

New details emerge about final minutes of gay man's battle with 9-11 terrorists

Mark Bingham called hero

by Doreen Brandt

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The 9-11 Commission's report details new information about the final minutes of United Flight 93, the flight on which gay businessman Mark Bingham and other passengers prevented the plane from being used by terrorists as a weapon on Washington.

Among other things the report answers the question about whether it was the passengers or the terrorists who put the plane into a nose dive that sent it crashing into a Pennsylvania field that fateful day.

The plane had taken off from Newark, N.J. Loaded with more than 11,000 gallons of jet fuel, it was a flying bomb in the hands of the hijackers. The 9-11 report says that the intended target was the White House or the U.S. Capitol.

The report shows that the passengers began their attempt to retake control of the plane at 9:57 a.m., nearly 30 minutes after the four terrorists aboard commandeered the Boeing 757.

At 6-foot-5, Bingham was formidable. The owner of his own public-relations firm, Bingham played rugby for the San Francisco Fog, a gay team where he earned a reputation for being an aggressive player. He had run with the bulls in Spain and business associates and friends call him a natural born leader.

As passengers charged the cockpit door terrorist Ziad Jarrah was at the controls. He began rolling the plane to the left and right, "attempting to knock the passengers off balance," the 9-11 Commission report said. Jarrah told another hijacker in the cockpit to block the door.

By 9:59 a.m., Jarrah switched from rolling the plane and "pitched the nose of the airplane up and down to disrupt the assault."

The report says the flight recorder captured the sounds of loud thumps, crashes, shouts and breaking glass and plates. Three seconds after 10 a.m. Jarrah stabilized the airplane. Five seconds later he was heard saying, "Is that it? Shall we finish it off?" Another hijacker responded, "No. Not yet. When they all come, we finish it off!"

Jarrah resumed pitching the plane up and down.

"In the cockpit. If we don't, we'll die," a passenger is heard saying.

"Sixteen seconds later, a passenger yelled, 'Roll it!'" the report says.

By 10:01 a.m., Jarrah stabilized the plane and said, "Allah is the greatest! Allah is the greatest!"

He then asks another hijacker in the cockpit, "Is that it? I mean, shall we put it down?"

"Yes, put it in it, and pull it down," the other responded.

The passengers continued with their assault, trying to break through the cock-

pit door. At 10:02 a.m. and 23 seconds, a hijacker said, "Pull it down! Pull it down!"

The hijackers remained at the controls but must have judged that the passengers were only seconds from overcoming them, the report concludes.

The airplane headed down; the control wheel was turned hard to the right. The airplane rolled onto its back, and one of the hijackers again began shouting, "Allah is the greatest. Allah is the greatest."

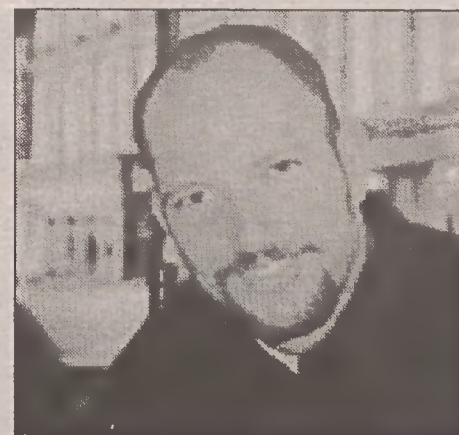
With the sounds of the passenger counter-attack continuing, the aircraft plowed into an empty field in Shanksville, Penn., at 580 miles per hour, about 20 minutes flying time from Washington, D.C., the report concluded.

The report gives no indication that passengers ever broke through the cockpit door, but it makes clear that the passengers' actions thwarted the plans of the terrorists. The report does not identify any of the passenger's voices but their families were allowed several months ago to hear tapes of the plane's cockpit voice recorder.

Even then it was impossible to identify individual voices. Bingham's father, Jerry, of Wildwood, Fla., is certain his son was one of the leaders in the counter attack.

"The report is a good thing," he told the *Sun Sentinel*. "But it's only good if they utilize it."

But, he said, he expected the report would lead to political infighting.



Mark Bingham played rugby for the San Francisco Fog, a gay team where he earned a reputation for being an aggressive player.

"Mark my words," he told the paper. "They'll start bickering over this whole thing. Two years from now, they'll still be asking, 'Who's in charge of all this?'"

And, he said that the country needs to maintain its resolve against terrorism.

"My son and the others on Flight 93 fought back," he said. "We need to continue that fight."

At a memorial service in 2002 U.S. Sen. John McCain paid tribute to Mark Bingham.

"I may very well owe my life to Mark," McCain said. "I love my country and take pride in serving her. But I cannot say that I love her more or as well as Mark Bingham did."

In June, Bingham's team, the Fog, won the highest prize in gay international rugby at a tournament in London, a cup named in his honor.

— This article previously appeared on 365gay.com.

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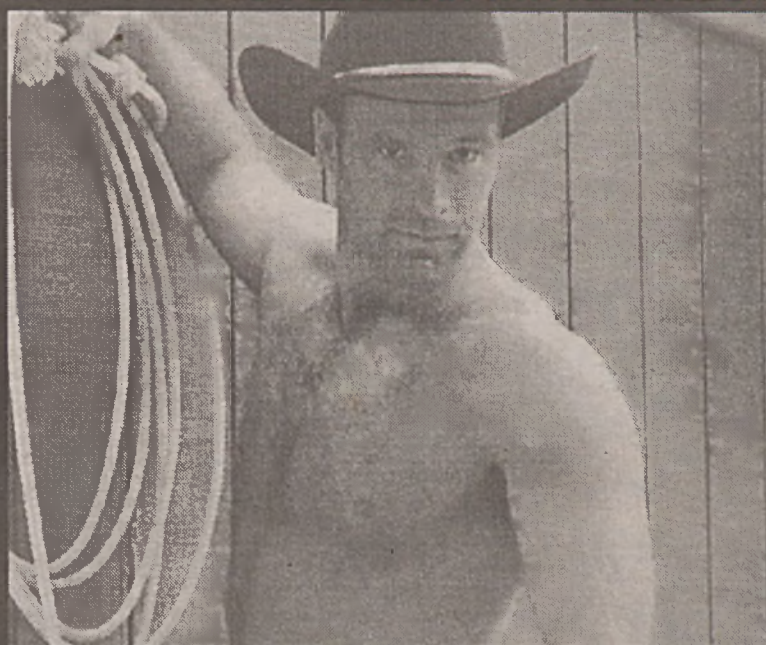
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