

Flight AA11's "Routine Medical Emergency" on 9/11

According to official sources, at approximately 8:19 a stewardess reported from the back of the plane in a recorded call that "**we can't breathe,**" because of a chemical irritant in the cabin. Shortly thereafter, she stated, "**We can't breathe in business class. Somebody's got mace or something.**" At 8:26 and again at 8:38 she reported that the plane was "**flying erratically**". Yet at 8:41 another stewardess reported "that passengers in coach were under the impression that there was **a routine medical emergency in first class.**"

THE 9/11 COMMISSION REPORT (page 5)

At 8:19, [Betty] Ong reported: "The cockpit is not answering, somebody's stabbed in business class -- and **I think there's Mace -- that we can't breathe** -- I don't know, I think we're getting hijacked." She then told of the stabbings of the two flight attendants.

At 8:21, one of the American employees receiving Ong's call in North Carolina, Nydia Gonzalez, alerted the American Airlines operations center in Fort Worth, Texas, reaching Craig Marquis, the manager on duty. Marquis soon realized this was an emergency and instructed the airline's dispatcher responsible for the flight to contact the cockpit. At 8:23, the dispatcher tried unsuccessfully to contact the aircraft. Six minutes later, the air traffic control specialist in American's operations center contacted the FAA's Boston Air Traffic Control Center about the flight. The center was already aware of the problem.

THE 9/11 COMMISSION REPORT (page 6)

Boston Center knew of a problem on the flight in part because just before 8:25 the hijackers had attempted to communicate with the passengers. The microphone was keyed, and immediately one of the hijackers said, "Nobody move. Everything will be okay. If you try to make any moves, you'll endanger yourself and the airplane. Just stay quiet." Air traffic controllers heard the transmission; Ong did not. The hijackers probably did not know how to operate the cockpit radio communication system correctly, and thus inadvertently broadcast their message over the air traffic control channel instead of the cabin public-address channel. Also at 8:25, and again at 8:29, Amy Sweeney got through to the American Flight Services Office in Boston but was cut off after she reported someone was hurt aboard the flight. Three minutes later, Sweeney was reconnected to the office and began relaying updates to the manager, Michael Woodward.

At 8:26, Ong reported that the plane was "flying erratically." A minute later, Flight 11 turned south. American also began getting identifications of the hijackers, as Ong and then Sweeney passed on some of the seat numbers of those who had gained unauthorized access to the cockpit.

Sweeney calmly reported on her line that the plane had been hijacked; a man in first class had his throat slashed; two flight attendants had been stabbed -- one was seriously hurt and was on oxygen while the other's wounds seemed minor; a doctor had been requested; the flight attendants were unable to contact the cockpit; and there was a bomb in the cockpit. Sweeney told Woodward that she and Ong were trying to relay as much information as they could to people on the ground.

At 8:38, Ong told Gonzalez that the plane was flying erratically again. Around this time Sweeney told Woodward that the hijackers were Middle Easterners, naming three of their seat numbers. One spoke very little English and one spoke excellent English. The hijackers had gained entry to the cockpit, and she did not know how. **The aircraft was in a rapid descent.**

At 8:41, Sweeney told Woodward that passengers in coach were under the impression that there was a routine medical emergency in first class. Other flight attendants were busy at duties such as getting medical supplies while Ong and Sweeney were reporting the events.

Images from USA v. Zacarias Moussaoui, Prosecution Exhibit P00054, which established that the call began at 8:18:47 AM, lasted 1620 seconds (27 minutes) and that only the first four minutes were recorded. This communication was at approximately 8:19 AM.

American Airlines American Airlines Flight #11
BOEING 767

SEAT: Crew
PASSENGER: Ong, Betty

Betty Ong
Flight Attendant **Betty Ong** calls American Airlines and speaks with AA Agent Winston Sadler and Operations Agent Nydia E. Gonzalez.
8:18 AM
DURATION: 00:04:00

CALL PLACED FROM REAR

...and um, I think there's mace that we can't breathe. I, I don't know. I think we're getting hijacked.

BETTY ONG FLIGHT ATTENDANT
WINSTON SADLER / VANESSA MINTER AA AGENTS
NYDIA E. GONZALEZ OPERATIONS AGENT

American Airlines Flight 11 | American Airlines Flight 77 | United Airlines Flight 93 | United Airlines Flight 175

One minute, ten seconds later, at ~8:20AM (as established from the recording of the Betty Ong call included in USA v. Zacarias Moussaoui, Prosecution Exhibit P00054), was this communication.

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