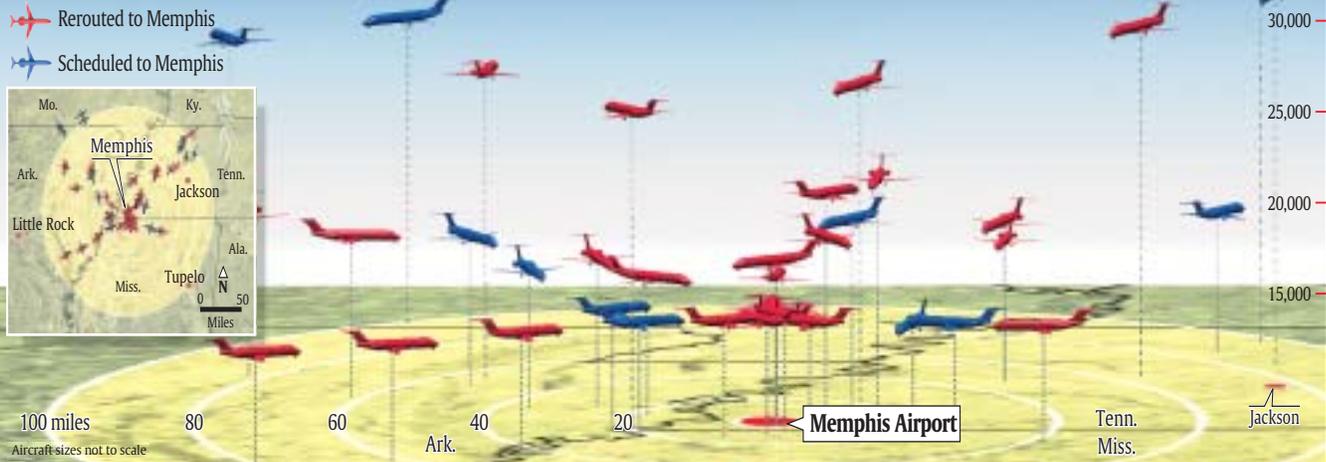


AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, TUESDAY, AUGUST 13, 2002, PAGE 1A

FOUR HOURS OF FEAR 9/11'S UNTOLD STORY

How one airport helped clear the skies

Memphis International Airport became one of the busiest in the country on Sept. 11 as flights were rerouted after terrorist attacks. Forty planes were within 100 miles of Memphis at 10:15 a.m. Eleven had been scheduled to land at Memphis; 29 had been rerouted. Only one other airport, Indianapolis International, received as many rerouted flights that day. A view of the sky over Memphis:



Sources: USA TODAY research; Flight Dimensions International

By Karl Gelles, USA TODAY

No one sure if hijackers were on board

Special report

In the crucial hours after the order to clear the skies over the USA, air traffic controllers, pilots and airline officials scrambled to protect the 350,000 people aboard almost 4,500 flights.

Air traffic controllers began to reroute flights, and track "suspicious" jets and send coded messages to pilots asking whether they had been hijacked.

One flight, a Korean airliner, may have come close to being shot down by U.S. military jets.

In the second of a two-part series, USA TODAY reconstructs how the unprecedented order to clear the skies played out.

By Alan Levin, Marilyn Adams and Blake Morrison
USA TODAY

Aboard Delta Flight 1989, Capt. Paul Werner learns of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks from his cockpit radio. The time: about 9:15 a.m.

Werner, 54, figures the planes that hit the World Trade Center must be small ones -- not passenger jets like the Boeing 767 he commands.

He has no idea what the FBI and air traffic controllers suspect: that terrorists plan to hijack his flight next.

Shortly after the second attack on the Trade Center at 9:03 a.m., FBI agents called an air traffic facility in Ohio that was tracking Flight 1989. Watch what the Delta flight does, agents told controllers at Cleveland Center.

Controllers there had already been watching.

Like the FBI, they realized that the Delta flight had taken off from Boston just minutes after American Flight 11 and United Flight 175 -- the two jets that crashed into the Trade Center towers. The similarities didn't end there.

All three jets were Boeing 767s.

All were bound for Los Angeles.

All were heavy with fuel.

On this day, as Werner flies west over Pennsylvania, the similarities can't be dismissed.

Now about 9:30 a.m., controllers hear words that seem to confirm their worst fears. They hear shouting as Flight 1989

FOUR HOURS OF FEAR 9/11'S UNTOLD STORY

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, TUESDAY, AUGUST 13, 2002, PAGE 1A

Crews armed themselves with knives, wine bottles

approaches the Ohio border. Then they hear a voice: "Get out of there!" Then what sounds like a scuffle.

Minutes later, a new voice, this one with a heavy accent: "Ladies and gentlemen, here it's the captain. Please sit down. Keep remaining sitting. We have a bomb aboard."

No one who hears those words believes they are coming from Werner. Not with such a heavy accent. No way. Rather, the transmission seems to be from a hijacker who unwittingly spoke over the radio when he meant to address passengers.

Officials at Cleveland Center rush word to Washington: Hijackers have another flight.

At the Federal Aviation Administration's command center in Herndon, Va., Delta Flight 1989 joins a growing list of suspicious jets. Some of their flight numbers will be scrawled on a white dry-erase board throughout the morning. Eventually, the list will grow to 11.

One, a TWA flight, refuses to land in Pittsburgh and wants to fly on toward Washington. Another, a Midwest Express flight, disappears from radar over West Virginia. And three jets over the Atlantic Ocean are sending out distress signals, the Coast Guard reports.

Top managers at the FAA's command center fear the worst: Jets all over the country -- including some over the oceans -- are being hijacked. One after another.

And why shouldn't they believe that, after all that has happened already this morning?

After the first two jets were hijacked and flown into the World Trade Center, FAA managers had directed all planes out of New York airspace. Next they had stopped takeoffs nationwide. Minutes after a third jet hit the Pentagon, they had ordered controllers nationwide to undertake the most massive effort in aviation history: clearing the skies.

Now they face an unprecedented challenge. They must land as fast as possible almost 4,500 planes in or headed toward U.S. airspace. Their goal is to bring 350,000 passengers and crew safely to the ground. But the order carries with it another prospect.

By ordering all jets to land, controllers may discover more planes that don't respond.

Jets that are in the hands of terrorists.

Jets the U.S. military might have to shoot down.

No one has ever contemplated such a scenario. Not since



By Anne Ryan, USA TODAY

"We're not going home": American Airlines flight attendant Marcia Wilks at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago. On American Flight 84, which was rerouted from Chicago to Toronto on Sept. 11, the 30-year veteran was sent to the back of the jet to look for terrorists.

the days of the Cold War have controllers even simulated landing the fleet. The plan then was called SCATANA, an acronym for "security control of air traffic and navigation aids." Its intent: to empty the skies and give control of the nation's airspace to the military in the event of an attack by the Soviet Union.

Now, controllers must do much the same thing but with one major difference: During the Cold War, the threat would have been a Soviet fighter or missile. Today, a passenger jet might hold the enemy, and any plane could be a missile.

FOUR HOURS OF FEAR 9/11'S UNTOLD STORY

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, TUESDAY, AUGUST 13, 2002, PAGE 1A

During the frantic hours after the order to ground the fleet is issued, controllers will reroute at least 1,300 flights. They will land 48 planes, on average, each minute. Another hijacked jet will crash in Pennsylvania after passengers fight terrorists who took over the jet. A SWAT team will await the landing of another.

These minutes -- from the time the order is issued until noon Eastern Time -- will prove the most critical of the day for controllers, air traffic officials, pilots and crews. They need to know quickly if each flight is safe.

Each missed radio call and every odd transmission will prompt them to worry: *How many other flights have been hijacked?*

9:45 a.m. ET:
3,949 planes in the air

Mistake realized

Silence.

Controllers at Cleveland Center can't raise United Flight 93, a Boeing 757 flying over Ohio.

Perhaps the strange radio transmissions -- the reference to a bomb and the heavy accent of a "captain" -- hadn't come from the Delta flight. Maybe Capt. Werner's Flight 1989 is fine after all.

At least, that's the way it seems to the controllers. The United flight had been just 25 miles ahead of the Delta flight when the radio transmissions came through -- close enough to account for the confusion.

Then, at 9:35 a.m., the United jet had climbed unexpectedly and turned back, over Ohio, toward the Delta flight. Then . . .

Silence. The United flight stopped talking.

It must be United that's hijacked.

When controllers ordered Werner to change course to avoid Flight 93, he had complied quickly. *Yes, Delta Flight 1989 must be fine.*

But now . . . what's this?

The Delta flight wants to land in Cleveland? And the captain's request comes before he can know that the FAA wants every flight down. On this day, the fact that the pilot requests to be rerouted before he is ordered to land seems suspicious. *Why the urgency?*

Controllers don't know that Delta officials, also concerned about the flight, have ordered Werner to land in

Cleveland. They continue to send messages to Werner. In code, they ask him if all is OK. Yes, he responds time and again. He doesn't know why they're so worried.

And now, preparing for landing, Werner has more important things to worry about. He was too close to Cleveland when he got the order to land. So he loops back, over Michigan, and heads toward the city.

As the jet begins its descent, another message comes through. Busy, Werner fails to respond.

On the ground, controllers in Cleveland Center grow alarmed. *Why didn't he respond? Have both jets -- the United and the Delta flights -- been hijacked?*

As a SWAT team gathers on the tarmac in Cleveland, controllers and airline dispatchers around the nation continue to contact hundreds of flights.

Each receives the warning: Terrorists might be aboard.

Protect the cockpit

The steak knives. Get the steak knives. And the crash ax. And wine! Full bottles of wine.

Aboard hundreds of flights, pilots and crews begin a quiet scramble for makeshift weapons. Just minutes before, they heard radio reports or received word through their cockpit computers about the hijackings and Trade Center crashes.

What they don't know, what no one on the ground can tell them, is whether their flights may be next.

The pilots need to protect the cockpit. But with what?

They don't want to alarm passengers. More important, they don't want terrorists to know that *they* know, to know that they'll be waiting, even if it is with only cutlery, a cockpit hatchet and a year-old chardonnay.

Over the Atlantic Ocean, the crew aboard United Flight 963 learns of the attacks from the BBC. Four hours remain on the flight from Munich to Washington, D.C. Two off-duty pilots are summoned to the cockpit and stationed outside. One tucks an unopened bottle of wine beneath a blanket. A flight attendant rolls the beverage cart in front of the cockpit door.

Aboard American Flight 71, now over Greenland, the captain tells flight attendants to gather steak knives from first class. The knives seem hopelessly inadequate, especially if hijackers have guns, but what choice do they have?

On American Flight 84 from Frankfurt to Chicago, Marcia

FOUR HOURS OF FEAR 9/11'S UNTOLD STORY

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, TUESDAY, AUGUST 13, 2002, PAGE 1A

Wilks, a flight attendant for more than 30 years, is dispatched to the back of the jet. Her job: to look for terrorists. On her way, she gathers the other crewmembers to tell them what she knows.

"We're not going home to Chicago today," she says.

A spunky Boston native, Wilks joined American in the late 1960s, bored with typing briefs for a lawyer and intrigued by the planes that flew past her office window. She wanted to see the world, and what better way than to fly? She even had a feel for the job; her father once worked for an airline.

Now, she resolves that on this day she will behave no differently from any other. *Maintain service.* That's what they always say during training. *Maintain service.*

When the pilot receives word to fly to Toronto instead of Chicago, he tells passengers the jet will have to stop in Canada because a crewmember is sick.

"How long will we be there?" a passenger asks Wilks. "Are we going to miss our connections?" another asks.

"It won't be long. Don't worry," she says over and over. Each time, she feels shame.

Oh my God, what you don't know, she thinks. You don't know what's happened to the world. Wait until we open the door.

She can't shake the thoughts as she lies down for a break in the back of the jet. She closes her eyes, but she doesn't sleep. She prays for the world she expects to find when -- if -- her flight lands.

What will it be like?

9:55 a.m. 3,520 planes

What's the target?

From aboard United Flight 93, a handful of passengers contact family and friends by cellphone. What they learn -- that three jets have already been hijacked and crashed into buildings -- will prompt one of the most heroic efforts of the day. Within moments, they will rush the cockpit to try to regain control of the jet.

On the ground, controllers know nothing of their plans. They became convinced the flight was hijacked when it turned back toward the east over Ohio. But they have no idea where the hijackers plan to take the flight.

At first, the jet flew toward Pittsburgh -- so low to the ground that controllers at Pittsburgh International Airport fled. They feared the jet might be headed for them.

Then Flight 93 turned south. *Toward Washington. Toward the White House? The Capitol? Or maybe Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland?*

In the FAA's command center in Herndon, workers are concerned. "Are we secure here?" one asks Ben Sliney, the man in charge of overseeing the nation's airspace.

Sliney answers quickly and firmly. "Yes. We've taken measures to increase our security."

In truth, he has no idea. He sidles back to where officials are gathered around his desk. "What have we done to increase security?" he asks quietly.

But like the others who remain at their posts, Sliney and controllers around the nation realize their safety is secondary. Some try to steal away to make calls home, but they know they must continue to work. Thousands of jets remain in the sky; more could be in danger.

In Cleveland Center, controllers still wonder why the Delta captain failed to respond to their coded message. In Washington, the fears are even more pronounced. As they watch on radar as Flight 93 heads toward them, they can't help worrying: *What is its target?*

10:05 a.m. 2,985 planes

Shoot it down?

At United Airline's crisis center, a solitary blip glows red on a big screen. It transfixes Hank Krakowski, the airline's flight operations director. Although the airline still has hundreds of flights in the air, officials at the airline's headquarters outside Chicago choose to illuminate only the path of Flight 93 on the status board.

Are they gonna have to shoot it down? he wonders.

A 737 captain who flies vintage fighter planes at air shows, Krakowski, 47, isn't the only one wondering. Military jets already are closing on the Boeing 767 as it barrels toward Washington.

Then, at 10:06 a.m., the blip stops moving over Pennsylvania.

"Latitude and longitude," Krakowski snaps. The coordinates put the jet at Johnstown, Pa., about 120 miles from the nation's capital.

Krakowski picks up the phone and is patched through to the Johnstown airport. No answer.

No answer? How can there not be an answer?

FOUR HOURS OF FEAR 9/11'S UNTOLD STORY

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, TUESDAY, AUGUST 13, PAGE 1A

A staffer finds the cellphone number for the airport manager. Krakowski tries again. "We might have a plane down in your area there," he says calmly. "See anything unusual?"

The answer is the one Krakowski fears. A black column of smoke rises from a field due south of the airport, near the town of Shanksville, the manager tells him. Krakowski feels numb as he looks at the screen. *We just watched one of our airplanes crash.*

But at least the jet hadn't reached Washington. No one would have to shoot it down.

10:30 a.m. 1,505 planes

Flight quarantined

On a remote taxiway at Hopkins International Airport in Cleveland, Delta Flight 1989 is quarantined.

Since early reports that a bomb, then hijackers, might be aboard, Delta CEO Leo Mullin, 58, had nervously tracked the flight from the company's headquarters in Atlanta. Every five minutes, a new report came in. None seemed clear.

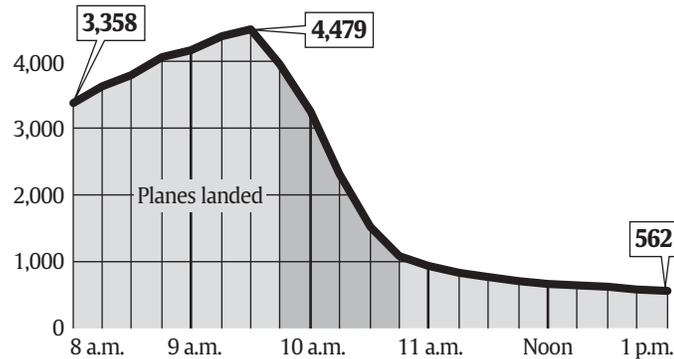
Still, the flight landed uneventfully in Cleveland at 10:10 a.m.

But what now? Mullin wonders.

For two hours, passengers and crew will stay aboard the jet. Cautiously, federal investigators will talk with Capt. Werner through an open cockpit window. Finally, they will board the flight and interview its passengers and crew.

Quick work

Air traffic controllers and pilots landed 2,868 planes in the hour from 9:45 a.m., when the FAA ordered all planes to land, to 10:45 a.m., ET. About three-quarters of the planes in the air landed in that hour.

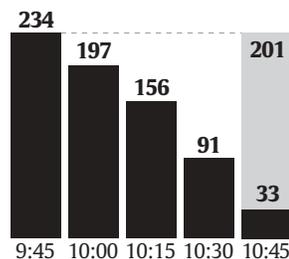


Major carriers

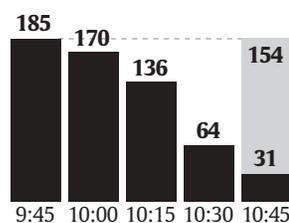
Airline carriers that landed at least 100 planes from 9:45 a.m. ET to 10:45 a.m. ET.

■ Planes in air
■ Planes landed

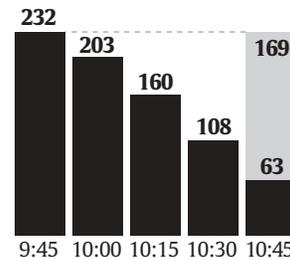
Delta



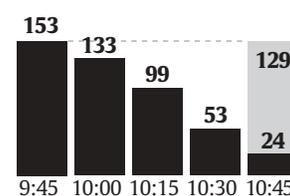
United



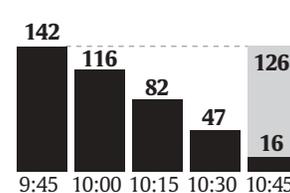
American



USAir



Southwest



Sources: USA TODAY research; Flight Dimensions International By Frank Pompa and Karl Gelles, USA TODAY

Not until midafternoon will Mullin learn the flight never was in danger. No bomb, no hijackers.

On United Flight 890, Capt. Jim Hosking remains more than an hour from North America, more than an hour from knowing whether terrorists are somewhere in the cabin. The message about the hijackings had come an hour earlier, while the flight was over the Pacific. He had been headed from Japan to Los Angeles, also the destination for three of the hijacked flights.

Then came orders to fly to Canada, where some 250 flights have been rerouted. Now, he's bound for Vancouver, British Columbia. He elects to tell the passengers nothing.

They won't notice where they're going anyway, he reasons. Not until the flight is close to landing. . . . Unless they're looking at the maps.

On the in-flight TVs, passengers can tune to a channel that shows the course of the flight. Hosking pulls the circuit breaker to disconnect the channel. Other

pilots aboard other flights do the same. Passengers will be blind to where their flights are headed. As far as they know, nothing is amiss.

10:45 a.m. 1,081 planes

Deploying the snowplows

At one of the world's busiest airports, Chicago's O'Hare

FOUR HOURS OF FEAR 9/11'S UNTOLD STORY

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, TUESDAY, AUGUST 13, 2002, PAGE 1A

International, passengers who came expecting to catch flights now crowd the turnstiles at the airport's train station, trying to leave.

The lines stretch so long that Patrick Harney, a city transportation official, calls the transit authority and pleads with officials there to let passengers board for free. "A lot of people just want to get out," he explains.

Many aren't even certain why they're being herded from the airport so fast. After the first Trade Center attack, the airport authority shut off the TVs in every concourse. The practice was adopted years ago, at the request of airline officials who knew news of any crash would unnerve travelers.

But airport officials are watching. As more details stream in -- the second tower of the Trade Center fell just minutes ago -- authorities begin a response that seems more befitting a blizzard than a terrorist attack.

Workers stand ready to set up 2,000 cots set aside for travelers stranded during snowstorms. Outside, along the airport's edges, O'Hare's 187 snowplows are deployed as roadblocks. They encircle the base of the control tower, their blades pointed toward anything that might approach.

11 a.m. 923 planes

Rumors and relief

When is this going to end?

And what more can she do?

Throughout the morning, FAA Administrator Jane Garvey has witnessed the most painful hours in the agency's history.

She and her deputy, Monte Belger, approved orders to close airspace over major cities. Then they approved stopping takeoffs nationwide. When Flight 77 hit the Pentagon at 9:38 a.m., they seconded the decision of managers in Herndon to order every flight to land.

But the reports of more suspicious flights didn't stop. A bomb is reported aboard a United Airlines jet that just landed in Rockford, Ill. Another jet disappears from radar and might have crashed in Kentucky.

The reports are so serious that Garvey notifies the White House that there has been another crash. Only later does she learn the reports are erroneous.

Now, almost 1,000 planes remain in the air. And at FAA headquarters in Washington, Garvey and Belger try to focus on what to do next. Still, they can't avoid another thought: Whoever hijacked the four jets that crashed somehow got past the airport security forces they oversee.

What could we have done? Garvey thinks. What did we miss?

In Belger's office, the phone rings. It's the Herndon command center. For once it's good news. Every commercial flight in U.S. airspace -- about a quarter of the planes still in the air -- is within 40 miles of its destination. The others are still over the oceans, and many are heading toward Canada. But at least all the flights over the United States are accounted for and complying with controllers.

"Thank God," Garvey says.

For the first time this morning, she takes a moment alone to call her family in Massachusetts.

11:30 a.m. 758 planes

A battle won

It seems small consolation, but Ben Sliney can't help thinking it: *At least no one has run into anything in a couple hours.*

When he accepted the job overseeing the nation's airspace a few months earlier, Sliney wanted to be sure he had the power to do the job as he saw fit.

"What is the limit of my authority?" he asked the man who had promoted him. "Unlimited," he was told.

Weeks later, as Sliney orders every flight to land on his first day on the job, he recalls the conversation.

He expects questions and complaints from his colleagues. But there are none.

At this time on most days, the screen at the command center is choked with so many green flight markers that the East Coast is almost obscured. Now, Sliney watches as a mere hundred commercial and private flights fly over the lower 48 states.

The skies seem manageable.

Then, an aide tells him about a serious car accident in Georgia. The pilot of a rescue helicopter is begging for permission to pick up someone who is critically injured.

"If it was my family lying in a wreck on the highway, I would hope you would let him go," the aide tells him.

All morning, Sliney has refused to make exceptions. Three times he ordered a jet carrying Attorney General John Ashcroft, who was heading to Washington, to land. *I can't be sure who's on that jet*, Sliney reasoned. The nation's top law enforcement official won't make it back to the capitol until afternoon.

FOUR HOURS OF FEAR 9/11'S UNTOLD STORY

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, TUESDAY, AUGUST 13, 2002, PAGE 1A

Sliney knew that decision could have political consequences. But this one could mean life or death. *Do I have the authority to do this?*

Sliney knows he can't wait. He tells the aide to give permission to launch the helicopter. There's been enough death today. Maybe he can save a life.

Noon: 669 planes

A safe landing

Capt. Hosking begins to direct his jet into Vancouver. Though he's only minutes from landing, he still isn't sure all is safe. If hijackers have been waiting until the jet is close to its destination, something still may happen.

But what can he do? The cockpit door has been barricaded and his first officer still has the crash ax out.

As the snow-covered peaks of the Canadian Rockies come into view, one of the flight attendants calls the cockpit. "Where are we going?" Even she doesn't know.

"I can't tell you," Hosking says. "And don't call back anymore."

They land just after noon Eastern Time. Hosking taxis the jet to a remote runway near other airliners rerouted to Vancouver.

Not until he shuts off the engines does he reach for his handset. He pushes the button that turns on the jet's public-address system, but he doesn't say a word.

What can I say? How do I tell them?

He recalls how he felt when he heard the news. How he wondered what had happened, how none of it had made any sense. He still isn't sure what to tell those in the back of the jet. He knows so little himself. What he's sure of is that they've made it. Perhaps that's what's most important. Perhaps that's the way to start.

They are *safe*, and so are thousands of other flights that have made it to the ground. Yes, that's what they should know. That's what he will tell them first.

His voice quavers: "The experienced fliers in the cabin know we're not in Los Angeles. . . ."

On this day, it is the best he can offer.