

The Account of Box Cutters as Weapons

Its sole living source was the attorney who represented Bush in the case that gave him the presidency.

Within 24 hours of the September 11th attacks an account that the alleged hijackers had used box cutters as weapons became the prevailing one as to how the airliners were commandeered. The account of box cutters being used, nearly to the exclusion of all other accounts, remains almost universally held to this day. This account was apparently inferred or insinuated from reports like this one, which the Washington Post ran on its front page on September 12, 2001:

Herded to the back of the plane by hijackers armed with knives and box-cutters, the passengers and crew members of American Airlines Flight 77 -- including the wife of Solicitor General Theodore Olson . . . [see note 1 below]

But according to a statement issued on January 27, 2004 by the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States [henceforward, "National Commission" or "Commission"], there is no evidence for box cutters having been used on three of the four hijacked flights, revealing that a central legend of the attacks has been mostly speculation. The Commission stated clearly that there had been only one report of box cutters having been used in the September 11th hijackings and that that report had come from a single call from American Airlines Flight 77. The National Commission's Staff Statement No. 4, "The Four Flights," states:

With regard to reports from crew and passengers, knives were cited on all four flights. The threat of a bomb was reported on Flights 11, 175, and 93. Box cutters were specifically indicated only in one report, from Flight 77. [see note 2 below]

This detail, of box cutters being reported on only one flight and originating from a single phone call, has yet to enter the awareness of the general public.

Cable News Network [CNN] had reported on September 12, 2001 who had received that call.

Barbara Olson, a conservative commentator and attorney, alerted her husband, Solicitor General Ted Olson, that the plane she was on was being hijacked Tuesday morning, Ted Olson told CNN.

A short time later the plane crashed into the Pentagon. Barbara Olson is presumed to have died in the crash.

Her husband said she called him twice on a cell phone from American Airlines Flight 77, which was en route from Washington Dulles International Airport to Los Angeles.

Ted Olson told CNN that his wife said all passengers and flight personnel, including the pilots, were herded to the back of the plane by armed hijackers. The only weapons she mentioned were knives and cardboard cutters. She felt nobody was in charge and asked her husband to tell the pilot what to do. [see note 3 below]

The 9/11 Commission Report confirmed that person to have been Ted Olson.

At some point between 9:16 and 9:26, Barbara Olson called her husband, Ted Olson, the solicitor general of the United States. She reported that the flight had been hijacked, and the hijackers had knives and box cutters. [see note 4 below]

The Commission reconfirmed this fact in an endnote to chapter 1 of its report.

The records available for the phone calls from American 77 do not allow for a determination of which of four "connected calls to unknown numbers" represent the two between Barbara and Ted Olson, although the FBI and DOJ believe that all four represent communications between Barbara and her husband's office . . . [see note 6 below]

The conclusion to be drawn from these few facts, is an ultra-extraordinary coincidence -- that the sole living individual, upon whom rests the claim that the 9/11 hijackers used box cutters, is Theodore Olson, the attorney who represented George Bush at the US Supreme Court in the case [*Bush v. Gore*] which resulted in him acceding to the presidency.

Notes:

Rowland Morgan is acknowledged for his focus on this issue. All referenced material to National Commission sources are available at the National Commission's website:
www.9-11commission.gov

1. "On Flight 77: 'Our Plane Is Being Hijacked,'" Marc Fisher and Don Phillips, Washington Post, September 12, 2001, page 1.

www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A14365-2001Sep11

Herded to the back of the plane by hijackers armed with knives and box-cutters, the passengers and crew members of American Airlines Flight 77 -- including the wife of Solicitor General Theodore Olson, a Senate staffer, three D.C. schoolchildren and three teachers on an educational field trip and a University Park family of four headed to Australia for a two-month adventure -- were ordered to call relatives to say they were about to die.

...

Barbara K. Olson, the former federal prosecutor who became a prominent TV commentator during the impeachment of President Bill Clinton, called her husband twice in the final minutes. Her last words to him were, "What do I tell the pilot to do?"

"She called from the plane while it was being hijacked," Theodore Olson said. "I wish it wasn't so, but it is."

The two conversations each lasted about a minute, said Tim O'Brien, a CNN reporter and friend of the Olsons. In the first call, Barbara Olson told her husband, "Our plane is being hijacked." She described how hijackers forced passengers and the flight's pilot to the rear of the aircraft. She said nothing about the number of hijackers or their nationality.

Olson's first call was cut off, and her husband immediately called the Justice Department's command center, where he was told officials knew nothing about the Flight 77 hijacking.

Moments later, his wife called again. And again, she wanted to know, "What should I tell the pilot?"

"She was composed, as composed as you can be under the circumstances," O'Brien said.

But her second call was cut off, too.

2. The National Commission's Staff Statement No. 4, "The Four Flights," January 27, 2004, at page 6.

In this document the Commission noted no report of the use of pepper spray or similar substance on Flight 77.

Since the passage quoted above omits any report of a gun being used on any of the planes, please see the following sources -- note that they refer to Flight 11, not to Flight 77:

- a. [Regarding the FAA's own written report on September 11, 2001 of a gun being used to kill a passenger on Flight 11] The testimony of Bogdan Dzakovic before the National Commission on May 22, 2003;

- b. [The reading into the record of a paragraph, including some details of the shooting, from the FAA's report] The statements of Commissioner John Lehman to Lt. General Michael Canavan at the hearing of the National Commission on May 23, 2003.

3. "Wife of Solicitor General alerted him of hijacking from plane," Tim O'Brien, CNN, September 12, 2001 [Posted at CNN.com at 2:06 AM].

<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/11/pentagon.olson/>

4. The 9/11 Commission Report, July 2004, chapter 1, "We Have Some Planes," at page 9:

At 9:12, Renee May called her mother, Nancy May, in Las Vegas. She said her flight was being hijacked by six individuals who had moved them to the rear of the plane. She asked her mother to alert American Airlines. Nancy May and her husband promptly did so. 56 [see note 5 below]

At some point between 9:16 and 9:26, Barbara Olson called her husband, Ted Olson, the solicitor general of the United States. She reported that the flight had been hijacked, and the

hijackers had knives and box cutters. She further indicated that the hijackers were not aware of her phone call, and that they had put all the passengers in the back of the plane. About a minute into the conversation, the call was cut off. Solicitor General Olson tried unsuccessfully to reach Attorney General John Ashcroft. 57 [see note 6 below]

Shortly after the first call, Barbara Olson reached her husband again. She reported that the pilot had announced that the flight had been hijacked, and she asked her husband what she should tell the captain to do. Ted Olson asked for her location and she replied that the aircraft was then flying over houses. Another passenger told her they were traveling northeast. The Solicitor General then informed his wife of the two previous hijackings and crashes. She did not display signs of panic and did not indicate any awareness of an impending crash. At that point, the second call was cut off. 58 [see note 7 below]

5. The 9/11 Commission Report, endnote 56 to chapter 1, "We Have Some Planes," at page 455:
56. FBI report, "American Airlines Airphone Usage," Sept. 20, 2001; FBI report of investigation, interview of Ronald and Nancy May, Sept. 12, 2001.

6. The 9/11 Commission Report, endnote 57 to chapter 1, "We Have Some Planes," at page 455:
57. The records available for the phone calls from American 77 do not allow for a determination of which of four "connected calls to unknown numbers" represent the two between Barbara and Ted Olson, although the FBI and DOJ believe that all four represent communications between Barbara and her husband's office (all family members of Flight 77 passengers and crew were canvassed to see if they had received any phone calls from the hijacked flight, and only Renee May's parents and Ted Olson indicated that they had received any such calls). The four calls were at 9:15:34 for 1 minute, 42 seconds; 9:20:15 for 4 minutes, 34 seconds; 9:25:48 for 2 minutes, 34 seconds; and 9:30:56 for 4 minutes, 20 seconds. FBI report, "American Airlines Airphone Usage," Sept. 20, 2001; FBI report of investigation, interview of Theodore Olson, Sept. 11, 2001; FBI report of investigation, interview of Helen Voss, Sept. 14, 2001; AAL response to the Commission's supplemental document request, Jan. 20, 2004.

The total connected time of the four calls, believed by the FBI and DoJ to be between Ted and Barbara Olson, was 13 minutes, 10 seconds, in contrast to: "The two conversations each lasted about a minute, said Tim O'Brien, a CNN reporter and friend of the Olsons." [see note 1 above]

The calls, including the time disconnected, covered a total time of 19 minutes, 42 seconds from 9:15:34 to 9:35:16 AM. Yet reportedly, "she said nothing about the number of hijackers or their nationality." [see note 1 above]. The 9/11 Commission Report, at page 33, indicates the "likely takeover" of Flight 77 occurred between 8:51 - 8:54 AM and that it crashed into the Pentagon at 9:37:46 AM.

7. The 9/11 Commission Report, endnote 58 to chapter 1, "We Have Some Planes," at page 455:
58. FBI report, "American Airlines Airphone Usage," Sept. 20, 2001; FBI report of investigation, interview of Theodore Olson, Sept. 11, 2001.

Addenda

1. More details on this call are provided in "Washington: Terror Strikes the Supreme Court," by Tony Mauro, New York Lawyer (American Lawyer Media), September 17, 2001.
www.nylawyer.com/news/01/09/091701i.htm

But no one became more tragically involved than the solicitor general himself. His wife of five years, Barbara, the outspoken conservative commentator, was on the American Airlines flight that crashed into the Pentagon.

It was just as the World Trade Center attacks were unfolding that someone in the solicitor general's office took a phone call from Barbara Olson. Ted Olson's longtime assistant, Helen Voss, raced into the SG's office to tell him that Barbara was on the line, sounding panicked. He picked up the phone and exclaimed, "What, you've been hijacked?" She was calling on her cell phone from aboard the jet, which had just left Dulles Airport. Voss says, "My heart sank." The call ended abruptly, but then Barbara called again, reportedly asking her husband, "What should I tell the

pilot?" It was a comment that friends have taken as a sign that she was characteristically trying to find a solution to the crisis. The pilot, along with passengers, had apparently been herded into the back of the plane.

Olson reported the conversation to the Justice Department's command center. After the second call ended, Olson and Voss turned on a television set in his office, unsure what else could be done.

When the news came of a plane crashing into the Pentagon, Olson turned to Voss and said, "That's Barbara's plane." Voss adds, "Then he said something I will not repeat." Soon after, Olson headed home to Great Falls, Va.

2. "The records available for the phone calls from American 77 do not allow for a determination of which of four 'connected calls to unknown numbers' represent the two between Barbara and Ted Olson although the FBI and DOJ believe that all four represent communications between Barbara and her husband's office . . . " [see note 6 above].

The Commission could not determine "using the records available" which calls were made to Ted Olson's office number at the Department of Justice. What records, if any, were unavailable? What is the basis for the FBI's and the DoJ's belief, if "the records available" "do not allow for a determination"? Four calls? Unknown numbers? Unknown to whom? One would expect the phone company to know. Why this unnecessary level of ambiguity and vagueness in a matter which should be conducive to greater clarity?

3. Yet another apparent discrepancy exists between the account in the Washington Post on the day after the attacks:

"Herded to the back of the plane by hijackers armed with knives and box-cutters, the passengers and crew members of American Airlines Flight 77 . . . were ordered to call relatives to say they were about to die [see note 1 above];

and both that in the text of the 9/11 Commission Report:

She [Barbara Olson] further indicated that the hijackers were not aware of her phone call [see note 4 above];

and that in an endnote to the first chapter of the 9/11 Commission Report:

only Renee May's parents and Ted Olson indicated that they had received any such calls [see note 6 above].

Postscript: In 2006 the US Government presented this graphic image as part of Prosecution Exhibit P00054 at the Zacarias Moussaoui trial. It purports that only one **unconnected call, lasting zero seconds**, from Barbara Olson was documented.

The graphic is titled "American Airlines Flight #77 Telephone Calls" and features the American Airlines logo and "BOEING 757". It includes a photo of Barbara Olson, a seat assignment diagram for "SEAT ASSIGNMENT: 3E", and a call log entry: "09:18:58 0 SECONDS (202) 514-XXXX DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE UNCONNECTED CALL". Navigation buttons for "BACK" and "INFO" are also present.