

James S. Robbins
NRO Contributing Editor



\$XWFLUSFKLYH
(IP DUBXWFLU
6 HCGVADU) UHCG
II I IGP ISLQALOSLQALD
5 HTXHWB HLYHLSDUDEGM185/ III !
9HLMRQ

April 9, 2002 8:55 a.m.

9/11 Denial

The French bestseller and its company.

O Lord, make my enemies ridiculous.
— Voltaire, 1767

Well, it did not take long for the ridiculous to find its way into print. In what is billed as the "first independent inquiry" into the events of Sept. 11, French left-wing activist Thierry Meyssan comes to the shocking conclusion that the Pentagon was *not* hit by American Airlines Flight 77. His book, *L'Effroyable Imposture (The Frightening Fraud)* is apparently a hot seller in his native land, the first 20,000 copies having been whisked off the shelves with more to follow. Meyssan, who had published his views as early as October 8 on [his website](#), the Voltaire Network, (the *philosophe* must be spinning in his grave having his name appropriated by this imbecile), proves, at least to his own satisfaction, that the damage to the Pentagon could not have been caused by a Boeing 757, but was in fact the result of a carefully planned truck bombing or missile strike which was then made to *look* like a plane crash.

Meyssan offers as evidence a careful analysis of images of the crash site. (See "Hunt the Boeing," a [site](#) based on Meyssan's assertions and run by his son, and the point-by-point refutation [here](#).) He also notes discrepancies in the eyewitness descriptions. (See [here](#) for a compendium of eyewitness accounts that, in fact, all pretty much agree.) Note that I haven't read the book — I'm waiting for the movie — but presumably Meyssan answers salient questions such as, if Flight 77 didn't hit the Pentagon, where is it? [Where](#) are Barbara Olson and the other passengers who left loved ones behind? If the eyewitnesses can't agree on what they saw, what was it they are disagreeing about and why are there so many of them?

No matter. Meyssan's purpose is to uncover a much deeper plot of the United States against the world. He reveals other interesting facts, like bin Laden was an agent of the U.S. who was used by President Bush to destroy secret CIA offices in the World Trade Towers. Seems like a lot of effort — when Stansfield Turner wanted to do it he just fired a bunch of guys. And if the WTC planes were part of the plan, and presumably also United Flight 93 that crashed in Pennsylvania, why go to the trouble of fabricating a strike on the Pentagon instead of just using another aircraft like the missing Flight 77? At some point Occam's Razor has to come into play. But to the tortured mind of Meyssan, whose [other causes](#) include hard anti-Catholicism and "rejection of a return to a moral order" it probably makes a lot of sense.

Today is Yom Hashoah, the Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust, and Meyssan's theory fits neatly with those of the Holocaust deniers. In both cases, the premises of their originators are indefensible, which forces them into a position where they have to throw the facts overboard to sustain their arguments. But notions like this are kept alive by people who have a predisposition to believe them, those who have pre-existing grudges and will engage in whatever reality-denying behavior justifies their baseline prejudices. For example, it is already widely believed in the Middle East that Sept. 11 was not perpetrated by bin Laden but by the Mossad, the CIA, or some other group, in order to give the United States a pretext to intervene in the region. Meyssan's theory is a qualitative step beyond the idea that al Qaeda was not behind the attacks — he denies that the attack on the Pentagon even happened, at least not "the way the government says it did." This story is certain to find fertile soil in some of the more radical quarters, especially among those that both deny the Holocaust happened and wish it had been more effective. For example Ibrahim

Abu-al-Naja, the first deputy speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, who complained about how the world was going to make the Palestinians "pay the price for what happened to [the Jews], if indeed anything had happened to them." Or the recent editorial on Wafa, the Palestinian Authority news service, that admitted that a few Jews went to the gas chambers, but "about whose number there is some ambiguity." (Wafa had no trouble counting the 12 million Native Americans allegedly exterminated in the 17th-19th centuries.) If Meyssan has any sense at all, he will rush out an Arabic edition pronto.

The answer to Meyssan and any other such revisionist is the truth, particularly the primary sources, the body of knowledge compiled by those who experienced the events in question. In the case of the Holocaust, the affirmative evidence is overwhelming, particularly the living record, the dwindling numbers of survivors and witnesses who have assumed the responsibility to chronicle their stories, to relay them personally to generations born long after the events. Likewise with the Sept. 11 attacks, it is incumbent to remember, and through memory to prevent similar events from happening again. The images of the WTC attacks speak for themselves. Where video is lacking, as in the case of Flight 77 (which is more proof of the plot, says Meyssan) it is up to the eyewitnesses to tell their stories.

So here's mine. I was in my Washington office doing research when one of the secretaries told me that an aircraft had hit the World Trade Center. We brought the news up on the projection screen in our darkened conference room and watched the coverage, seeing endless six-foot high replays of the impacts and explosions. It was unsettling, even disorienting, but my colleagues and I were appraising it professionally, trading theories on who was to blame and how the terrorists coordinated the attacks. We did not come to any firm conclusions.

I went back to my office around 9:20. A short time later a friend of mine called, an Air Force officer, and we spoke awhile about the strikes in New York. I was standing, looking out my large office window, which faces west and from six stories up has a commanding view of the Potomac and the Virginia heights. (When I hired on my boss said we had the best view in town. True, most days.) The Pentagon is about a mile and half distant in the center of the tableau. I was looking directly at it when the aircraft struck. The sight of the 757 diving in at an unrecoverable angle is frozen in my memory, but at the time, I did not immediately comprehend what I was witnessing. There was a silvery flash, an explosion, and a dark, mushroom shaped cloud rose over the building. I froze, gaping for a second until the sound of the detonation, a sharp pop at that distance, shook me out of it. I shouted something both extremely profane and sacrilegious and told my friend, "They hit the Pentagon. We're under attack. Gotta go." I hung up the phone and turned back to the window to see the dark cloud spreading. I yelled down the hall, "Look out the window!" I heard gasps outside, and a researcher dashed into my office and stared. I grabbed my bags and said I was getting out of the building and invited others to do the same. I took the elevator down and walked to the edge of the greensward, in easy view of the Pentagon across the river. I set down my bags and stood in the dew soaked grass, seeing the brilliant blue sky filling with rolling clouds of smoke. The blackness stretched south the length of the horizon. The adrenaline of the initial shock had worn off a bit, and I was able to take in the enormity of the event. Even more than witnessing the plane crash, I remember those long helpless minutes standing in the grass.

So, of course, I take it personally when a half-wit like Meyssan comes along saying it did not happen. And he is so evidently at war with reality that one is tempted not to waste time with him. His ideas are obviously foolish, easily disproved, an affront to any reasoning person. It would be easy to ignore him. But that would be a mistake. This is another front in what President Bush called "the war to save civilization itself." The history of the 20th century should show that no idea is so absurd that it cannot take destructive hold and play havoc with societies, even to the point of sanctioning mass murder. Allowing the extremists to go unchallenged only encourages them. People like Lenin, Hitler, Pol Pot and other millennial criminals were just like Meyssan at one point in their careers. If they had been opposed more vigorously sooner, perhaps they never would have attained power. When such ideas are allowed to stand, they take root among the

impressionable or those predisposed to think the worst. And especially now that communications technology has made it possible to give global reach to the bizarre and archive it forever, it is essential for men and women of reason resolutely to counter the delusions of the fringe element.

I was there. I saw it. That is my entire rebuttal.

— *By James S. Robbins, a national-security analyst & NRO contributor*

<http://www.nationalreview.com/robbins/robbins040902.asp>