

Anomalies of the air defense on 9/11

by Paul Schreyer

The term „anomaly“ as used in science means something that contradicts, or at least is not explainable by, a basic theory. Simultaneous anomalies can be „coincidences“, but as they increase in number they may force a scientist to put his or her theory in question. Regarding air defense on 9/11 we can identify at least six major simultaneous anomalies.

1. Absence of command authority

The specific people who should have managed the air defense on 9/11 were absent precisely while the attacks were occurring. Even though they were available in the days before and after the attack, they were missing exactly in the crucial hours of the hijackings. For better understanding, this is what the protocol said before 9/11 in case of a hijacking:

The air traffic controllers realizing the hijacking would inform their superiors, who in turn would alert the Hijack Coordinator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The Hijack Coordinator would call the Pentagon, more precisely the Deputy Director for Operations (DDO) in the National Military Command Center (NMCC). The DDO in coordination with the Secretary of Defense then would give orders to NORAD, which would scramble fighter jets to intercept the hijacked plane. ¹

So the top people responsible would be:

- ▶ the FAA’s Hijack Coordinator
- ▶ the DDO in the NMCC
- ▶ the Secretary of Defense

On 9/11 all three were absent from their command posts in the crucial hours between 8:14 a.m. (first hijacking) and 10:03 (last crash).

- ▶ Michael Canavan, the Hijack Coordinator of the FAA (and former Special Forces General) was not in the office but had flown to Puerto Rico; ² Lynne Osmus, his Deputy, arrived in the office only after all the planes had crashed ³
- ▶ General Montague Winfield, the NMCC DDO (who in 2012 became Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense), was not at his post between 8:30 and 10:00 a.m.; Captain Charles Joseph Leidig, his Deputy, had just qualified for being DDO one month before; General Winfield had asked him the afternoon before if he would sit in as DDO from 8:30 on; Winfield returned to his post only after all planes had crashed ⁴
- ▶ Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stayed away from the NMCC, too, and arrived there no sooner than 10:30 a.m., after all planes had crashed ⁵

This seemingly well-timed absence of key people is still unexplained. It obstructed the air defense effectively.

2. Communication breakdown

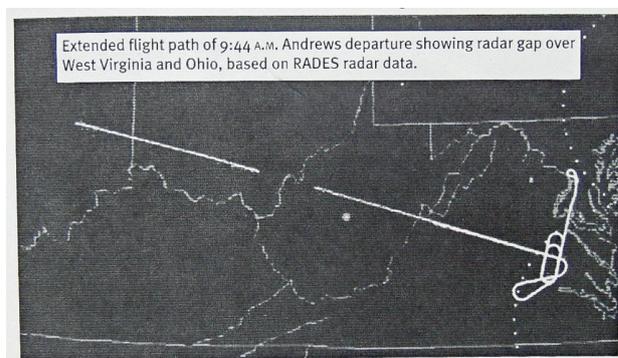
Several important telephone and radio connections didn't work, exactly while the hijackings were in progress. President Bush remembered in his memoir: „One of my greatest frustrations on September 11 was the woeful communications technology on Air Force One.“⁶ His attempts to keep in touch with Cheney failed repeatedly. Bush: „We tried to establish an open line, but it kept dropping.“⁷ Neither could he reach Rumsfeld nor other key officials.⁸ Bush says he became angry, snapping to his Chief of Staff: „What the hell is going on?“ According to the President the phone started working again, as Air Force One was reaching Barksdale Air Force Base at about 11:45.⁹ In other words, Bush was largely out of the loop for about two hours due to an unexplained temporary communication breakdown.

The same problem was seen in the Pentagon's NMCC, where the before mentioned Captain Leidig was „having a difficult time“ contacting the FAA's Operations Center. Once the line was established it was „repeatedly lost because of technical problems“, according to an internal document by the 9/11 Commission.¹⁰ Because of this unexplained failure the basic communication between civilian air traffic control and the Pentagon was effectively obstructed while the attacks.

Furthermore the pilots of the F-16s finally taking off from Langley at 9:30 could not be reached by their NORAD supervisors for unknown reasons until after the Pentagon was hit at 9:37. Only at 9:38, a few seconds after the Pentagon crash, could a connection be established to the fighter pilots, who were only then redirected to Washington.¹¹

3. Radar loss

Flight 77 was hijacked exactly in a small area of poor radar coverage, a so-called „radar gap“, as the *Washington Post* reported in November 2001.¹² Because of this the airliner disappeared from the eyes of air traffic controllers, right when it turned. This was essential for the terrorists' success in reaching the Pentagon. But how could the alleged hijackers have known, that this gap existed, where it was located, and when they would have arrived there? No logical explanation is given for this. When I emailed Don Phillips, the long-time transportation expert of the *Washington Post* who first mentioned the radar gap in the above cited article, asking him about this, I got no response. And when I tried to find out more about radar gaps in the airspace over the United States from Steve Bussolari, a scientist from the MIT's Lincoln Lab and author of the 2002 study „Surveillance implications of 9/11“ he wrote back politely but declined to answer any of my questions.



The same radar gap is also visible in this picture of another flight that morning (taken from the book „The 9/11 Mystery Plane“ by Mark Gaffney, Trine Day, 2008, p. 93).

4. Simultaneous wargames

On the morning of 9/11 several wargames were conducted. One of them was „Vigilant Guardian“, a countrywide so called „transition to war“ exercise including a hijacking right on the morning of the attacks.¹³ Whether this was only a virtual hijacking or if real planes were involved is still unclear. (Richard Clarke, the President's counterterrorism chief, called the exercise that morning in his book „Against all Enemies“ not „Vigilant Guardian“ but „Vigilant Warrior“, which by the NORAD code definition would indicate it contained real planes in the sky.)¹⁴ What we know for sure: the wargame included fake inserts of virtual planes on the radar screens. This blurred the real radar picture, while the hijackings occurred, as tapes from NORAD's north east sector indicate.¹⁵

5. Absence of Andrews fighters

The military airbase closest to Washington was Andrews Air Force Base, just about 10 miles outside the capital. It was home to the President's Air Force One and also to the 113th Fighter Wing whose proclaimed mission was „to provide combat units in the highest possible state of readiness“. ¹⁶ Even though Andrews was not an alert base - as was Otis or Langley Air Force Base either of which could launch armed fighter jets within 10 to 15 minutes - the Andrews fighter pilots called themselves proudly the „Capital Guardians“. At least it is fair to suggest that these fighters should have reached Washington first.

On the morning of 9/11 seven fighter pilots were available on the base, three of them already in the air on a training mission 200 miles - or 10 to 12 minutes flying time - south of Washington. ¹⁷ But astonishingly no fighter jets were scrambled from Andrews while the hijackings were in progress. And the pilots on a training mission were allegedly out of radio reach. So while jets were taking off from Otis Air Force Base (at Cape Cod) at 8:52 and from Langley Air Force Base (near Norfolk) at 9:30, no fighters were launched from Andrews, the base right next to Washington.

According to author Lynn Spencer the Secret Service called Andrews to request fighters at shortly after 9:30. ¹⁸ But allegedly only at 10:38, a whole hour after the crash into the nearby Pentagon, the first Andrews fighters were starting, unarmed, on their way. ¹⁹ This huge delay has never been conclusively explained. Allegedly it took almost an hour to put missiles onboard the jets. ²⁰ But as the first F-16s took off unarmed, obviously this explanation makes little sense.

Commander of the fighter wing at Andrews was Brigade General David Wherley. He was not interviewed by the 9/11 Commission's Team 8, as were most other air defense officials, but personally and exclusively by the Commission's executive director Philip Zelikow. ²¹ Reading the memorandum of this, kind of „private“, interview (not taking place at the General's Andrews office but at Harvard University where the General was a student in a teaching program of Zelikow himself) and reading the account of Lynn Spencer one gets the impression that Wherley couldn't have scrambled fighters without a clear shoot-down order issued to him by Cheney's White House. So this would be a reason for the delay. But again this makes only little sense, considering all alert fighters from Otis and Langley had already started without such an order. That is, „scramble“ or „intercept“ doesn't mean „shoot down“, but first and foremost „take off and look out what's going on“.

The 9/11 Commission asked about Andrews in its Second Public Hearing in May 2003, where air defense officials testified. Here is a short excerpt from the exchange with two NORAD Generals (Wherley didn't testify there):

Commission Member John F. Lehman: In a short answer, why (...) wasn't Andrews Air Force Base with F-16s and Marine F-18s available, part of the alert? And I understand, and I'd also like to have you comment on what the role of the Secret Service was in scrambling those F-16s. (...)

Major General Larry Arnold: The Andrews airplanes. It is my understanding that the Secret Service (...) had personal knowledge of those, of the people out there and the telephone number, and were - I cannot speculate whether they knew what we were doing or not, but in the urgency to get something done they made a phone call to the 113th, I learned later - I did not know that at the time - and asked them to get anything they could airborne, and I think the quote was „to protect the House.“

Major General Craig McKinley: And the 113th is the 113th Fighter Wing at Andrews, the District of Columbia Air National Guard F-16 Wing.

Gen. Arnold: And not part of NORAD. ²²

So the Generals tried to underline that they actually weren't responsible for Andrews Air Force Base because it belonged to the Secret Service, which in turn was led directly from the White House where Dick Cheney was in charge on 9/11. Commission member and experienced attorney Richard Ben-Veniste tried to clarify this issue later in the same hearing:

Mr. Ben-Veniste: Let me ask you about the planes which were scrambled from Andrews Air Force Base (...) by the Secret Service of the United States. Who gave the order to scramble jets - F-16s also, I believe - out of Andrews?

Gen. Arnold: It's my understanding that the Secret Service requested that they launch anything they could to get them airborne.

Mr. Ben-Veniste: Of whom did they make that request?

Gen. Arnold: I'm not sure if it's General Dave Wherley, and I think they actually talked to him. And I did not know this at time of course, but they called him up and said, what do you have that you can get airborne? He had some airplanes returning from the range on training mission. (...)

Mr. Ben-Veniste: And who provided that guidance to them? Was that a decision made internally by Secret Service, or did Secret Service require higher executive order in order to launch those planes on that mission?

Gen. Arnold: I do not know that.

Gen. McKinley: I am unaware of the answer to that, sir. ²³

So the NORAD-Generals kept silent about this crucial issue by pretending not to know who was actually in charge of the fighter jets protecting the capital of the United States. A quite doubtful claim. But also at the top of the White House and therefore of the Secret Service who operated with Andrews nobody seemed to know anything. The „Staff statements on the military and civilian aviation authorities“, read into the record during the 9/11 Commission's 12th public hearing in June 2004, says:

„The president and the vice president told us they had not been aware that fighters had been scrambled out of Andrews, at the request of the Secret Service and outside of the military chain of command.“ ²⁴

And the final 9/11 Commission Report, issued one month later, went even further, adding a sentence not included in the staff statement before:

„There is no evidence that NORAD headquarters or military officials in the NMCC knew - during the morning of September 11 - that the Andrews planes were airborne and operating under different rules of engagement.“ ²⁵

This appears to be wrong. According to the NEADS tapes, publicly available since 2009, Major Kevin Nasypany, Mission Crew Commander at NEADS, asked at 10:41, three minutes after the start of the first Andrews jets: „Do we have some fighters out of Andrews under our control? CONR is asking.“ ²⁶ CONR was the NORAD headquarter for the continental United States under the command of General Larry Arnold. So this statement indicates that NORAD headquarters at least knew about the Andrews scramble.

In the bulk of internal documents by the 9/11 Commission, transferred to the National Archives to be released for the public (a process only partially completed since 2009), there is a folder about Andrews. But it was exempted from publication in November 2009, indicating that there might be more to hide regarding the actions and inactions of this airbase on 9/11. ²⁷

6. Delay and detour of Otis and Langley fighters

Nevertheless two bases scrambled fighter jets before the attacks were finished. These were Otis Air Force Base at Cape Cod and Langley Air Force Base near Norfolk. Two Otis F-15s took off at 8:52 a.m., 11 minutes before the second impact into the World Trade Center, and three Langley F-16s took off at 9:30 a.m., 7 minutes before the crash into the Pentagon.

The first thing that should be discussed here is the apparent delay in scrambling these jets. The Otis pilots were alarmed at about 8:36 by FAA via Otis Tower.²⁸ This was 2 minutes before NEADS received their first alarm call from Boston Center at 8:38,²⁹ valuable time for the pilots who moved rapidly to the hangar and climbed into their cockpits, ready to take off at about 8:42.³⁰ But the actual scramble order by NEADS commander Colonel Robert Marr was given to them no sooner than 8:46. Therefore the two alert pilots had to wait calmly for 3 to 4 minutes in their jets.³¹ These were important minutes, considering the flying time of 10 to 12 minutes from Otis to New York and the second crash there at 9:03. The delay of this scramble order by Colonel Marr is still not sufficiently explained. The case is very similar with the Langley jets. The pilots there were alarmed at 9:09, but the actual scramble order was given to them by Colonel Marr only at 9:24.³² Again a loss of important minutes, considering the flight time of about 10 minutes from Langley to Washington and the Pentagon crash there at 9:37.

So to summarize this first aspect: the fighter jets from Otis and Langley might have arrived in time for intercepting the planes that would crash into the WTC's south tower and the Pentagon, if their scramble orders hadn't been delayed - for reasons still to be explained. That doesn't mean they could have shot down those planes, for there was no shoot down order issued at that time. But at least they could have reached the airliners and taken a look into their cockpits, so that we had a chance to know who actually controlled those planes. This is something we still don't know at all.

Apart from the actual time of the scramble orders there was an even more disturbing anomaly - the strange detours of all involved fighter jets from Otis and Langley. These detours led to further substantial delays in reaching their targets. For example the combined scramble and flying time from alarm to arrival over New York or Washington respectively would be roughly about 20 minutes in both cases. Theoretically. For in reality the Otis and the Langley fighters needed about 50 minutes from alarm to target. Following a few details about these detours:



Flight paths of the four hijackings and the fighter jets on 9/11

The Otis jets (call sign: „Panta“) flew a so called „holding pattern“ over the Atlantic, a loop that is largely unexplained. At 9:09, before reaching New York, they made a sharp turn to the east and began flying in the wrong direction further out to the ocean.³³ On whose request? What we know is that two minutes later, at 9:11, the pilots received a message over the emergency channel: „Remain current position until FAA requests assistance.“ Interestingly this was the only time, the emergency channel (also called „guard channel“) was used for communication to the pilots during their whole mission.³⁴ Who transmitted this order? Then at 9:13 the Otis pilots suddenly left the holding pattern and headed directly to New York, arriving over Manhattan at 9:25. Miles Kara, one of the air defense investigators of the 9/11 Commission's Team 8 wrote about this in 2010:

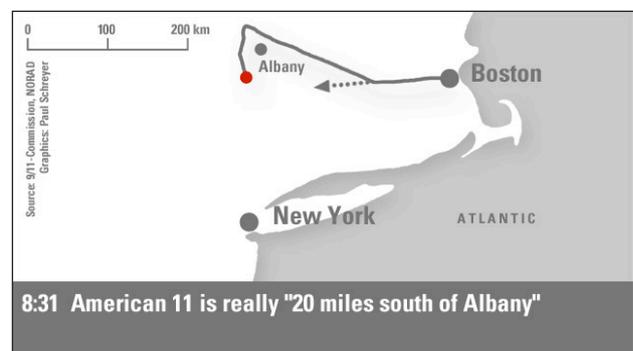
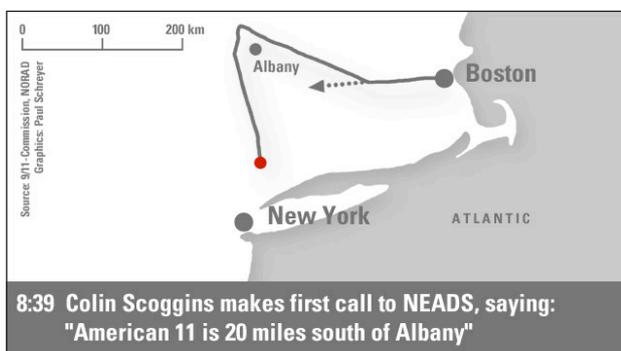
„We have no primary source information that informs us as to why the Panta flight abandoned the holding pattern. There is no amplifying information for the odd, one-time use of the guard channel to communicate with the Panta flight.“³⁵

Indeed, what happened there? Kara summarized: „There is no primary source information that tells us how and why the Otis fighters established a combat air patrol over New York City.“³⁶ That’s quite strange since the voices of all officers at the NEADS operations floor are on tape. Each one on a different channel. But, as Miles Kara from the 9/11 Commission tells us: „The audio channels at NEADS for the Otis flight military controllers were not recorded the morning of 9/11. (...) Absent the audio files from the NEADS controllers, we do not know what actions they took, and when.“³⁷ So the detailed surroundings of the first air defense mission on 9/11 remain under a veil of „no information available“.

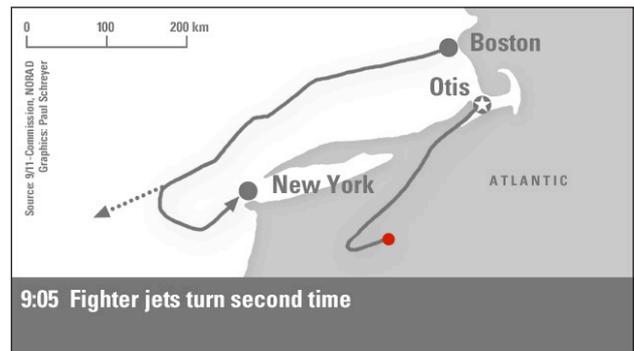
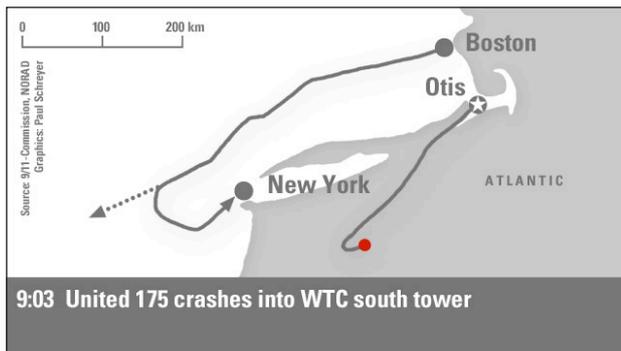
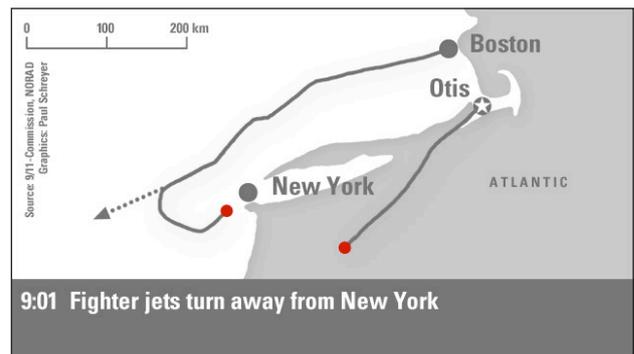
One could argue that the whole issue of the holding pattern between 9:09 and 9:13 is of little relevance, since the second crash into the World Trade Center had already occurred at 9:03. That’s true. At least if the times we got are all correct. But what - and this is speculation now - if the post-9/11 generated radar flight path of the Otis jets had been intentionally attached with a wrong timestamp? We know at least that the Otis jet’s CVR (cockpit voice recorder) and HUD (heads up display) data were both „not accurately time-stamped“.³⁸

So what if the Otis flight happened earlier? Although this is speculative, we have an indication that the first call alarming the military of a hijacking and leading to the Otis scramble was made at least 8 minutes earlier than the NEADS-tapes suggest.

According to the tapes Joe Cooper from the FAA’s Boston Center called NEADS at 8:38 to request fighter jets. The 9/11 Commission Report cites this phone call as the first alert to the military that morning.³⁹ Following this initial call FAA’s military liaison Colin Scoggins kept in contact with NEADS to help them track American 11 which could be seen on FAA radar until it crashed (while NEADS radar operators couldn’t see it, for unknown reasons). Scoggins remembers clearly saying in his first call to NEADS that Flight 11 „is 20 miles south of Albany“.⁴⁰ But if you look at the report of the National Transportation Safety Board for Flight 11 you see that the plane was 20 miles south of Albany as early as 8:31.⁴¹ And as Boston Center’s Joe Cooper was calling NEADS even before Scoggins, this means the first alarm call to NEADS might have happened at least 8 minutes earlier than stated in the 9/11 Commission Report. Asked about this by a journalist in 2011, Scoggins stayed by his version, saying this was puzzling him too and there were a few minutes „that never matched up“.⁴²



So we have to consider the possibility that everything regarding the military response to Flight 11 and therefore the Otis scramble happened at least 8 minutes earlier. In this case the strange holding pattern wouldn’t have occurred between 9:09 and 9:13 but between 9:01 and 9:05 instead. That would make perfect sense if the goal was to keep the jets away from the incoming flight United 175 before it crashed into the south tower at 9:03.



Sequence assuming the Otis scramble started 8 minutes earlier than officially claimed

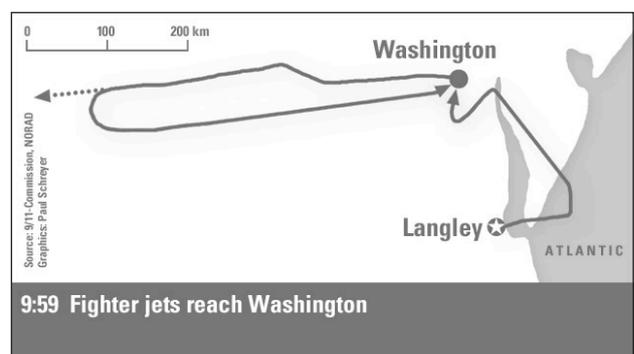
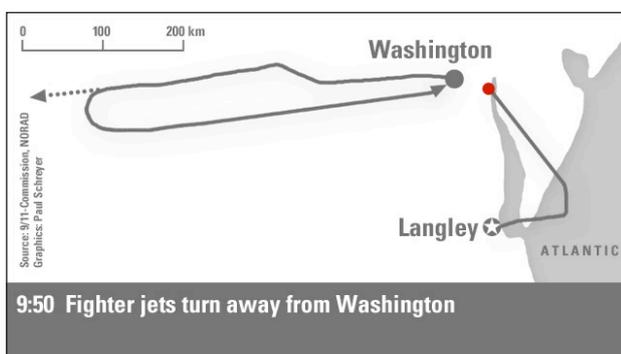
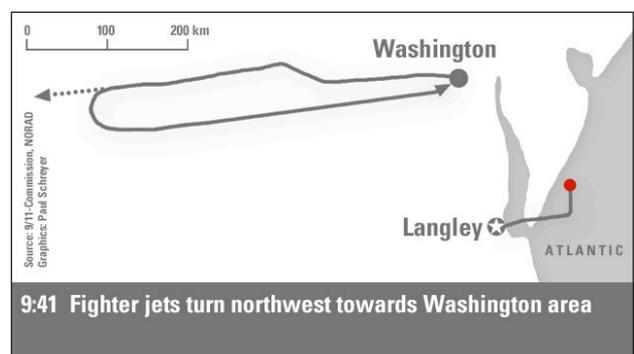
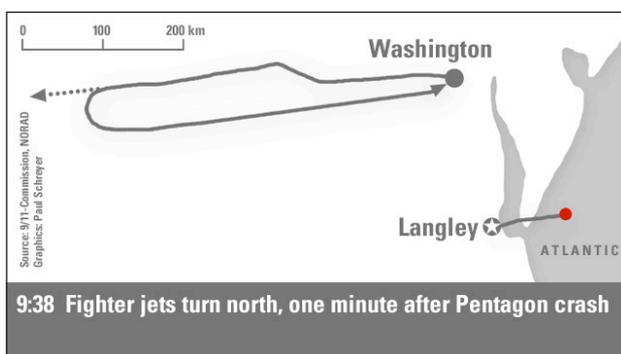
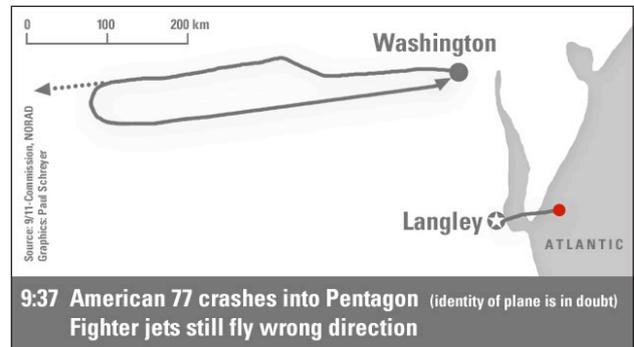
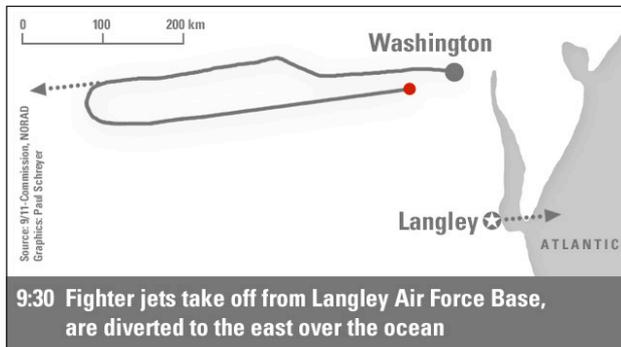
But again, this is speculation. Now back to undisputed facts. The second Air Force Base sending fighter jets that morning was Langley. When the pilots there finally received their scramble order at 9:24, 13 minutes before the Pentagon crash, they were ordered by NEADS to fly to the Washington / Baltimore area. Which they didn't do at all. Instead they flew straight out to the east over the ocean for some 8 minutes. On whose request? Here is what we know:

Two officers were responsible for managing the air defense at NORAD's north east sector: Major Kevin Nasypany, Mission Crew Commander at NEADS, and his superior Colonel Robert Marr, Commander of NEADS. Nasypany was in the operations room, where he had a bunch of people at the radar screens as well as people in direct contact with the Air Force bases. Marr was in the battle cab above and phoned with Nasypany as necessary.

When Nasypany's people watched on their screens that the Langley jets, who had taken off at 9:30, flew wrong direction, they reached out to the „Fleet Area Control and Surveillance Facility“ at Virginia Capes, also known by their call sign „Giant Killer“. This facility was responsible for controlling the military airspace over the ocean where the Langley jets were flying that moment. NEADS called „Giant Killer“ at 9:34 and requested that they redirect the fighters to the Washington area.⁴³ But it seems that „Giant Killer“ didn't forward the request to the pilots, for the jets continued to fly further out to the ocean.

At 9:36 NEADS received the message that a plane was 6 miles from the White House. That was the plane that would crash into the Pentagon in the following minute. According to the 9/11 Commission Report Major Nasypany discovered only then and „to his surprise“ that the Langley fighters had flown in the wrong direction for already 6 minutes.⁴⁴ When his Weapons Controller Steve Citino then tried to call them directly, he was unsuccessful. Allegedly they were out of reach over the ocean.⁴⁵ At 9:37 one of the Langley pilots contacted NEADS and asked for confirmation of the (wrong) course to the east.⁴⁶ That meant „Giant Killer“ had definitely not forwarded the requested redirection - for unknown reasons. NEADS instantly gave the correct heading to the Langley pilots (call sign: „Quit“) but got only this response from a nearby flying refueling tanker plane: „We are relaying to Quit 25,

they can't hear you." 47 Only at 9:38 could a radio connection be established between NEADS and the fighter pilots - precisely one minute after (!) the crash at the Pentagon. Only then the pilots learned that they should have flown to the Washington area right from the beginning - and finally turned. 48 Major Nasypany had a hard time understanding all this. „Why'd they go out there?“, he asked his people, according to the tape recordings. One of his controllers answered: „Because Giant Killer sent them out there.“ 49



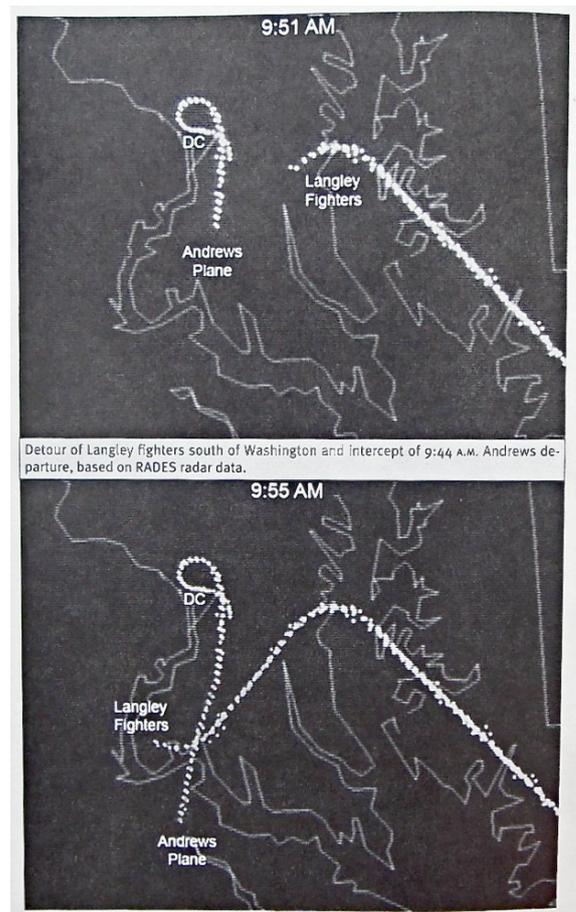
Sequence of the Langley scramble based on official timeline and radar data

This is all we know. The official explanation for the detour is that air traffic controllers at Langley had sort of a standard flight plan, sending all jets generally to the east and that this standardized eastern heading somehow replaced the original NORAD scramble order. But this seems to be a dubious claim. Because how could that have happened? The pilots knew the original scramble order. They knew which direction NEADS wanted them to fly. And then they somehow forgot? But, same as with the Otis scramble, there seems only little chance to dig deeper because „Giant Killer“, the responsible control facility, deleted all its tapes from the communication on 9/11. This was done routinely, as Commission staff member Miles Kara claimed. 50

The Langley fighters were diverted a second time shortly before their arrival over Washington, just when United 93, the 4th hijacked plane, was heading towards the capital as well. At 9:50 the fighters were pushed to the southwest, away from Washington again. This episode is completely

missing in the 9/11 Commission Report, even though the detour is clearly visible on radar. Author Lynn Spencer offered an explanation in 2008 and Miles Kara repeated it in 2011: both claim that a NEADS controller had just erroneously transposed two digits of the coordinates he gave to the Langley pilots that moment - 38.25 North, 77.02 West instead of 38.52 North.⁵¹

But anyway - this is in both cases a latitude way south of Washington (38.90 North). Then why was such a new heading, diverting the fighters again from the capital, given at all at 9:50? The radar data, made public through a FOIA request in 2007, shows a likely explanation: the start of a plane from Andrews at 9:44, circling over Washington and then flying south. As the radar picture shows, the Langley fighters were turning apparently to follow and intercept that plane. Again, neither the 9/11 Commission Report nor Miles Kara identify or even mention that plane. As independent researchers found out via FOIA requests in 2008, it was a military Boeing 747, a so called „E-4B“ or „Doomsday plane“. ⁵² Why did the 9/11 Commission keep completely silent about this? And for what apparently classified purpose did this flying electronic command center actually take off, some 20 minutes after a nationwide ground stop had been declared?



Last detour of the Langley fighters before reaching Washington (taken from the book „The 9/11 Mystery Plane“ by Mark Gaffney, Trine Day, 2008, p. 84)

Summary

September 11, 2001, was a quite remarkable day for the air defense system of the United States.

- ▶ The key people responsible for managing a hijacking were absent from their command posts right in the crucial hours.
- ▶ Important telephone and radio connections didn't work until after the attacks were over.
- ▶ A hijacked plane disappeared in a radar gap, and nobody is willing to explain.
- ▶ A wargame projecting a hijacking was taking place simultaneously.
- ▶ The airbase that should have protected the capital was not able to send fighter jets within an hour of time.
- ▶ Interceptors from alert bases were scrambled with unexplained delays and then diverted several times.

In short, a whole set of highly improbable events occurred simultaneously on that morning. From a scientific point of view these anomalies need further investigation. It is not credible that Bin Laden was responsible for these anomalies, nor that they were sheer coincidences.

About the author: Paul Schreyer, born 1977, is a freelance author and journalist from Germany. He writes for the German magazines „Telepolis“, „Hintergrund“ and „Ossietzky“ and is author of the book „Inside 9/11“. His website is www.911-facts.info.

Notes:

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<http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf>
- (2) 9/11 Commission, Transcript 2nd Public Hearing, 23.05.03, p. 77
http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/archive/hearing2/9-11Commission_Hearing_2003-05-23.pdf
- (3) 9/11 Commission, Memorandum for the Record, Interview Lynne Osmus, 03.10.03
<http://media.nara.gov/9-11/MFR/t-0148-911MFR-00910.pdf>
- (4) 9/11 Commission, Memorandum for the Record, Interview Captain Charles Joseph Leidig, 29.04.04
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- (15) Matthew Everett, Shoestring 9/11 Blog, „Let’s get rid of this goddamn sim’:
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