

London Daily Mail: Flight 93 'was shot down' (Daily Mail)

The heart-thumping moment came when when passengers on board one of the hijacked 9/11 jets fought back against the ruthless fanatics hellbent on crashing the plane into the heart of America.

Jumping out of their seats to a rallying cry of 'Let's roll!', they charged towards the front of the Boeing 757 and began smashing down the cockpit door to reach the hijackers at the controls.

Amid the desperate commotion, the plane rolled violently from right to left and pitched up and down as the rogue pilots tried to throw the passengers beyond the door off balance. As the struggle continued, the cockpit voice recorder captured the hijackers urgently discussing whether to ditch the plane. 'Is that it? Shall we finish it off?' asked one of the fanatics.

'No, not yet. When they all come, we finish it off,' was the reply. Minutes later, at 10.03am, with the same voices shouting in Arabic, 'Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest,' the plane headed down, banked hard right and rolled on to its back. It smashed into an empty field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, at its top speed of 580mph and exploded into a massive fireball.

The flames set nearby woods on fire as the impact sprayed body parts and other debris into the trees and up into the sky, to float to earth as far as eight miles away.

This, then, is the legend of United Airways Flight 93, one that has been vigorously promoted in a stream of books and films, most recently in the £9.6 million Hollywood movie United 93. It is the story of how 33 innocent passengers and seven crew gave their lives to save countless others as their plane flew kamikaze-style towards the White House or the Capitol in Washington.

To a nation still reeling from the attacks on New York's World Trade Centre and the Pentagon that same September morning, these were men and women every bit as heroic as those who had fought at the Alamo.

Yet my own exhaustive investigations have led me to conclude that the story of Flight 93 is far from being the straightforward account of supreme courage that the authorities would have us believe.

Instead, the real story is mired in cynical manipulation and warmongering propaganda. I am convinced there is evidence to suggest a wholly sinister twist to the tale that already holds pride of place in American folklore. For I believe that Flight 93 may well have been deliberately shot down as a means of stopping it from reaching its ultimate target — even at the expense of the 40 blameless people on board. It is a suspicion that was held even by the FBI, but was swept aside as a shaken America clung on to the official version of selfless sacrifice and raw patriotism.

Today, with the approach of the fifth anniversary of 9/11, some will still say that such speculation only serves to lend comfort to terrorists and does a disservice to the dead.

Others, however, will feel there are too many disquieting circumstances and unanswered questions to simply ignore.

But let us examine the evidence — so that you can come to your own conclusion. The massive impact caused the entire plane to disappear 30ft deep into the earth, telescoping down on itself and crushing everyone and everything inside the fuselage beyond recognition.

However, the absence of any significant debris — including tailplane and wings — bewildered witnesses, relatives and, more importantly, some crash experts.

They found it hard to believe that an airliner up to 155ft long, with two engines each weighing more than six tons, could have penetrated the ground so completely as to utterly disappear. Had it, in reality, been blown to pieces in mid-air?

CERTAINLY, it is unclear how a single piece of fuselage the size of a dining room table could have been recovered from a marina in Indian Lake, a couple of miles away from the crash site — unless it fell from the sky during an aerial break-up.

But a bigger mystery is why the engines went missing.

Considering their weight, they should have plunged deep into the earth along with the rest of the airliner.

Yet they weren't in the crater and only a one-ton segment of an engine was ever recovered, again more than a mile from the crash site. The FBI said, unconvincingly, that it had 'bounced' there.

The FBI also claimed metal fragments found up to eight miles away could have been carried there by the wind, even though the breeze was very light.

Witnesses said nothing was left at the crash site, yet the FBI belatedly claimed to have made two sensational discoveries — a red bandana and a passport allegedly belonging to the hijackers.

Very conveniently, these turned up as prosecution evidence earlier this year at the trial of Zacarias Moussaoui, the so-called 20th hijacker and only terrorist to be convicted over the 9/11 atrocities.

IF FLIGHT 93 was shot down, there must have been a fighter jet in the skies to unleash a guided missile.

The U.S. government has admitted that two F-15s were flying above New York City before 9am on September 11 and three F-16s were patrolling over Washington by 9.40am. They could have reached Shanksville in minutes.

According to investigative writer David Ray Griffin, several witnesses saw two F-16s tailing Flight 93 minutes before it went down.

They claim they saw an F-16 move closer in and fire what were probably two Sidewinder missiles, one of them catching at least one of the Boeing's huge engines, after which the 'plane dropped like a stone'.

Someone else 'heard a loud bang' and saw the airliner plummet. A Vietnam War veteran said he 'heard a missile', a sound he knew well. It is debatable how seriously we should take these reports. But there are numerous and highly credible witness accounts of a mysterious white jet being seen after Flight 93 went down.

Jim Brant, owner of the Indian Lake marina where debris was found, said he heard the roar of jet engines overhead, then saw a fireball rise into the air. He looked up and noticed a white plane circling the wreckage. 'It reminded me of a fighter jet,' he said.

Another resident, Tom Spinelli, said: 'I saw the white plane. It was flying around all over the place like it was looking for something. I saw it before and after the crash.'

He said it had high tail wings and no markings on it. John Feegle, another witness, said: 'It didn't look like a commercial plane. It had a real goofy tail on it, like a high tail. It circled around, and it was gone.'

Dennis Decker and his friend Rick Chaney were also close to the impact site. 'As soon as we looked up we saw a mid-sized jet flying low and fast,' said Decker.

'It appeared to make a loop or part of a circle, and then it turned fast and headed out.' Decker and Chaney described the jet as white with no markings. Decker added: 'It was a jet plane, and it had to be flying real close when that 757 went down. If I was the FBI, I'd find out who was driving that plane.'

A total of 12 eyewitnesses are on record as having seen the white jet. One witness, Susan McElwain, complained that the FBI told her there was no plane and did not note down her account.

However, amid the growing furore over the sightings, the FBI was forced to offer an explanation, which again many found unconvincing.

It claimed the jet was a passing civilian Fairchild Falcon 20 that was asked to descend to 5,000ft some minutes after the crash to give co-ordinates for the site. The plane and pilot have never been produced or identified.

One commentator pointed out: 'The reason why this seems so implausible is that, first, by 10.06am on September 11, all non-military aircraft in U.S. airspace had received orders more than half an hour earlier to land at the nearest airport.

'Second, such was the density of emergency phone calls from people on the ground in the Shanksville area as to the location of the crash site, that aerial co-ordinates would have been completely unnecessary.

'Third, with F-16s supposedly in the vicinity, it seems extraordinarily unlikely that, at a time when no one knew for sure whether there might be any more hijacked aircraft still in the sky, the military would ask a civilian aircraft that just happened to be in the area for help.'

THE military's role in 9/11 is shrouded in confusion, ambiguity and inconsistency.

A news report on September 20, 2001, said: 'America's defence establishment has disclosed that it ordered its fighter jets to intercept all the passenger aircraft hijacked in last week's attacks on New York and Washington.'

The report also stated that military intelligence was aware of the hijackings before any of the aircraft had hit their targets.

Three years later, however, the military said it hadn't heard about Flight 93 until after the plane had crashed — a line accepted by the official 9/11 Commission, which published its findings in July 2004.

The official inquiry said the Federal Aviation Authority — responsible for the security and safety of U.S. civilian aviation — had been incompetent in failing to alert the U.S. Air Force.

But the FAA had already acted quickly in ordering more than 4,000 aircraft to land at the nearest airstrip to avoid any more hijacks. And the military would have learned of Flight 93's hijack via teleconferences set up by the FAA, the White House and the U.S. Defence Department as events began to unfold on September 11. Richard Clarke, who ran the White House video conference, stated that at 9.27am, the FAA informed both Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and General Richard Myers, Chief of Defence Staff, of a number of 'potential hijacks' including 'United 93 over Pennsylvania'. Therefore, more than 25 minutes before Flight 93 went down, both Rumsfeld and Myers knew all about it. No wonder the military's claim to have learned about Flight 93 only after it crashed is dismissed by many as a bare-faced lie. IN OTHER air crashes, information from the flight data recorder and the cockpit voice recorder — the black box recorders — were dealt with in an open manner, with crash investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board discussing the progress of their inquiries with reporters. But in the case of Flight 93, the Transportation Safety Board was not in charge of the investigation — the FBI was.

The black box recorders were reportedly found buried 25ft deep inside the crater. But a threeminute discrepancy in the crash time led to suspicions of foul play.

Seismic records, consolidated from four seismology stations in the region, originally pegged the impact time at 10.06am. It was only later that the Pentagon and the 9/11 Commission decreed that the correct impact time to have been at 10.03am.

But Terry Wallace, who heads the Southern Arizona Seismic Observatory and is considered the leading expert on the seismology of man-made events, was puzzled.

He complained: 'The seismic signals are consistent with impact at 10.06am and five seconds plus or minus two seconds. I don't know where the 10.03 time comes from.' So there were two crash times.

Sceptics note that a lot could happen in three minutes — minutes that could be removed from the end of a flight-deck recording to delete evidence of an attack by U.S. jets.

The FBI kept the contents of the voice recorder secret until it was forced by bereaved relatives to play the tape under heavy security at a hotel in April 2002.

The family members later reported they heard sounds of an on-board struggle beginning at 9.58am, with a final 'rushing sound' at 10.03am, when the tape fell silent. Could the 'rushing sound' have been made by the plane being holed? And what of the moment when the plane hit the ground?

'There is no sound of the impact,' said Kenneth Nacke, whose brother Lou had been on Flight 93. There is a further twist. In 2006, when the judge at the trial of Zacarias Moussaoui ordered a transcript of the cockpit voice recorder, it ended with the sound of the hijackers shouting praises to Allah.

Just where had those praises been in 2002 when the tape was first played to relatives? For many, their sudden appearance confirmed suspicions of tape tampering.

AT FIRST, the FBI was keen to show it was keeping an open mind over the fate of Flight 93.

Within days of the crash, Reuters reported from Shanksville: 'Federal investigators said they could not rule out the possibility that the United Airlines jetliner that crashed in rural western Pennsylvania during this week's attacks on New York and the Pentagon was shot down.' 'We have not ruled out that,' FBI agent Bill Crowley told a news conference when asked about reports that a U.S. fighter jet may have fired on the hijacked Boeing 757. 'We haven't ruled out anything yet.'

Why did Crowley later retract his statement — and on the same day as the U.S. Air Force issued its official denial of any involvement?

AT THE crux of the legend of Flight 93 are the phone calls passengers are said to have made to their loved ones after the hijackers took control.

These are said to have alerted the passengers to the fact that they were victims of no ordinary hijacking, but a co-ordinated mission by fanatics to strike at the heart of America in New York and Washington. At the same time, a number of passengers allegedly told relatives of their resolve to fight back. Interestingly, phone contact from passengers on the two hijacked planes that hit the Twin Towers and a third jet which crashed into the Pentagon that same morning was scarce to non-existent.

Yet officially there were 35 calls made among the 40 passengers and crew on Flight 93, with callers using either mobile phones or GTE Airfones fitted into the backs of the aircraft seats. The use of mobile phones is suspect anyway because telecommunications experts say that — given the technology of 2001 — calls at an altitude of six miles could have only occurred by fluke at best. Just as baffling, the FBI insisted there were 13 mobile phone calls — of which there were no billing records — yet reduced this number to just two at the trial this year of Zacarias Moussaoui when the evidence risked being exposed to the harsh light of law.

Why had the FBI failed to put the record straight over the previous four-and-a-half years?

One answer is that it suited the heroism legend to keep silent as the Pentagon banged the drum for war in Iraq.

The 9/11 Commission claimed that five of the calls described the intent of the passengers and crew to revolt against the hijackers. One caller, the Commission said, ended her message with the words: 'Everyone's running up to first class. I've got to go. Bye.' But all this begs the question: why did the hijackers allow such a free-for-all of phone calls as they attempted to terrify their hostages?

After all, the hijackers would have realised that experts would have been able to locate the lost aircraft if people were using their mobiles.

THE most intriguing of the calls is the one said to have been made by Flight 93's most famous passenger Todd Beamer, whose 'Let's roll!' phrase became a byword for the victims' heroism and patriotism.

Beamer's call was said to have been taken by a telephone supervisor working for the Verizon Corporation, owners of GTE Airfones, the gadgets on the airplane seats.

At the time, Verizon had a contract worth £750million for installing a high-security telecoms package across U.S. government departments, including the Pentagon.

One of its supervisors, Lisa Jefferson, an evangelical Christian like Beamer himself, retains a vivid recollection of her 15-minute conversation with him.

After discovering that she shared her first name with Beamer's wife, they apparently talked about his two little boys and the new baby on the way, Beamer's fear that he might not make it home, and his faith.

Faced with the awful prospect of dying on board Flight 93, Beamer supposedly recited the Lord's Prayer and Psalm 23 with Mrs Jefferson. He also asked her to promise to call his wife. MRS JEFFERSON received a Verizon Excellence Award from her bosses for her handling of the call. To some this may have seemed inappropriate.

She had not taken a recording of it, contrary to convention. She had not gone through the routine questions in her distress-call manual. She had not connected this agitated man to his wife waiting anxiously at home. Nor had she informed his wife subsequently of the call as promised.

Mrs Beamer only learned of her husband's final call four days later, when a representative of United Airlines got in touch.

She says the United Airlines representative told her: 'The FBI had been keeping the information private until they've had the opportunity to review the material. But now they've released it, I have a written summary of the call.'

But later Mrs Beamer learned that the FBI had not kept the call so secret after all. Her husband's boss at his computer company had already spun the story of Beamer the hero aboard Flight 93 before anyone else knew of his phone call.

As for Lisa Jefferson's evidence, it was single-sourced, unsubstantiated hearsay of which there was no record. For spooks inside a sprawling empire of wires like Verizon, rigging up a phone call to Lisa Jefferson's headset would have been simple.

She had no idea what Beamer's voice sounded like, and she would never hear it again to judge whether he had actually been speaking to her. This year, Lisa Jefferson published a book entitled *Called* — the story of seeing 'her life transformed, simply by answering Todd Beamer's call'.

The blurb added: 'Jefferson sends a stirring challenge to all of us whether it comes during quiet obscurity or international adversity, we must be prepared to answer God's call.'

Evangelical Christians throughout America rallied to that call. But one puzzle remains: Todd Beamer's wife later said she had never before heard of his reciting the Lord's Prayer in pressure situations. Nor, she added, was Psalm 23 something he often recited.

TODD BEAMER'S 'Let's roll!' phrase became the war on terror's recruitment slogan.

President Bush had launched the legend in a speech on September 20, 2001 as he declared his unprecedented 'war on terror'. Beamer's story of selfless patriotism, according to the President, was a 'defining moment' in American history. Alongside President Bush on this occasion was Todd Beamer's wife Lisa.

Nobody, of course, would begrudge Mrs Beamer her celebrity, given her tragic circumstances. But her presence undoubtedly helped President Bush's cause.

The President again invoked her evangelical Christian husband's courage in another speech a month later.

'We will no doubt face new challenges,' said the man widely regarded as having taken office fully intending to attack Iraq. 'But we have our marching orders. My fellow Americans... let's roll!'

Such a phrase couldn't fail to chime with the President's gung-ho admirers — nor with the 40 million evangelical Christians in the so-called 'red' states where the Bush regime had its most fervent support. Later U.S. Navy personnel would spell out the words 9/11 LET'S ROLL by forming themselves on the deck of a warship bound for Iraq.

Lisa Beamer, always a staunch ally of the White House and its war on terror, had herself photographed unveiling a 'Let's Roll' logo on the side of a U.S. Air Force F-16.

She even sought to have 'Let's Roll' trademarked and signed a six-figure book deal which, along with her seven-figure compensation cheque, made her a rich woman. And in August 2002, just in time for the first 9/11 anniversary, she published her memoir entitled — predictably — *Let's Roll!*

The front cover showed the author with the Stars and Stripes and the publisher issued a staggering one million copies in hardback.

Truly, the Let's Roll slogan had become a call to arms — just at a time the White House needed it most.

Bush administration not admit its guilt? It could surely have argued that the poor souls lost in the airliner were a tragic but necessary sacrifice in order to prevent horror and destruction on a larger scale in at the Capitol Washington.

Air Force scrambles had been frequent enough in the past. One report said there had been 129 within the U.S. during 2000.

But secrecy is the first instinct of any war department, especially amid reports flooding in of a passenger revolt on the plane.

Any admission of a shooting down must have been ruled out politically because those brave passengers just might have retrieved the controls from fanatical hijackers.

For the U.S. military to have snatched victory from their grasp was unthinkable.

There are countless theories and areas of evidence to examine. There is even a theory that the plane could have blown up because of a bomb on board.

Air traffic controllers on the ground reportedly heard an anonymous voice in the cockpit announce: 'Ladies and gentleman. Here is the captain. Please sit down and keep remaining sitting. We have a bomb on board. So sit.'

But if Flight 93 had been blown up by a bomb at cruising altitude, its debris area would have covered at least 20 miles, as in the Lockerbie

crash.

The 9/11 Commission speculated that the rogue pilot jolted the plane violently in the minutes before the impact to disrupt a passenger revolt. This in turn led to claims that he might have succeeded in tearing a wing off, or otherwise wrecking the aircraft in mid-air, causing it to crash.

Boeing has refused to discuss this possibility. Such movements, however, could easily have been caused by the pilot attempting to avoid an approaching heatseeking missile homing in on its engines.

EYEWITNESS reports differed from the official story. Along the plane's route, people confirmed that the Boeing came in from the northwest, but they said it was not nose-diving. Instead it was flying low.

Bob Blair and Linda Shepley saw the plane when it dropped to 2,500ft. Rodney Peterson and Brandon Leventry noticed it at 2,000ft. Terry Butler saw it at about 500ft. Eric Peterson saw the plane at 'maybe 300ft'.

Lee Purbaugh, a scrap metal worker, was the closest. He told reporters: 'I heard this real loud noise coming over my head. I looked up and it was Flight 93, barely 50ft above me.'

'It was coming down at 45 degrees and rocking from side to side. Then the nose suddenly dipped and it just crashed into the ground. There was this big fireball and then a huge cloud of smoke.'

Purbaugh's account was perhaps the nearest of all the witness testimony to the official version of the story. Except for one important element.

Not once did Purbaugh mention the plane being upside down, as the 9/11 Commission, the FBI and the Pentagon all maintained it was.

With such a huge airplane roaring over his head, he could hardly have failed to notice which way up it was.

To some, this cast doubt on the credibility of his reported evidence. To others, it was merely another piece of the Flight 93 jigsaw that failed to fit.