

A Long Travel Home

The following story is a fiction although somewhat closer to the truth of, what actually happened with the four planes and their human load on Sept. 11, 2001, when compared to the official 9/11 story. There are indications for all aspects of the story except that any American passenger survived the killers – but then, I needed somebody to tell the story.

I was going home to California from Washington early in the morning. The sun was going to rise as I arrived at the airport, it looked as if it was going to be a beautiful day but some problems arose as I tried to book in for the scheduled plane.

"I am sorry, Sir, but the plane you were supposed to take was already filled, that is, I admit it was overbooked. However, we have another plane for San Francisco a little later and as a small compensation, I can give you a business-class seat."

"When will the second plane leave?"

"It should be leaving at 8:20 a.m."

"All right, accepted, but don't forget the promised upgrading, I have long legs."

"No problem, Sir, there is plenty of room for the legs in that plane. So far, we have just about one fifth of the seats occupied."

"Strange – and with another plane from the same company hopelessly overbooked?"

She drew her shoulders up, opened her hands to each side and said, "The computer's will is our command."

The computer! Always is the computer given credit to all possible errors, why not the humans who fed the computer? Never mind, I might get home an hour later but with a much more comfortable travel than squeezed down in a monkey-class seat. It was worth waiting for.

The take-off was further delayed but when you travel much, such occurrences were not exceptional. I was enjoying the prospect of returning home today, so it was not important whether it would be an hour later. I was only feeling a bit bad that I had not called my family but I decided it was too early to wake them up. Besides, once travelling business-class, I planned to invest 2½ \$ for an air-phone call once we approached Chicago. I was living with my parents and could expect them to pick me up in the airport.

We were indeed a small company for a big airplane as we were finally asked to board the plane. While walking up the boarding ramp, I overheard how a few of my fellow passengers discussed how they had also been scheduled for the early plane. I considered asking if there were indeed anybody who was primarily intending to take this one but then I thought, 'none of my business,' and slowly proceeded with the rank.

It seemed that they had seated nearly all the passengers in the first and business-class sections. There was a general satisfaction in the plane, not crudely expressed but people were talking nicely to another without stress from the late departure.

"United Airlines welcomes you on board UA93," one of the stewardesses began in the usual mechanical tune as stewardesses always use by the stereotypical messages and security instructions. Here in America, they always speak English, but I have noticed that abroad, they end their speeches with the same tune, regardless if it is with thank^{you}, mer^{ci}, gra^{cias} or dan^{ke}.

The weather was perfect for flying – among many other things the weather was perfect for. Not a single cloud separated us in 32,000 feet altitude from the working people at

the earth-surface. It would, of course, be a great comfort to see them stroll for work in the daily traffic congestion, then later sweat during hard work while I was sitting up here and doing nothing. I knew what happened down there every morning and I knew what I was doing, or not doing, up here and my imagination was the only link between the two scenes. However, that did not make the comparison worse in my favour. Had I only been stuck in the traffic jam that morning, but that was a later recognition.

The stewardess who gave me my breakfast was blond (the favourite hair colour among stewardesses) and she would have been a beauty with any other colour. She smiled at me and I figured how many men she would smile to during one month and how many of these men afterwards recalled the smile of this sole woman. Maybe that was what she was paid for. Her salary may not be enormous but it covers this enchanting smile.

Another man of approximately 40 years age asked for the stewardess' attention and thereby attracted also mine, possibly in addition to other men whom she had enchained with the witchcraft of her smile. This intruder was sitting in the last row of the first class and dressed in the invariable uniform of a businessman, which sole variation was the colour of the tie – his was light blue, a bit lighter than common among CEOs but he was, of course, too young for the highest rank. He handed a note to the stewardess and I could hear the word 'captain' in their short conversation. Then she hurried up towards the cockpit and returned immediately to continue her job – not that there was any urgency here, never had so few passengers been dealt with by a full cabin's staff, but I figured that she preferred to be near me rather than in the same surrounding as pilots with dubious reputation. I was torn out of my dreams a few minutes later as indeed the pilot came out and asked the passenger for his identity.

"Of course you may see it," he said loudly and opened a small wallet that he had taken from his jacket's inner pocket.

The captain loudly murmured "FBI anti-hijacking team" to which the agent signalled him not to discuss anything openly. He was then invited to join the remaining pilot in the front. All passengers had followed this meeting with undisclosed curiosity.

'A plain-cloth agent travelling first-class?' I wondered. Soon he came back, however, and the plane continued its route undisturbed – at first. But suddenly it sounded:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. Due to circumstances beyond our control, we have been forced to interrupt our travel. We have been ordered to land in Cleveland. I shall give you further information when I receive it myself. There is nothing wrong with our plane, it is an inconveniency for all of us but there is no danger."

A murmur of groans and complaints were heard in the cabin, also I was slowly getting angry. I got up early in Washington, was then booked for a later plane than the one I had planned to take. The second plane was delayed and now we were going to make an unforeseen stopover. Should I not slowly get upset? On the other hand, what to do about it? Forcè majeure, as the French say.

"We are now starting our descent towards Cleveland," the captain informed. "Please fasten your seatbelts."

Indeed, there was nothing particular about the landing, but afterwards there was an exceptionally long taxiing. From the window, I noticed that we were bypassing the main terminal. "That's a great pilot," I said loudly. "He has giving up flying and now tries to reach California by driving there." The nearest passengers were laughing, even the dark-haired James Bond, who might have caused the trouble, turned around and smiled. Calm and smiling passengers were what were needed now.

The plane finally stopped in front of some strange buildings, not looking as I had ever seen in any airport. Somewhat comforting, three other planes were already parked in front of it, another from United and two from American Airlines. Immediately, the captain explained:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to NASA Research Center in Cleveland. We have received a bomb warning and the plane must be evacuated immediately, starting in the

front. Do not take any personal belongings with you and do not use any cell-phone as that may precipitate the explosives on-board. A bomb search team will enter as soon as you have left and you should not endanger their work, therefore I repeat, do not make any cell-phone calls.”

While he spoke, the stewardesses had opened the door. I had hoped now to experience an emergency evacuation down the inflated tubes but no, a gangway had already been attached and there was nothing dramatically about our departure from the plane itself. Down there, an unusual reception committee was searching us and confiscating all the cell phones they could find, including – I am sorry to say – mine. Simultaneously, we were asked to identify ourselves and give a telephone number for our relatives and whoever might expect us in the scheduled airport.

When all the passengers had left, two persons in company with a small fox terrier entered the plane. I had imagined something bigger for a bomb sniffing dog, but now my attention was made by another occurrence: our luggage was immediately emptied and part of it reloaded on a small white military jet. I recognized my own suitcase among the ones going into the new plane while there was no room for other part of the luggage. What was the idea of this splitting? It was only obvious that they were in a hurry, because I even saw the white jet take off before we forcibly were pushed into a large hangar, which had been furnished with benches and chairs where aeroplanes were else being checked and repaired. The passengers and crews of the other three planes had already been gathered together here. The crew’s section was farthest away from the entrance but not directly separated from the passenger’s – it was simply so that the four crews had placed themselves along the wall. The big gate had been closed.

A man, dressed like the FBI-agent of our plane but with brown curled hair, stood up and spoke to us: “Ladies and Gentlemen, may I ask your attention. This day has seen dramatic events in our nation. An unknown number of planes have been hijacked. Because of these occurrences, we have been forced to take unusual precautions. I know that you are here subjected to various inconveniences but you can praise yourself happy not to be onboard any of the hijacked planes. All planes over the entire nation have been grounded. As soon as possible, perhaps this very evening, we shall try to bring you all to California, from where you may reach your final destination on the ground. Your relatives shall be informed according to the information you gave before entering this building.”

Just after he finished, about a dozen young men with skin colours assuming an Arab origin entered the building. Including the crew, we were now about enough people to fill a Boeing 767, if it should be offered later – as the agent’s speech seemed to indicate. People spoke to each other, expressing understanding for the precautionous efforts. To me, it was strange that my recently bought and rather expensive cell-phone had been taken away, that my suitcase had left and the hangar had been furnished in advance. Moreover, my confidence in the authorities was different to the people expressing gratitude to their excellent planning. I did not know what was being played here but soon decided that I did not want to participate.

That decision alone did not suffice. I wanted to go out of the building but there were two men standing in front of the door.

“What are you attempting?” one of them asked brusquely.

“I just want some fresh air,” I replied friendly.

“You ain’t going nowhere,” the other said and clobbered on the chest where he was definitely hiding a handgun.

The first one found that this was perhaps too rough. “Please understand that this is a landing field, not a stroll-around for wanderers.”

I understood that any argument about being ‘a free citizen of the United States’ would not meet much understanding by these two guys and decided to express understanding for their arguments. Instead, the incident had further hardened my suspicion that we were held prisoners in some malicious game.

Hundreds of people and only two toilets in the building. There was already a row of a dozen people in front of them, and with me, there was now one more. Not that I really needed it but I decided that it was better to recognize the possibilities – and empty the bladder simultaneously, now I was there. When my turn came, I found a small window from which a desperate prisoner might escape, but certainly not unnoticed – the row behind him would soon pose demands towards the closed door but worse, heavily armed guards on the backside of the building confirmed that this was now to be considered a prison.

I went back into the hangar and considered my strategy. If possible, I decided to try to escape, but how? It was obvious that there was no chance of leaving the building, so how about staying there when the others left? I still did not know where, then another question emerged: when to hide, if I found a suitable place? I tried to answer this question first. If our guards would abduct all, for what purpose ever, they would probably do so after darkness. If I had hidden already 10 hours or more, I might be anything but fit for the strain demanded by the search. So I had better use the time for some rest. Besides, our guards would also be tired after some hours, but possibly they would be replaced at the end of the day. I decided that 7.30 p.m. was the ideal time, so it was only the question, where to hide. That question should be answered before my rest.

There was the big hall, the small corridor and a lot of people everywhere. Before all exits of the building, brusquely looking guards were standing. They were probably armed with handguns but at least for now, they did not affect the general mood by showing them. I was confined with a lot of people who did not realize it.

Then there was kind of an open floor in the big hangar, opposite the gate and above the offices and toilets. It was worth a glance. The problem was, that there was only an open metal stair up there, not much of sight protection and even a guard near to it. I passed him without showing any interest and in that moment, something happened: A woman started to scream in the opposite end of the hangar. Some people talked loudly to her but that failed to calm her down, on the contrary, she was crying and shouting, in another sense, distracting the attention of everybody else. Even the guard in front of the stairs felt an obligation to mix himself up, and that was my chance, if ever there was one. Cautiously, I entered the stairs and nobody must have seen it.

As soon as I was up there, I lay down and crawled. I looked back after a few yards. There was still a tumultuous chaos and a terrible acoustic in the hangar, amplifying the screaming and many voices but I could not see anybody. Nevertheless, just lying up here did not satisfy me, if there was a better disguise. There were no rooms up here but in the wall, a tremendous tube let into what was supposedly part of an air conditioner. Possibly it was required if they worked with engines in the closed hangar, currently no wind was felt from it. There was kind of a grid in front of it but the screws had been removed and it was loosely attached, invisible from the distance but apparent in a close view. The noise was getting lower and if I should produce any myself, I better hurry up. The tube was big enough for me to crawl into and it made a turn immediately, the only disguise in this hangar, it seemed. An average American would not have any chance but I was young, somewhat sporty and slim. In order to close the grid properly, I had to enter with my feet first. It was a bit difficult to turn around the corner.

"Hey you there, scram, this is my disguise," a voice whispered from behind.

There was one here already; that is why the grid was loose, he had done the first part of the work.

"I'm sorry, I am probably here for the same reason as you. I have no intention to leave. Besides, as long as I stay here, I can't betray you," I whispered back.

My predecessor, if I may call him so as he was first here, was fast to understand and answered, "Okay, but then remain silent. It may be a long stay. I hope nobody else is coming."

Shortly afterwards, somebody indeed tried. The guard quickly returned to his post and shouted: "What are you intending to do? It is forbidden to go up there!"

My guard whispered, "Great, I hope he will take better care now."

"You are an egoist," I replied.

"Possibly, that is a precondition for surviving in this cruel World. And now wait till the night."

"Right, by the way, what's your name?"

"I don't have any"

"Sounds sensible. You may call me Jack." I could also keep my name secret.

"To you, I am Bob. And now stay silent!"

I realized that my plans were necessarily overthrown. This was the possibility and there would not be a second one. How good that I had just visited the toilet, and how sad that I did not take anything to eat.

It was indeed a long wait, and I must have slept sometime during the afternoon. Suddenly I felt a grasp on one of my feet. "Stop snarling," Bob snared.

"I'm sorry, I must have slept."

"If you turn around on your side, you may sleep further without waking everybody else."

The survival artist was right, and the monotony helped me to kill some more hours that way. I was woken up around 10 pm East-Coast time, my wristwatch claimed, when a man from below loudly said:

"We have a plane leaving for San Francisco soon. Does anybody care to take it?"

The noise from the floor indicated that everybody wanted to get away from here. Even I considered doing so for a moment, but then I remembered that why I was here, that our prison was prepared and we were barred from any contact with the rest of the World.

Perhaps they had wanted to check some sort of a passenger list, but the pressure from behind was enormous as reaction to the ill-placed humorous remark. There was a lot of loud and demanding talking, and you could hear the man from before try to ascertain the people that "there is room for everybody". Slowly, the hangar emptied, it may have taken half an hour. A little later, a distant voice said: "The toilets are empty." A second voice shouted, the other rooms are empty," and quite near a third voice claimed, "the gallery is empty."

I believe I heard a relieved sigh from Bob. Shortly after, he whispered: "Look at your watch, Jack. We shall stay one hour after the last sound."

"Then I hope they are not going to clean the floor up."

"Wait and see."

I saw nothing – that is, the light was turned off and there were no sounds except the breathing of the two of us. We heard a jet start.

"Off towards Hawaii," Bob murmured.

"How do you know?"

"I don't, it could be the North Pole or the Azores Islands in the Atlantic. I only have the feeling that they shall never arrive. Besides, the Pacific has the advantage that the plane is initially following a westward course as its partly professional passengers expect. I don't really care. I am only satisfied that I am not on board."

He was not sympathetic, my fellow escape-convict, but he had a professional hold of the matters. I was looking forward to get a view of him.

"Shouldn't we get out of the tube and stretch the legs at first at the gallery?" I asked.

"Nope, we shall stay here. Just imagine that there is a light turned on upon the slightest movement and everything is lost. One hour, as I said."

Exactly at a quarter to midnight on my watch, Bob granted freedom. "But silent, slow movements, we are still not out of danger," he emphasized.

I took off the grid and pushed it aside so that I could get out. I offered Bob a hand but he refused it. Our eyes had been accustomed to darkness but there was almost no light revealing anything but contours. Therefore, we had lost the ability for walking straight.

With stiff legs and one hand supporting on the wall just beside the tube, Bob stood and urinated. "Not the fine manner," I argued.

"One more reason to do it," he said. That convinced me, too, so I followed his example.

We cautiously approached the ladder and went down. Now I realised that somebody had left the light in the corridor in front of the toilets and that the small rim of light coming under the door gave our accommodated eyes enough light to see rather detailed the scenery of the emptied hangar.

"Bob, I think I can recognize some cookies here," I whispered. We should both be hungry."

"Don't touch them, there may be tranquillisers in them."

"But then some bread?"

"There is a higher probability that it is clean, but don't eat it now, wait till after we get out of this airport, if at all possible."

"All right, chief," I said and stuffed some bread and a can of coke into my pocket but let the cookies stay where they were. Bob did the same. There was no doubt that he was more professional in the business of escaping.

Before we proceeded, he asked me, "Do you know that we are not in the main airport of Cleveland but in the adjacent NASA Research Center?"

I nodded, "Our welcome committee told us so."

"That makes it even more difficult to get out of here. The airport is probably surrounded by a fence, this one then by a double fence with dogs in-between and armed guards patrolling around. And it may be as difficult to get out as to get in. I have no plan but we must first observe the surroundings without stirring-up any attention, least of all from belling dogs."

The first stage would be to get out of the hangar. However, Bob decided to get all useful objects with him, and that necessitated an inspection of the office and other small rooms under the gallery. Fortunately, they had been unlocked as they searched for hidden passengers. Bob avoided going into the toilet because he was afraid that the light might betray us, once we opened the door. In a small room in the middle, we found some high cupboards. They were locked, but it posed no big challenge for Bob to change that. Each of them contained a uniform, including a cap. Unfortunately, there were no ID cards attached, probably the owners needed them to get into the area.

"Okay, you are now Lieutenant Jack Jackson, I am Captain Bob Franklin, should anybody ask."

In the office there were some car keys that Bob grasped, hoping but not knowing then if he would find the vehicle that fitted the keys.

"Now we only need a plan of, how to get out of the area," Bob said. That, however, was not to be found anywhere. Having searched all, my watch now showing close to 2 a.m., we made the big step and opened the door from the hangar to the outside world. No, we did not simply open it, first we found it locked but Bob easily unlocked it from the inside, then opened it to a ridge of perhaps one inch, then spotting no living soul opened enough to get his head out and then finally waived me out, too.

"Point of no return, Lieutenant Jackson."

"Aye, Aye, Captain Franklin." After having stumbled around in near total darkness for several hours, it was almost daylight here in comparison. Now I recognized that Bob was one of the Arab persons who had latest entered the hangar. He also looked at me sceptically: "Fairly young for a lieutenant, I guess."

"Don't envy my youthful appearance, general."

Just around the corner, we found the car that fitted the keys. It was a closed-up military jeep.

"It's no use as long as we don't know where to drive. We better find out first by foot. Preferably without being spotted. Nobody knows we are here, that is our sole advantage, the later they find out, the better. Best, of course, if they did not find out at all, but that is too much to hope for."

We could easily see that left of the hangar, if you were standing in front of it, there was nothing that looked like an entrance to the area. Three of the four planes were still standing there. Then there was probably simply open to the landing and take-off paths. To the right, there were more hangars and dark buildings, and then we spotted the tower before they spotted us.

On the backside, already the fence was running. We saw nothing of the dogs which Bob had prophesised but we also did not want for sure to know, if they were there. But not so far away, we recognized an entrance. A car was just coming in and had stopped for check-in. A little later, another car drove out and hardly stopped.

"That is our chance," Bob said jubilant. They check incoming traffic but not outgoing. Let's get out of here!"

In the car, Bob instructed me how to salute the guard at the gate. He then drove off, approaching it and braking just before reaching the bar but even then not completely. I saluted towards the guard and this one just opened the gate before Bob collided with it – or perhaps he would have braked hard in the last second. We were out, yes, we were free! That is, not quite free, we were also haunted.

"Is this the first car you steal?" Bob wanted to know.

"Frankly spoken, I never thought there would be one," I answered.

"There will soon be a second one," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"We are only driving this over to the civil airport and there steal another one.

"But why?"

"First, you cannot drive far in a military car, even with a key in it. Our uniforms do not suit the mark of the car and on the first occasion, we'll land in a military jail; and second, because there is still a small hope that nobody will miss us. When they find the car nearby with the two uniforms neatly packed, they may not speculate very deep into the matter, how it got there. So far, they were perhaps responsible for a dangerous and successful mission at NASA, and they might not want to admit that something failed ..."

"Such as letting two passengers escape?" I supplemented.

"Exactly," he grinned.

"Then let us take a bus into town. That is even less conspicuously. Not that I am afraid of stealing a car, but it doesn't seem to fit our demands right now."

"I hate to admit it, but you are right," Bob replied. "Besides, we are light travellers, now our luggage has been taken away."

"I saw my suitcase being thrown into a small military jet."

"That adds to the mysteries of the day," he said.

We only had to wait shortly at the airport, after having redressed as the old pals Bob and Jack and leaving the uniforms in the car as Jack had said. Nobody saw us coming and the airport was strangely transformed. There were indeed many stranded passengers sitting and mostly sleeping in the chairs of the lobby, adjoined by their suitcases. Over them were timetables that in all cases said, "Flight cancelled." What had happened? Why had the passengers of four loosely packed flights been given separate treatment? We had a tremendous lust to ask for the reason but then, they might have suspected us as coming directly from the moon. As we discovered that the shuttle-bus for Cleveland Centre was just about to leave, we decided that we had better get away from here. We got tickets from the airport lobby and entered an otherwise empty bus, whose driver looked hatefully at us as if we were disturbing his tranquillity. We never discovered if he could talk, neither had we any desire for that.

In Cleveland, our mutual travel ended in a park with a lake. We did not want to take a hotel for a few hours sleep, and in the park, two benches could do the same. Bob told me how to manage the further case. I was taking the train or Greyhound bus, formerly American ways of travelling, and claim somebody had stolen all my luggage and flight tickets in Washington. Instead, I had taken the train all way home. He even gave me 500 \$, much more than needed for the train. Then he instructed me never to talk about him. How could I have seen him if I never had taken any plane that day from Washington? I was only getting angry when I suddenly saw him take a small cellular phone from his jacket and talk for a couple of minutes in an incomprehensible tune.

"Greetings from my father," he said.

"Could I just borrow that? I want to call my parents, regardless what time it is."

"I'm sorry," he said, "this phone should have been confiscated in Boston or latest in the NASA airport. The man it was registered for doesn't exist any more." While saying this, he turned it off and threw it out in the lake of the park.

Dampening my anger he said, "Don't call your parents too early. Think about your story, give it a tight appearance and take the earliest westbound train – you might as well leave for the station now."

"And you?"

"As I said, I do not exist any more and you promised to respect it. A survival artist must cease to exist from time to time in order to go on with his life." And then he disappeared out of mine.

I went to the station and bought a ticket home. Then I bought a newspaper – and got a shock: America was under attack and all passengers of four planes had been killed in a combined suicide mission. I even found my name under UA93 but managed later to get it removed. The survival artist was later reported to have steered another of the planes into the North Tower of the WTC, which collapsed for mysterious reasons almost two hours later. I have kept the story of our rescue for nearly five years but present it now that I have moved to another country and changed my identity completely. As for Bob, he may have survived another couple of times or even not, but I figure that, if still alive, he does not mind now that I tell the story of, how we were rescued when America was attacked.

This story tries to fuse the strange circumstances that none of the four planes of 9/11 were hijacked (certain) but about a dozen of Arabs were framed, along with some who are still alive. The planes landed peacefully (most probable), all in Cleveland (probable), where some luggage of UA93 was reloaded to a small white jet and then dispersed along 8 miles to the crater created by a missile (possible) to awake the impression that an aeroplane had crashed here (impossible). It makes use of the information, Mohammed Atta's father gave, that his son had called him in Egypt around noon on September 12th.