

Trascrizione del programma “*America Remembers*” di *MSNBC Dateline*, andato in onda l' 11 settembre 2002, conduttore Tom Brokaw.

In studio, i controllori di volo che gestirono, la mattina dell'11 settembre 2001, i voli AA11, UA175, AA77 e UA93, raccontano la loro esperienza.

Il testo che segue è stato redatto in lingua inglese e archiviato su *Newsmine.org*

America Remembers

Air traffic controllers describe how events unfolded as they saw them on September 11th

Dateline NBC
September 11, 2002

BODY: Announcer: Here now is Tom Brokaw.

TOM BROKAW: Good evening. Where were you on September 11th? Today, certainly here in New York, with all the sad memories and solemn memorials, we've heard answers from a number of people: grieving family members, survivors, government officials. But there is one group we have not heard from. They saw the attack coming from the very beginning to the end. They are the air traffic controllers who were in charge of America's air space that morning. What they witnessed, even now, is hard to fathom. And what they managed to do had never been done before. Tonight, for the first time, they tell their compelling story.

Offscreen Voice #1: (Voiceover) It's beautiful day. It was a great day to be flying.

(Plane taking off)

Unidentified Air Traffic Controller #1: Contact Boston center line, 1-2-5.

Offscreen Voice #2: (Voiceover) Controllers are doing a great job moving the airplanes.

(Airplanes taking off and landing)

Unidentified Air Traffic Controller #2: Runway four left, clear for takeoff.

Voice #2: (Voiceover) Nothing was different.

(Airplanes taking off and landing)

BROKAW: (Voiceover) September 11th seemed a perfect day to fly in the Northeast. Daybreak was crisp and bright. There was unlimited visibility, no ceiling, conditions were just right.

(Airplane taking off; New York City; World Trade Center before attacks)

Unidentified Air Traffic Controller #3: Northwest 553, you're evac is correct.

Crono911.org

Mr. GREG CALLAHAN: We were very busy. Things were moving nicely.

Unidentified Air Traffic Controller #4: Zero-one-five, you may see traffic inbound from runway four right.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) As usual, the skies over America that day were crowded with airplanes, often 4,000 to 6,000 airborne at any given time. For air traffic controllers, keeping them moving safely and on time is an intricately choreographed ballet, each plane moving through the air at different speeds, altitudes, and headings.

(Airplanes at airport; controllers in control tower; radar screen; map showing plane locations)

Mr. CURT APPLGATE: It is a thing of beauty. It is like clockwork.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Making it all happen is a complex mix of manpower and technology, procedure and judgment. The pressure is constant, the stress, unrelenting.

(Controllers in control tower)

Unidentified Air Traffic Controller #5: British Midland 701 descend and maintain flight level 350.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Despite the computers and training, the backup systems and safety equipment, in the end, it is the air traffic controllers who must at a moment's notice make sense of it all. But on this day, nothing would make sense.

(Controllers working in control tower; radar screen; controllers)

Mr. MIKE BLAKE: You're ingrained to know that you're going to be faced with adversity or possibly even death.

Mr. RICK TEPPER: You always wonder, you know, the--the law of averages, that sooner or later, something's going to happen, and you just hope that it's not on your shift.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) But for these 20 air traffic controllers--and hundreds of others across the US--it did happen on their shift. One year ago today, the morning of September 11th, they watched in disbelief as four passenger planes were hijacked, back-to-back, in little more than an hour. They were as stunned as the rest of us, working in uncharted territory, but at the same time, forced to make critical decisions. Hundreds of thousands of lives were at risk. Tonight, for the first time, they all share their story--what they saw, what they felt, as they were witness to the most devastating tragedy in aviation history.

(Pennsylvania crash site; Pentagon burning; World Trade Center burning; controllers working; controllers in control tower; controllers; controllers talking to reporter; World Trade Center burning)

BROKAW: How much of that day has lingered with you?

Mr. DON KRIVOLAVY: The whole day.

BROKAW: Still think about it?

Mr. KRIVOLAVY: Yeah. There's not a day goes by where you don't have to think about it.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) It all began at Boston's Logan Airport. It's morning rush hour. Planes are already stacked on the runway, waiting to get final clearance for takeoff.

Eight AM. American Flight 11, bound for Los Angeles, pushes back from the gate and is cleared for takeoff. The Boeing 767 with 81 passengers, 11 crew and 24,000 gallons of jet fuel lifts off, headed west. As the plane climbs out of Boston Logan, it's handed off from one air traffic control center to the next.

By 8:10 AM, American Flight 11 is in the hands of Boston's regional en route center, which is located 50 miles outside the city. More than 75 controllers are on duty at the time. Among them, Tom Roberts, Lino Martins, Don Geoffroy, John Hartling, Pete Zalewski, and Mike Blake. Within minutes, the 767 is climbing through 20,000 feet, and onto Pete Zalewski's radar.

(Logan Airport; people in airport; planes lined up on runway; plane taking off; Boston Air Route Traffic Control Center sign; controllers working; Tom Roberts; Lino Martins; Don Geoffroy; John Hartling; Pete Zalewski; Mike Blake; aerial view of ground; radar screen)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: I initially climbed him to foot level 290, 29,000 feet.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) 8:14 AM, 14 minutes since takeoff. American 11 is headed up to its cruising altitude of 35,000 feet, but not before Zalewski radios the pilot a routine order to turn, to keep enough space between American 11 and another plane.

(View from plane window; computer graphic showing plane's route; radar screen)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: I turn him to 20 degrees right, he took the turn. I then told American 11, 'Climb and maintain flight level three-five-zero--35,000 feet.' There was no response.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) A moment of concern perhaps, but that was not uncommon.

(Controller working)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: At that point, I was just thinking that it was, you know, maybe they--pilots weren't paying attention, or there's something wrong with the frequency.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Zalewski followed procedures, continuing to try to raise American 11 on the frequency.

(Controllers working)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: And at first it was pretty much, you know, 'American 11,' you know, 'are you paying attention? Are you listening?' And there was still no response. I used the emergency frequency to try and get ahold of him through that. There was no response.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) By now, Zalewski is running a mental checklist, trying to account for the loss of communication: a technical problem or maybe a mistake on the pilot's part.

(Controllers working)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: I went back to the previous sector to see if the pilot had accidentally flipped the switch back over on the--on the radio. At that point, there was still--we had nothing. We weren't hearing from him.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) American 11 was "NORDO"--"no radio contact." Zalewski stepped up his efforts.

(Controllers working)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: I would go on to call that aircraft 12 times. And as it went on, I even began to get more concerned.

BROKAW: You're watching American 11 at that point as well, Lino?

Mr. LINO MARTINS: Yes. He was in my air space at that time.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Colleague Lino Martins, working nearby, is now also tracking the American Airlines plane.

(Controllers working)

Mr. MARTINS: I saw him start the right turns, figuring Pete was going to climb him. That's when Pete called, said, 'No, he's staying at 290 because he didn't respond. He's NORDO.'

Mr. ZALEWSKI: I said, 'We're not talking to him, and he was last assigned at 29, but he may have heard the 35. I'm not sure what he might do here, so just watch--watch him.'

Mr. MARTINS: At that point, again, I didn't think anything was wrong.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) But the second controller did have incoming flights directly in the path of American 11.

(Controller working)

Mr. MARTINS: I had to plan ahead. On this new heading he was on, he was opposite direction with my Boston arrivals, and I had to get them underneath him.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) But then, 8:20 AM, American 11 abruptly changes course, turning to the northwest.

(Computer graphic showing American 11's route)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: I then saw the transponder shut off.

Mr. MARTINS: And I'm thinking, 'Well, maybe there's really something wrong. First there's no radio, now we lost this transponder.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Every commercial airplane is equipped with a transponder that transmits a constant signal. The signal gives controllers on the ground a steady flow of information displayed on radar screens in a datablock, such as this one. Think of it as the airplane's vital signs--the carrier, flight number, speed and altitude. If the transponder is not working, the plane is simply a blip on radar. Controllers can see only the location and the speed of the plane.

(Plane taking off; controllers in control tower; radar screen; text showing transponder information; radar screen)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: And so, I very quietly turned to the supervisor and I said, 'Would you please come over here?' I said, 'I think something is seriously wrong with this plane. I don't know what. It's either mechanical, electrical, I think, but I'm not sure.'

BROKAW: Did--did you suspect hijacking at that point?

Mr. ZALEWSKI: Absolutely not. No way.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) American 11 had been NORDO for six minutes, and now other controllers are becoming concerned. Tom Roberts tries yet another method to contact the plane.

(Radar screen; controllers working)

Mr. TOM ROBERTS: I was--happened to be working on another American Flight on my frequency. One of our procedures or protocols is to go aircraft-to-aircraft on a company frequency to see if the pilots from one flight could talk to the pilots of another flight.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) But that, too, fails. There is still no reply. The silence increasingly ominous as the jet, now drastically off course, flying in a northwesterly direction toward Albany, New York. Controllers are scrambling help create a safe zone around the runaway plane, moving every other flight in the area out of the way, from the ground all the way up to 35,000 feet

(Aerial view of clouds; computer graphic showing American 11's route; controllers working)

Mr. MARTINS: Pretty much...

Mr. ROBERTS: We moved all the airplanes from...

Mr. MARTINS: Right. Out of his way.

Mr. ROBERTS: ...from Albany, New York, to Syracuse, New York out of the way...

Mr. MARTINS: Because I didn't know...

Mr. ROBERTS: ...because that's the track he was going on.

Mr. MARTINS: I didn't know when he was going to turn back--if he was going to turn back on

course.

Mr. ROBERTS: And we had no altitude information.

Mr. MARTINS: So we lost the altitude...

Mr. ROBERTS: So, it's not just clearing the altitudes of conflicting traffic.

Mr. MARTINS: Right. It was that whole altitude stratum from the ground up to 35,000.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) It's now 8:24 AM, 10 minutes since losing contact. That's when controllers see the plane make another unauthorized turn, this time to the left, going south.

(Controllers working; computer graphic showing American 11's route)

Mr. MARTINS: When he started his left turn, I was thinking 'Oh, great, maybe he's getting back on course.' But then he continued the left turn. I said, 'Wait a minute, something's going on here. This is not right.'

Mr. ZALEWSKI: And that's when I heard the first transmission from the aircraft. And I wasn't quite sure what it--what it was, because it was just a foreign voice. It was something very different. To me it sounded almost Middle Eastern. And I asked--I said, 'American 11, is that you? American 11, are you trying to call me?' And then came the next transmission. And in that transmission, I immediately knew something was very wrong. And I knew it was a hijack.

BROKAW: And what did you hear?

Mr. ZALEWSKI: I remember the part of them saying they were going back to the airport. And by that, I deduced that they were going to go back to Boston. That's what I was thinking. And I didn't believe it was--was one of the American pilots on board. I--I immediately stood up and yelled at the supervisor, 'John, get over here immediately, right now.' And I just remember everybody in that building, and in the aisle just looking at me like, 'What is wrong with you?'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Zalewski cannot make out exactly what the hijackers are saying, but the tone of their voices alone chills him.

(Pilot controls)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: I felt, from those voices, the terror. For some reason, I knew something was--seemed worse than just a normal hijack. It just seemed very different to me, just was very...

BROKAW: Did your heart skip a beat at that point? You guys are known for your cool.

Mr. ZALEWSKI: We are. And I think I just--I went into 'Do your job' mode.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Zalewski immediately asked for an assistant to help listen to the transmissions coming from the plane, and puts the frequency on the speaker so others can hear. And he notifies the supervisor there is a hijacking, the first one on a US carrier in more than a decade.

(Controllers working; computer screen; controllers working)

Mr. MARTINS: And then the supervisor came over, and that's when we realized something was serious. And he headed southbound towards New York at a high rate of speed.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) As Boston Center supervisors notify the FAA and other air traffic centers about the hijacking, Zalewski anxiously listens on the frequency, thinking the hijackers might try to make contact.

(Radar screen; controllers working)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: Then comes a third transmission from the aircraft. And that one was pretty horrifying. And I can just remember the people in the aisle that I was working with. That was the first time they were able to hear the voices also, other than just myself. And I remember one of the controllers that was sitting two over from me just say, 'That is really scary.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Zalewski, concerned he might be missing vital information, asks the supervisor to have someone pull the transmission tapes that are automatically recorded, right away.

(Controllers working)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: And thank--thankfully, they did pull the tapes. And a part that I didn't hear, which was, 'We have more--more planes,' or something to that effect, and that really was a key statement.

BROKAW: You heard those tapes.

Mr. DON GEOFFROY: Yes, I did. I heard exactly what Pete heard. And we had to actually listen to it a couple of times just to make sure that we were hearing what we heard. I've heard a number of different tapes in the past of aircraft crashes, and this was, in my mind, the worst. I'd--I'd never heard something like that.

BROKAW: Was it just cold-blooded, 'We have a lot of airplanes and'...

Mr. GEOFFROY: It made you--it made you actually step up and think, 'What did he mean? What--what's going on?' You now, 'What's--what's next?'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) The voice they're most likely hearing is that of Mohamed Atta, who would be the mastermind of the terrorist attacks. Controllers believe the hijackers, meaning to speak to the passengers, mistakenly keyed the mike to air traffic control, and Pete Zalewski instead. By now, American 11 had crossed into airspace John Hartling's controls.

(Photo of Mohamed Atta; controllers working; radar screen; controllers talking to reporter)

Mr. JOHN HARTLING: And Tom come over and told me that 'This--this aircraft, we believe, is hijacked, and he's last reported at 29,000 feet.'

BROKAW: What'd you think when he said the word 'hijack'?

Mr. HARTLING: I didn't believe him. Because I didn't think that that stuff would happen anymore,

especially in this country.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) The plane is now speeding south at almost 600 miles an hour, far faster than the 450 miles an hour it should have been flying. With no transponder information, controllers were now asking the assistance of another plane heading to the West Coast that morning. It is United Flight 175.

(Computer graphic of plane flying; radar screen)

Mr. HARTLING: I said, 'I'd like you to look at your 12 or 1:00, tell me if you see an American 767.' And he said, 'Yeah, he's about 28, 29,000.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) The United Flight that Hartling was speaking to had also taken off from Boston's Logan Airport only 14 minutes after American 11. In fact, it was also a Boeing 767, fully fueled, bound for Los Angeles. It was carrying 58 passengers and six crew. Hartling had no way of knowing that five terrorists are also on board this plane, only moments away from making their move.

(Airplane taking off; map showing planes' intended routes; radar screen)

Mr. HARTLING: And I said, 'Well, turn thir--turn 30 degrees to the right. I want to make sure I keep you away from this guy,' because I had no idea where he was going.

BROKAW: So you're still in touch with the pilots in that cockpit.

Mr. HARTLING: Yeah.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Now that the second United plane was safely back on course--or so he thought--John Hartling handed it off to the next link in the air traffic chain, the New York area en route center.

(Computer graphic showing United 175's corrected route; controllers working)

BROKAW: And you're keeping your eye on American...

Mr. HARTLING: American 11. He's still...

BROKAW: Now he's going at a very high rate of speed.

Mr. HARTLING: No, his speed started to drop drastically.

BROKAW: And what did that say to you?

Mr. HARTLING: That he was...

Offscreen Voice #3: Descending.

Mr. HARTLING: ...probably descending.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Descending rapidly, headed in the direction of New York. Like the rest of us, controllers still had no idea where.

(View from plane window)

(Announcements)

Unidentified Air Traffic Controller #6: ...1680, contact New York center, 134.6.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) At the New York en route center in Islip, Long Island, Dave Bottoglia, Curt Applegate, and Mark DiPalmo are working a routine shift, no idea what is about to come their way. At 8:41 AM, United Flight 175 enters Dave Bottoglia's airspace and makes contact.

(Air traffic control center; controllers talking to reporter; controllers working; radar screen)

Mr. DAVE BOTTOGLIA: The first thing he said to me was, 'We heard threatening transmissions being broadcast by the American.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) The pilots of the United Flight have monitored a transmission from the hijacked plane, repeating to Bottoglia what they overheard in the American cockpit.

(View from plane window; cockpit controls)

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: And his exact words were, "Everyone, stay in your seats."

BROKAW: (Voiceover) The crew of 175 has no way of knowing they are only moments away from also being hijacked. By now, American 11 is crossing out of Boston's airspace, and is bearing down on Bottoglia's territory in New York. Within seconds, the plane, or "target" as controllers call it, appears on his screen.

(Pilots in cockpit; view from plane window; controllers working; radar screen)

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: The controller right next to me gets up and walks over to me and he says, 'You see this target here?' He says, 'This is American 11. Boston center thinks it's a hijack.'

BROKAW: So what'd you think at that point? What was going through your mind?

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: I really thought they were probably going to Cuba.

BROKAW: So you kept track of the target?

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: Kept track of the target. And now we, of course, we know that he was descending at a rapid pace, but we had no altitude or anything on him.

BROKAW: So you didn't know how fast he was going down through the altitudes.

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: That's correct.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Within minutes, American 11 simply disappears from radar. It is 8:46 AM.

(Computer graphic showing American 11's route)

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: The only thing I can remember is when the American target disappeared, all I said was, 'Well, we know he's not high altitude anymore.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) But within seconds, Bottoglia has another unexpected problem. As he and other controllers search the radar, looking for American 11, he suddenly notices that United Flight 175, which moments ago helped him locate the hijacked plane, also has disappeared. Instinctively, Bottoglia knows the two are somehow related. He asks another controller to take over all of his other planes.

(Controllers working; computer graphic showing route of United 175; controllers working)

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: I think my voice was shaking. 'Please just take everything and don't ask any questions.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) He calls the United plane several times unsuccessfully, sharing the same anxiety his colleagues in Boston had felt only moments earlier. Curt Applegate is working at the next radar bank in the New York center.

(Controllers working; Applegate talking to reporter)

Mr. APPLGATE: I--I could hear the talking behind me, and I realized we had two lost airplanes. That made me very nervous.

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: I know something bad's happening. I really don't know what. We had no transmissions from the United.

Mr. APPLGATE: When I turned back to look at the radar, there was a target right over Allentown. So I turned and yelled at Dave. I thought that was his American that he was looking for.

BROKAW: But you're--in fact, are looking at the United flight?

Mr. APPLGATE: But I was, in fact, looking at United, that's correct.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) A transponder signal quickly reappears on radar somewhere near the New Jersey/Pennsylvania border. A mistake, perhaps, on the part of the hijackers. The signal continues to transmit information to controllers. There is no longer any question in Bottoglia's mind that he's looking at a second hijacked airliner. The United Flight is no longer heading west as it should be. Instead it is turning ominously towards the east.

(Radar screen; controllers working; computer graphic showing United 175's route)

Mr. APPLGATE: Well, when I saw it, it was at 33,000 feet. And as soon as I said that, he--he started to turn to the left and descending.

BROKAW: Did you continue to watch the United target move across the screen?

Mr. APPLGATE: Yeah. I was just looking at--at this United Flight as he descended through traffic. You know, I'll tell you what, they damn near had a midair.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) For the first time, we're learning about a near midair collision. Applegate and Bottiglia showed "DATELINE" how United Flight 175, streaking through the skies over New York at more than 600 miles an hour, barely missed colliding with another commercial flight--Delta 2315--en route to Tampa, Florida, from Bradley Airport in Connecticut. Applegate listens in disbelief, as the controller next to him scrambles to move the other plane out of the way.

(Applegate pointing at radar screen, explaining plane activity; view from plane window; Applegate)

Mr. APPLGATE: God, I heard stuff from him I didn't think I'd ever hear in my career, ever--the frantic calling and the--traffic calls, 'Traffic, 2:00, 10 miles. I think he's been hijacked. I don't know his intentions. Take any evasive action necessary.' That's something you hear in the movies, not on the job.

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: And it was a terrifying moment just to watch the two airplanes miss by less than, I think it was 200 feet.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) United 175 barely misses a fiery midair collision, a crash that, while catastrophic, could have saved lives by keeping the plane from reaching its target: the south tower of the World Trade Center.

There are now two hijacked airliners in the skies over the East Coast. The first, American 11, has already disappeared from radar. Controllers don't know where it is. The second is United 175, now over northern New Jersey suburbs. And in Newark, New Jersey, a third plane and group of controllers will be pulled into the unfolding drama. Dan D'Agastino is a controller at the Newark tower.

(Airplane flying; view from plane window; World Trade Center; computer graphic showing hijacked planes flight paths; airport; controllers in control tower; Dan D'Agastino)

Mr. DAN D'AGASTINO: And if you look out that window there, that's--they're all lined up just as we were on September 11th.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) The morning shift is running smoothly, other than the usual ground delays at Newark.

(Controllers in control tower)

Mr. CALLAHAN: We had about 25 to 30 planes at the runway at any given moment.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Greg Callahan is clearing planes to take off and land. Only five minutes earlier, at 8:41 AM, he had cleared a United plane to take off for San Francisco. It had been waiting on the runway, and by the time it took off, it was almost 40 minutes late. At the time, Callahan had no reason to give it a second thought, but the story of what would happen on that airliner, the bravery and heroism of 33 passengers and seven crew, would become legend. It was United Flight 93. But minutes after Flight 93 takes off--uneventfully--something does grab the attention of Newark controllers, whose view from the top of the tower is a panorama of New York's skyline.

Working alongside Callahan is Rick Tepper.

(Greg Callahan talking to reporter; plane taking off; Callahan overlooking airport; photos of victims; plane flying; plaque listing passengers of United Flight 93; text from memorial; controllers in control tower; view from control tower)

Mr. TEPPER: I just happened to glance up and saw a mushroom cloud coming off the first tower.

(Voiceover) We knew it was an explosion-type of fire.

(World Trade Center burning)

Mr. TEPPER: I said, 'Greg, look at that.'

Mr. CALLAHAN: He was off my left shoulder, and he pointed out the window and said, 'Look at the World Trade Center.'

Mr. TEPPER: And he's going, 'Oh, my God. Look at that.'

(Voiceover) So we were just standing there staring and just in disbelief, watching it--watching it burn.

(World Trade Center burning)

BROKAW: (Voiceover) The initial reports: 'A small private plane appears to have crashed into the tower.' Bob Varcadapane was the supervisor in Newark tower that morning, in charge of eight controllers.

(World Trade Center burning; Bob Varcadapane talking to reporter)

BROKAW: You could see the smoke from here.

Mr. BOB VARCADAPANE: Oh, yes. You could see the smoke billowing from the side of the building, and we didn't know what it was. We contacted LaGuardia, Kennedy Tower, and Teterboro Tower to find out if they lost an airplane. And they all said they didn't know what it was. I got on the phone to the en route air traffic control's facility out in New York on Long Island, and I asked them if they'd lost any airplanes, and they said, 'No, but Boston Center lost an airplane. They lost an American 767.'

BROKAW: Did it occur to you at that point that it could have been that plane that went into the World Trade Center?

Mr. VARCADAPANE: Well, that's exactly what I said to myself then. I said to the controller that 'I have a burning building and you have a missing airplane. This is very coincidental.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) As Bob Varcadapane trades calls with the New York and Boston centers, a horrific realization dawns on controllers. American Flight 11, still missing from radar, finally has been found. Word of the fate of Flight 11 quickly travels throughout the air traffic control world. Back at the New York center, all eyes are now trained on United 175, as it races over central New

Jersey, clearly headed toward New York.

(Varcadapane talking to reporter; World Trade Center burning; computer graphic showing flight path of United 175)

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: I know that an airplane has hit the Trade Center, but we're still hoping that the United was not going to do that.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Until now, controllers thought, hoped, the plane was headed toward Kennedy Airport to land, but with each second, it is becoming more clear that whoever is in control of the cockpit of the United plane has a different plan. New York Center alerts another nearby air traffic facility, the one responsible for lower altitude planes.

(Controllers working; view from plane window; cockpit; controllers working)

Mr. DON KRIVOLAVY: I got a call from New York center saying, 'We have an aircraft at 24,000 feet. We don't--he's not talking to anybody, we don't know where he's going.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Don Krivolavy is on duty that morning. His colleagues, John Smith, John Riccardi, and Dean Yawkopelli.

(Controllers talking to reporter)

Mr. KRIVOLAVY: Probably 10 miles into my air space, he started descending. I pointed him out to John.

Mr. JOHN SMITH: And said, 'Watch this aircraft. It's coming through. We don't know what's going to happen.'

Mr. KRIVOLAVY: And we just watched him go down.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Eight fifty-two AM. It has been six minutes since American 11 hit the north tower, and NORAD, responsible for the defense of North American airspace, is now alerted to a second hijacking. It scrambles two F-15 fighter jets from Otis Air Force Base in Massachusetts to potentially intercept the United plane, but they are more than 150 miles and some 20 minutes away. The rest of the country, watching on television, still believes the crash in New York is an accident. But these controllers, now watching in horror as the second plane bears down on lower Manhattan, are the first to know the awful truth.

(World Trade Center burning; fighter jet; F-15 flying; fighter jets flying; World Trade Center burning; controllers working; radar screen; controllers working)

Mr. APPLGATE: We know he's going to crash. That's--that's pretty much a given. We don't know where he's going to crash.

Mr. DiPALMO: I think we all knew something was going to happen, be it the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building.

Mr. RICCARDI: It was highlighted to me so that I could watch it as it came in from the southwest

and then made a direct turn towards the south tower.

BROKAW: When it made that direct turn, did you think, 'Oh, my God'?

Mr. RICCARDI: I thought it was a fighter jet coming in to cover the city. As it turned out, it just continued to descend through 5,000 feet and lower.

Mr. KRIVOLAVY: And that's when my supe came up and said, 'You know, you could probably consider him a terrorist at this point.' And you kind of just turned around and got this kind of empty feeling.

BROKAW: It was helpless. You couldn't do anything.

Mr. KRIVOLAVY: Yeah. You know, you sit there for 10 years controlling planes. For the first time in your life, you don't have any control of this at all.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) At Newark tower, Bob Varcadapane is still on the phone with a controller at the New York center and learns that a second plane has been hijacked and is almost on top of Manhattan.

(Varcadapane talking to reporter)

Mr. VARCADAPANE: He says to me, 'As a matter of fact, do you see that target coming over the Verrazano Bridge?' I went over to the radar and looked at the radar. The Verrazano Bridge is depicted on the radar.

BROKAW: Right.

Mr. VARCADAPANE: And I looked over there, and I saw the aircraft descending out of 4700 feet, 3600 feet, 2700 feet.

Mr. CALLAHAN: And I could hear him calling on altitudes. 'I have a target in sight. He's descending rapidly.' And he said, 'Look out to the southeast,' and the gentleman working ground control said, 'Hey, who's that by the Verrazano bridge?' And here comes a very large target descending rapidly, very fast.

Mr. TEPPER: He was in a hard right bank, diving very steeply and very fast. And he--as he was coming up the Hudson River, he--he made another hard left turn and--just heading for downtown Manhattan.

Mr. VARCADAPANE: (Sitting next to Greg Callahan) It was fast.

Mr. CALLAHAN: Very fast.

Mr. VARCADAPANE: He was moving.

BROKAW: Really moving

Mr. VARCADAPANE: He was moving fast.

BROKAW: Anybody in the room say anything at that point, or are you just transfixed by what you were seeing?

Mr. CALLAHAN: Well, that pretty much confirmed all our worst fears as to if there's anything in the back of your mind saying, 'Maybe this just was something minor.' Basically everyone--there was a moment of silence, and then things really started to move.

Mr. TEPPER: You could see that he was trying to line himself up on the tower.

(Voiceover) Just before he hit the tower, he almost leveled it out and just--just hit the building. And I'm still talking to the center at that time and I just said, 'Oh, my God, he just hit the World Trade Center.' And you could see him go in the side of the building, and then you just saw the flames and explosion erupting out the other side of the building.

(United 175 approaching World Trade Center; World Trade Center burning)

BROKAW: What was going on in this room at that time?

Mr. VARCADAPANE: There was disbelief. They couldn't believe what we just saw.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) They knew it was coming. But until they saw it happen with their own eyes, it was too hard to believe. As the second strike plays out on live television, the rest of the country is also in shock, finally understanding what these controllers already knew: America is under attack. Controllers in the tower immediately wonder, could there be a third attack on the way? Supervisor Bob Varcadapane takes immediate action.

(United 175 approaching World Trade Center; World Trade Center burning; controllers in control tower; Varcadapane talking to reporter)

Mr. VARCADAPANE: I immediately went to the phone and called Washington, DC, to tell them that Newark was ceasing operations. We were not moving any airplanes. (Unintelligible)

BROKAW: Who did you call in Washington?

Mr. VARCADAPANE: I called the Air Traffic Control System Command Center.

BROKAW: Do you have a hotline right into...

Mr. VARCADAPANE: Yes. I have a phone directly to that center. I told them that Newark was ceasing operations. We would not accept any aircraft landing at Newark airport. I wanted--my main concern was keeping airplanes out of this air space. New York City was just attacked twice. So then we shut down. I believe that was the beginning of shutting down of the national airspace system.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) As Newark controllers shut down their airport, they have no way of knowing that one of their own planes, United Flight 93, cleared for takeoff only moments before the first tower was hit, is about to face its own crisis.

(Newark Airport; World Trade Center burning)

(Announcements)

BROKAW: (Voiceover) At yet another air traffic control center in Cleveland, Stacey Taylor's keeping a close eye on her flights. The FAA is warning controllers to watch transcontinental flights heading West for anything suspicious. And then something very suspicious does happen.

(Airport; Stacey Taylor; radar screen)

Ms. STACEY TAYLOR: I hear one of the controllers behind me go, 'Oh, my God, oh my God,' and he starts yelling for the supervisor. He goes, 'What is this plane doing? What is this plane doing?' I wasn't that busy at the time, and I pulled it up on my screen and he was climbing and descending and climbing and descending, but very gradually. He'd go up 300 feet, he'd go down 300 feet. And it turned out to be United 93.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) By this time, United Airlines had warned crews still in the air about the potential for a hijacking. Electronic messages similar to an e-mail have been transmitted to pilots. "Beware, cockpit intrusion," the message read. The pilots on Flight 93 type back, "Confirmed." At the Boston center, controllers are taking matters into their own hands to safeguard crews.

(Clouds; cockpit; text from messages; controllers working)

Mr. ROBERTS: I saw controllers step up to the plate and start warning flight crews. This was totally by the seat of their pants. It's not because they're directed to by anybody. It's just, OK, everybody's on alert right now.

BROKAW: 'Watch for cockpit intrusion,' that kind of thing?

Mr. ROBERTS: Absolutely. And I'm like, 'Yeah, go for it.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) And in New York, controllers brace themselves for another possible assault on their airspace.

(Controllers working)

BROKAW: Did you keep thinking, 'My God, there may be another target coming in here at some point?'

Mr. RICCARDI: Yes. Yes, it was definitely on my mind. I was wondering, what else was going to get hit, how many more times this would happen, where it would happen.

Mr. JOHN RICCARDI: But at that point, it was, 'What was next?'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Nine thirty AM. At Washington's Dulles Airport, controllers also on high alert. But what they don't know is that one of their own flights is now missing: American 77. Flight 77 has been out of contact with controllers in Indianapolis for more than 20 minutes. Fighter jets are dispatched to track the flight, but the plane already has turned east, flying back over West Virginia toward Washington, DC. Todd Lewis is working radar at Dulles Airport.

(Airplane; controllers in control tower; radar screens; computer graphic showing flight path of American 77; Todd Lewis)

Mr. TODD LEWIS: ...when my colleagues saw a target moving quite fast from the northwest to the southeast. So she--we all started watching that target, and she notified the supervisor. But nobody knew that was a commercial flight at the time. Nobody knew that was American 77.

BROKAW: What did you think? It was a military flight of some kind when you saw it?

Mr. LEWIS: I thought it was a military flight. I thought that Langley had scrambled some fighters and maybe one of them got up there.

BROKAW: It was really moving fast.

Mr. LEWIS: It was moving very fast, like a military aircraft might move at a low altitude.

BROKAW: How long were you able to track what turned out to be American 77?

Mr. LEWIS: Well, it--it was heading right towards a prohibited area in downtown Washington. And that--that covers the Capitol and the White House. We then called the White House on the hotline to let them know.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Controllers activate a hotline to the Secret Service, and within seconds, agents are frantically evacuating the White House. The president is in Florida, but the Secret Service whisks Vice President Dick Cheney into an underground bunker.

(Controllers in control tower; men on top of White House; people running)

Mr. LEWIS: Then it turned south and away from the prohibited area, which seemed like a momentary sigh of relief, and it disappeared. But it was going away from Washington, which seemed to be the right thing.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) But at 9:38 AM, the plane does strike, crashing into the Pentagon.

(Pentagon burning)

BROKAW: And what did you think when you heard the Pentagon had been struck?

Mr. LEWIS: Then there was no question that, yeah, it was a commercial flight. And you're wondering, 'We're being attacked. What's next?'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Washington, DC, is where United Flight 93 soon will be headed. As American Flight 77 was breaching Washington's airspace to eventually hit the Pentagon, back in the skies over Youngstown, Ohio, Flight 93 still is on course, now airborne for more than 50 minutes. But now, Stacey Taylor and other controllers watch the plane suddenly start to climb. The controller working Flight 93 tries to contact the cockpit.

(Washington, DC; view from plane window; computer graphic showing United 93's flight path; controllers working; radar screen)

Unidentified Air Traffic Controller #7: (From tape) United 93, Cleveland, do you still hear the center?

Ms. TAYLOR: I was afraid of that flight. I see this plane, climbed up from his assigned altitude to 35--of 35,000 feet to 41,000 feet, turned around and aimed right back at where we were, and descended rapidly. And when a plane descends too fast, the computer can't keep up with it. And you get Xs in the altitude box. So we knew he was aimed at us and descending very, very rapidly. At that point, I knew it was a confirmed hijacking. I didn't know where they were going, what they were doing. I was worried that we were a target, that the center was a target. I remember looking at the ceiling and thinking, 'Here--you know--here it comes.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) We have all shuddered at the thought of what must have been going on in the cockpits of those hijacked airliners. It turns out the Cleveland controller working United Flight 93 at the time, along with supervisors, actually heard the sounds of the struggle in the cockpit.

(View from plane window; controllers working)

Ms. TAYLOR: I said, 'Did you guys talk to him?' He goes, 'Yeah, we talked to him.' I said, 'What did the pilot'--he said, 'It wasn't the pilots.' He said, 'It was the hijackers.' I said, 'The hijackers?' I said, 'Are you telling me the hijackers were talking to you on the frequency?' He said, 'The pilot opened up the mike before.' He said, 'We heard it all.' I said, 'What?' He said, 'We heard them being killed.' And he said, 'We heard.' And I said--I said, 'Don't tell me any more.' I said, 'I don't--I don't want to know any more.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) And as upsetting as this is, there is still more going on inside Cleveland Center.

(Radio tower)

Unidentified Police Officer: (Speaking over Public Address system) And if you can get away from downtown, I would advise you to do so.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) A false alarm involving another Delta flight en route to Cleveland has officials ordering evacuations.

(Cars and emergency vehicles in Cleveland)

Ms. TAYLOR: They're evacuating the city of Cleveland. They're evacuating the Center as we're all doing all this, too.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Flight 93 will not strike the Cleveland center. Instead, like the other three planes before it, it makes a radical turn. Hijackers then shut off Flight 93's transponder signal, just as they had on the other three planes. Controllers can now only see a moving target on radar. They have no other flight information.

Back at Newark tower, where Flight 93 took off only an hour before, Bob Varcadapane is trading phone calls with the FAA's central command Center in Herndon, Virginia. The command center is telling him there are at least 10 planes they're still suspicious of for one reason or another, all

possible hijackings.

(Computer graphic showing United 93's flight path; controllers working; radar screen; Newark Airport; Varcadapane talking to reporter; controller command center; radar screen)

Mr. VARCADAPANE: When I talked to the command center again, he told me that another aircraft was being hijacked. And I told--he said, 'As a matter of fact, it's one of your airplanes.'

BROKAW: You had a hard time believing that at the beginning?

Mr. VARCADAPANE: I didn't believe it all. I--I was like, 'What is going on?'

Mr. CALLAHAN: We were tracking United 93, and I was in conversation with the FBI agent, and he was relaying to me that, 'We suspect that this aircraft has now been taken over by hostile forces,' described the sharp turn it made over eastern Ohio and now was heading back along southwestern Pennsylvania. And I could tell just by giving it a visual track that it was obviously heading for the Washington, DC, area.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) As Flight 93 speeds towards Washington, DC, the Federal Aviation Administration does something unprecedented in aviation history. Officials at the FAA command center order that the national airspace be completely shut down--the grounding of every single civilian plane in the sky.

This FAA animation shows what the skies look like at 9:45 AM, September 11th, 2001. Controllers have already landed more than 1,000 planes from the Boston and New York air corridors. There are still 3,949 planes in the air. Controllers must still land every single one as quickly as they can at the nearest possible airport, no matter how far from their intended destination. The controllers began rerouting the planes at the rate of one every second.

(Control command center; radar screens; FAA animation; controllers in control tower; radar screens; controllers working)

BROKAW: And people were landing out here in Lacrosse, Wisconsin, and Peoria, Illinois.

Mr. VARCADAPANE: Oh, they were landing all over the country. This whole system, basically just shut down.

BROKAW: It shows--it--it looks like a daisy field, and suddenly it goes dark.

(Voiceover) At the Cleveland center, Stacey Taylor is busy diverting planes to land, but can't stop thinking about Flight 93.

(Control center; Taylor talking to reporter)

BROKAW: You're keeping your eye on Flight 93 at this point?

Ms. TAYLOR: Yeah. And then the transponder came back on. We got two hits off the transponder. That's something we've always wanted to know. Why did the transponder come back on? Because the hijackers had shut it off so that they couldn't be tracked, even though we were still tracking

them. Now we were getting an altitude readout on the airplane. I can't remember the precise numbers, but it was around 6400 feet, and then around 5900 or 5800 feet. And we're thinking, 'Oh, you know, maybe something's happened, maybe this isn't what we think it is.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) But minutes later, at 10:03, the transponder shuts off again. Flight 93 disappears from radar.

(Computer graphic showing flight path for United 93)

Ms. TAYLOR: I had another airplane that I was working. And I told him, I said, 'Sir,' I said, 'I think we have an aircraft down.' I said, 'This is entirely up to you, but if you'd be willing to fly over the last place that we spotted this airplane that--and see if you can see anything.' And he's like, 'Yeah, we'll do that.' So he flew over, and at first he didn't see anything. And then he said, 'We see a great big plume or a cloud of smoke.'

BROKAW: You knew it was down at that point.

Ms. TAYLOR: We knew.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) A number of heroic passengers had launched their own counterattack on the cockpit, preventing the plane from reaching its presumed target--the nation's capital.

(Plane cockpit; plane flying; Washington, DC)

Ms. TAYLOR: I know there's been talk about if United 93 was shot down. United 93 was not shot down. I would have known, I would have seen that.

BROKAW: Did you see any of the fighters around Flight 93?

Ms. TAYLOR: There were no fighters around Flight United 93, no. And from the way I understand it, if they'd have gone any closer to Washington, then they would have been intercepted, but at the time the flight went down, no, there was no one on him.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Ten thirty AM. The FAA's view of the national airspace. In just 45 minutes, controllers have safely landed almost 2500 planes. But there are still more than 1500 in the air, and each one is a potential weapon. Controllers still fear that other attacks are planned. Speculation centers on the Sears Tower in Chicago, or other landmarks in the nation's capital, even Air Force One. The president's plane still is in the air, and controllers worry it could be the next target.

(Radar screen of planes over entire country; controllers working; Chicago; Capital building; Air Force One)

(Announcements)

BROKAW: (Voiceover) The airspace above the United States is in a lockdown. Controllers are furiously diverting planes to land at the nearest possible airport, and aside from military aircraft, only one other plane is allowed to take off: Air Force One, the plane known as the flying Oval Office. In fact, the Secret Service is purposely keeping the president on the move and away from

Washington.

(View from plane window; controllers working; fighter plane preparing to take off; Air Force One flying; Air Force One landing; George W. Bush on Air Force One)

BROKAW: Do you remember hearing about Air Force One, about where it was and where it was going?

Mr. VARCADAPANE: Yeah. Yeah. We knew where it was.

Mr. CALLAHAN: We were tracking it.

Mr. VARCADAPANE: We were tracking it.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) At 11 AM, Air Force One still is on the move, en route from Sarasota, Florida, where the president had been speaking to elementary school students that morning to Barksdale Air Base in Louisiana.

(Air Force One taking off)

BROKAW: Was there discussion in the room about, 'Man, Air Force One is still up there?' Were you...

Mr. CALLAHAN: That was one of the potential targets. That, factoring in the fact that as many as 10 aircraft were still potentially unaccounted for.

Mr. VARCADAPANE: Yes. Yes they were.

Mr. CALLAHAN: And that Air Force One was a potential target, as was the White House, as was other--the Capital, Washington, DC.

Mr. D'AGASTINO: It was a war zone. Our skies were turned into a war zone. Everywhere you turned, it was military jets and helicopters everywhere. And that's when the reality sank in, we're at war.

BROKAW: It was nuts.

Mr. VARCADAPANE: Yeah.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Eleven thirty AM. More than 3,000 planes landed safely, but there are more than 900 still to go.

(Plane landing; FAA radar showing entire country)

BROKAW: Man, how did you keep the concentration on the other planes, knowing what had happened here?

Mr. KRIVOLAVY: It's--it's hard, but you do it, because that's what you're trained to do.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Finally, at 12:15 PM, four hours to the minute when controllers lost contact with that first airliner, they have accomplished their mission. For the first time in the history of air traffic control, dating back to 1938, there is not a single civilian plane in the sky over the US. Controllers have accounted for all the suspicious planes. They wonder, but will never know, if there were other hijackers with attacks planned that day, plans that were derailed by their quick action.

(Controllers working; airplanes at airport; controllers working; airplanes at airport;

Mr. JOHN CARR: When the chips were down, they delivered.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) John Carr is the president of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association. He presides over some 15,000 controllers nationwide.

(John Carr; controllers working)

Mr. CARR: (Voiceover) When you're talking about an event that no one had practice, no one had trained for, no one had any idea could possibly unfold before them...

(Controllers in control tower)

Mr. CARR: ...to then shut down the system in two and a half hours and land almost 5,000 airplanes without a single error is a feat of airmanship that I don't think will ever be equaled.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Until now, there has been no time to deal with emotion, but with the air space clear, the enormity of what that happened, the staggering loss of life hits home.

(World Trade Center burning; man in shock; rescue workers)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: I broke down. I mean, I was just--I broke down.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) At Boston Center, Pete Zalewski, the first controller to handle a hijacked plane, maintaining composure throughout it all, he finally falls apart.

(Controllers working)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: I started crying. I couldn't talk. I started shaking. And I just said, 'What's wrong with the world? What's--what is happening?'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) There is more bad news for the Boston Center. One of the controller's wives actually had been on the American Flight 11, the first plane to hit the World Trade Tower.

(Controllers working; plane flying; World Trade Center burning)

Mr. ROBERTS: Doug McKay's wife was on American 11, and...

BROKAW: Was he on duty?

Mr. ROBERTS: Doug was actually on his way to work. Doug had dropped his wife off at the airport.

Mr. GEOFFROY: The individual that worked with Doug the--the evening before knew that his wife was going to be on American 11.

(Voiceover) And when they found out American 11 had hit the towers, we stopped Doug at the door...

(Wedding photo of Doug McKay)

Mr. GEOFFROY: ...and we basically took him aside, and brought him into another room and--and we went through taking care of Doug. And it was pretty--pretty tragic.

BROKAW: That is part of the brotherhood and sisterhood, isn't it? You have to take care of each other as well as take care of all those airplanes out there.

Mr. ROBERTS: Is sure is. And on that day we lost Doug McKay also. He--he could never work again, not--not doing what he was doing before.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) The skies would ultimately remain closed down for three days to civilian aircraft.

(Controllers in control tower)

BROKAW: When flights resumed and controllers came back on duty in this room, after September 11th, what was the tone?

Mr. VARCADAPANE: Very somber. We were more worried about what it had done to our industry. This is our industry--the pilots, the controllers, the--the users. They've taken our industry and--and turned it into a complete mess that nobody ever imagined.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) For many controllers, the coming days and weeks were harder still. Each shift, a waiting game with controllers wondering, will there be a next time? And if there is, will we be able to sop it?

(Controllers working)

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: Every little thing that happened, I was jumping up.

BROKAW: And any tiny little glitch would cause you...

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: Oh, stress was enormous.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) For Pete Zalewski, it was difficult to come back at all.

(Controllers working)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: For about a month, I didn't sleep. I was out of work for about six weeks, but I knew there was a point where I would--I would go back. I need--needed my life back.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Even before 9/11, controllers in New York were no strangers to tragedy. The crashes of TWA Flight 800, Swiss Air Flight 111 and Egypt Air 990 all happened in or around their air space. And within weeks of September 11th, tragedy would strike again when another American plane, Flight 587, crashes on takeoff into a neighborhood in Queens.

(Controllers working; man pulling wreckage out of water; fire extinguisher with "TWA" on it; rescue workers pulling wreckage out of water; American 587 crash; rescue workers at crash site of American 587)

BROKAW: Were you working that day?

Mr. APPLGATE: Yes. Yes.

BROKAW: What did you think when you heard that?

Mr. APPLGATE: I thought "terrorism." Had to be.

Mr. DEAN YAWKOPELLI: Everyone was kind of waiting for the next shoe to drop. And I think everyone thought, 'Well, all right, we're into the new--the next phase of whatever--whatever it is they have in store for us.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) But investigators now believe a failure of structure, not terrorism, caused the crash of American Flight 587 in Queens. While the year has now safely passed, the shadow of September 11th still hangs over them.

(Rescuers at crash of American 587; plane taking off; controllers in control tower)

Mr. RICCARDI: Every time an aircraft doesn't do exactly what you tell him, it brings up the thought of, 'What could happen now?' And 'What's going to happen. 'What's he doing? Why is he doing this? Why is he not answering?' And it brings it right back every time.

BROKAW: How much do you worry about the new rules, that fighter aircraft might have to shoot down a civilian airliner at some point? Hard to imagine, isn't it?

Mr. VARCADAPANE: Yeah.

Mr. D'AGASTINO: If it's hard for us, can you imagine how hard it is for that fighter pilot?

Mr. VARCADAPANE: Fighter pilot. The decision he has to make.

BROKAW: Have you been briefed about those contingencies?

Mr. D'AGASTINO: We have contingency plans we've been brief on.

BROKAW: Told to keep it secret?

Mr. D'AGASTINO: Pretty much, yeah.

Mr. VARCADAPANE: Yeah.

Mr. D'AGASTINO: We'd--we'd have to kill you if you said...

BROKAW: Well, let's not go that far. But that's a stark new reality in your life, right? That an American fighter jet might have to shoot down an airliner filled with civilians because it's been converted into a weapon by someone?

Mr. CALLAHAN: Exactly.

Mr. VARCADAPANE: Right.

Mr. ROBERTS: It's not only planes as weapons, but we're also watching out for sensitive areas such as nuclear power plants, you know...

Mr. MARTINS: Reservoirs.

Mr. ROBERTS: ...large stadiums, reservoirs.

Mr. MARTINS: Yeah. And bridges and stuff like that.

Mr. ROBERTS: And that's added a new dimension to our job, and we feel that we are every bit of this nation's defense when it comes to the skies as anybody else, because, you know, we're going to be the first line there.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) As today's anniversary approached, most of these controllers have shied away from even reading about it, or watching the coverage on television.

(Controllers talking to reporter)

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: I already know too much. Because as I watched the American disappear, the United disappear--and those were the first two--and I guess I'm the first one to know it.

BROKAW: It's an honor you'd rather give up, though, right?

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: Absolutely. I just think about all those people, and all the brave people that died there.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) He remains in awe of the timing of it all.

(World Trade Center burning)

Mr. BOTTOGLIA: How did they do such a coordinated thing that--the American literally disappeared, and the United literally got hijacked at almost the same time. And I've always wondered if they were actually talking to each other saying, 'I'm going in now. Good luck.'

BROKAW: (Voiceover) It's the "what if's" that plague the Newark controllers. What if those fighter jets scrambled to intercept the second plane had arrived just a bit earlier?

(Controllers in control tower)

Mr. VARCADAPANE: I remember the two F-15s. They were there moments after the impact. And I was just--said to myself, 'If only they could have gotten there a couple minutes earlier.' They just missed it.

Mr. CALLAHAN: But what would they have done then?

BROKAW: What do you think they would have done then?

Mr. VARCADAPANE: I don't know--I don't know what they have done *****(as spoken)*****.

Mr. CALLAHAN: You know, 20/20 hindsight.

Mr. VARCADAPANE: I have no idea.

BROKAW: They'd have had to--they'd have had to shoot it down.

Mr. CALLAHAN: But back then, that only came from the president.

Mr. VARCADAPANE: Yeah.

BROKAW: Yeah.

(Voiceover) What if Flight 93, delayed so long on the runway at Newark that morning, had been delayed just a few minutes more?

(Shadow of plane taking off)

Mr. VARCADAPANE: It happened a few minutes later, it may not have made it off the ground. It may not have made it at all. Unfortunately.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) Each of them struggles with personal memories, moments, images, seared into their consciousness. They will never forget them.

(Callahan looking over airport)

Mr. ZALEWSKI: I still can hear their voice. That will never go away for me. The just horrific--just the feeling of it, the--the voices, the--you--you knew they had control. You knew they had control, and we didn't, and that was very scary. Because as controllers, you're taught to have control. And there was none that day.

BROKAW: (Voiceover) They were the four darkest hours in aviation history. But these controllers and their colleagues across the US met an unprecedented challenge that morning one year ago. Their coolness kept other tragedies from occurring, ensuring the safety of more than 350,000 people in the air, and countless more on the ground.

(World Trade Center burning; rescuers at Pennsylvania crash site; Pentagon burning; controllers in control tower; controllers working)

BROKAW: I know you have professional pride, but when you look back, aren't you a little astonished that it went as well as it did?

Mr. DiPALMO: The--the people that were working that day did a phenomenal job. I mean, the controllers in this country are the best in the world. And I'm proud to be one of them.