllers ever became fully aware of how the wargames had so perfectly neutralized their desperate efforts, the consequences might be unmanageable. The ATCs must have been pulling their hair out that morning in Dantean anguish, screaming, demanding, “We can’t find them. We can’t ID the hijacks. Somebody please get the exercise crap off our screens! Remove the inserts! Have any live-flies involved in any FTXs squawk now so that we can find the real things!”

These were proud, dedicated professionals, so severely wounded by 9/11 that they might just not give a damn anymore about jobs, pensions, benefits, medical insurance, jail time for breaking secrecy oaths, or even physical retaliation, if they saw a larger picture. People who have been broken beyond a certain spiritual and emotional point can, on occasion, become fearless and immune to any kind of pressure or threat.

As sure as I recall every detail of my two shootings as a police officer, several nasty fights, and some other terrifying moments, I know, as any combat veteran will tell you, that these controllers are frequently and involuntarily reliving every second of that day over and over. They are stuck in a continuous replay loop of a horror film in which they are characters, and — as they try to heal — are desperately seeking the “Stop/Eject” button. But they can’t find it.

Self-forgiveness after trauma like this is hard to come by, even if you did nothing wrong — no evil, and no mistake — to trigger it. Any major trauma, earned or not, evokes an instant need to find out why it happened to you; to find your error and correct it so that it never happens again. It would be too frightening to think that there may have been nothing at all you could have done to prevent (or correct) it. The same thing might happen to you again then. Your mind and soul believe that possibility to be an un-survivable experience. All you want is for the damn tape to stop playing.

A story about one ATC’s pain says it all.

Ed Ballinger

Would you speak out if you had 44 years as a controller, were close to retirement and in poor health? Was it worth chasing the questions that nagged at you, when

you just weren't sure that there wasn't some reasonable explanation? Making waves would, you might think, only keep you stuck in it more; keep you from moving on.

Ed Ballinger was the ATC handling both Flight 93, departing from Newark, and Flight 175 from Boston. So he was obviously aware of multiple hijackings occurring in real time. His story also shows that he was well aware of Flight 11's fate in close to real time. It was he who would have first detected a missed radio transmission, a transponder being turned off, or a sudden and unauthorized course change.

As the "hijackings" were in progress, and on his own initiative, Ed Ballinger gave his "best-possible" warnings to scores of United pilots. He did it on his own initiative and without any direction: as we shall see, even the National Command Authority remained deadly silent for almost 77 minutes after the second hijack and first impact (when everyone knew it was a synchronized attack), until Flight 93 had become the fourth confirmed hijacking.

A story in Chicago's *Daily Herald* about Ballinger's ordeal didn't mention the wargames.⁹ Ballinger didn't mention them either. He must have known about them. The whole Northeast Sector where he worked knew about them, and was in one way or another participating in them. No one would ever take the chance of having a wargame exercise and then not brief the affected controllers. Otherwise they would have begun initiating emergency responses and setting off alarms that would have produced unpredictable results that might have spread throughout the system.

Suburban Flight Dispatcher to Recount Worst Day

Today, Ed Ballinger will speak to a roomful of strangers about the one subject he doesn't care to discuss: The first two hours of his shift as a flight dispatcher for United Airlines on the morning of September 11, 2001.

The Arlington Heights resident and former United Airlines employee will meet with a sub-committee of the 9/11 commission in Washington, DC, so panel members can decide whether his testimony warrants his appearance before the full commission.

Ballinger is there because he was in charge of United Flights 175 and 93 when they crashed into the World Trade Center and a field near Shanksville, PA.¹⁰

Because perhaps, just perhaps, offering his story will calm the whispering thought that troubles him still: If he'd been told the full extent of what was unfolding sooner that morning, he might have saved Flight 93.

"I don't know what [the panel appearance] is going to be," he said Tuesday after arriving in the capital. "They want to know what I did and why. I've been told it's not finger pointing. It's just finding out what happened."

Part of what happened was his 44-year career at United crumbled after September 11. He found it too hard emotionally to go on with his job as before.... "In my judgment, he is a vital part of the story because Ed Ballinger is the last human being to talk to [Flight 93's cockpit]," said the Wilmette Republican, whose district includes much of Arlington Heights.

"And when all is said and done, he was responsible for preventing multiple hijackings," Kirk added. "I think he probably foiled [another] hijacking...."

"When September 11 came along, that morning, I had 16 flights taking off from the East Coast of the US to the West Coast," he said. "When I sat down, these 16 flights were taking off or just getting ready to take off."

Then the first American Airlines planes struck New York and the Pentagon.

[Note: if this is correct, then NORAD and the White House and the Pentagon *all* knew that three hijackings had occurred by this time. Yet they issued no warnings. Ballinger had to do it by himself.]

Ballinger contacted all his flights to warn them. But United Flight 175 "was not acting appropriately."

He asked Flight 175 to respond. The pilot didn't reply and Ballinger was forced to conclude he'd been compromised and that he was rogue.

[This is exactly what long-standing FAA procedure told him to assume. See Chapter 17.]

By now, the situation was terribly different from previous hijackings Ballinger had handled. **In two hours, he sent 122 messages.**

"I was like screaming on the keyboard. I think I talked to two flights visually. The rest was all banging out short messages," he said.

Realizing what was going on, he sent all his airplanes one message: "Beware of cockpit intrusion."

"93 called me back and says, 'Hi, Ed. Confirmed.'"

Ballinger said he didn't wait for orders from his supervisors, or for Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta's decision to ground all flights. He immediately tried to get his pilots down on the nearest Tarmac.

"As soon as I had a grasp of what was going on... I sent it out immediately. It was before Mineta, and even before the airlines told us to alert the crews," he said.

Dispatchers were told by superiors: Don't tell the pilots why we want them to land.

[Question: Why not? To avoid confirming the attacks were in progress to any airline pilot who didn't yet know, thereby risking an uncontrollable and possibly successful intervention? At least one hijack had already struck the WTC, so the dispatchers' superiors need not have worried about terrorists blowing up the planes in mid air; bombs were not the mode of attack this time. Had the pilots been told about the multiple hijackings and the WTC impact of Flight 175, any struggle for control of the plane could only diminish the eventual death toll, not increase it. All over the country, brave "real" Americans were rising to the challenge, doing whatever they could without waiting for anyone to tell them what to do. They knew damn well what to do.]

"One of the things that upset me was that they knew 45 minutes before that American Airlines had a problem. I put the story together myself (from news accounts)," Ballinger said....

"Perhaps if I had the information sooner, I might have gotten the message to 93 to bar the door."

Perhaps, but [Illinois Congressman Mark] Kirk is adamant that Ballinger did save the passengers and crew of United Flight 23, which on September 11 was about to depart from Newark, NJ, to Los Angeles. Kirk believes Flight 23 was going to be commandeered.

Thanks to Ballinger's quick call, the flight crew told passengers it had a mechanical problem and immediately returned to the gate.

Later, Ballinger was told six men initially wouldn't get off the plane. Later, when they did, they disappeared into the crowd, never to return. Later, authorities checked their luggage and found copies of the Qu'ran and al-Qaida instruction sheets.

"I felt good about that one," Ballinger said.

Kirk admits it's speculation, but said he believes "there are 200 people walking around today because of Ed Ballinger."

The suspect passengers were never found, and are probably still at large, Kirk said....

Ballinger said he was never the same after September 11, and was reluctant to return to work.

"That first day, I'm lucky I didn't hit anyone," he said. "I drove through every red light getting home as quickly as possible. I wanted to get home and medicate myself."

At work, he started second-guessing his own decisions and became, in his words, "ultra-ultra conservative."

"I came to a point where nothing was safe enough," he recalled. "[I] couldn't even make a decision. It put you in jeopardy in every respect."

At age 63, he was told to take a medical leave and long-term disability. He said he couldn't do that. He was then asked if he could retire in six hours.

A Social Security Administration psychiatrist put him on total disability.¹¹

What if Ed Ballinger had heard the anguished commentary of his brother and sister ATCs on the destroyed FAA tape? What would have happened if they compared notes? They still can.

Most of the ATCs who testified did so behind closed doors or, when in public, were circumspect and not asked any important questions. The testimony we know about never once mentioned details of wargames other than what had already been published (and left equally unexamined) in the press.

As pieces came together I continued the investigation.

The CIA and the NRO

Getting wargame responses from the CIA and the NRO was not at all difficult. Plausible deniability, properly emplaced, always provides layers of comfort and permits gracious behavior for those it shields. After speaking with Arias I called CIA headquarters on May 14th. A CIA press officer listened politely, gave me an e-mail address and promised to quickly evaluate my questions and tell me where to send them. She kept her word.

From: michetk [michetk@ucia.gov]

Sent: Friday, May 14, 2004 11:59 AM

To: Mike Ruppert

Subject: Re: Journalist Questions -- NRO Plane Into Bldg exercise and Dod/NORAD Live-Fly Hijack and Intercept Exercises on September 11 2001

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Mike,

I looked at your questions and I believe the best person for you to talk with is the director of NRO's public affairs-- Rick Osborne [sic] on 703 808 1013.

If you need anything else please let me know.

M

I called the NRO on May 17 and left a message for Oborn (CIA had misspelled his name). The receptionist gave me his email address. Off flew another e-mail.

I pulled out all my aces and namedropped shamelessly. I mentioned that I was good friends with the widow of famed CIA U2 pilot Francis Gary Powers, shot down over Russia and captured in 1960. Sue Powers and I had become close in 1992 while working as volunteers in the Perot presidential campaign. That was before we both got extremely "disillusioned" with the "short, floppy-eared Texan"