

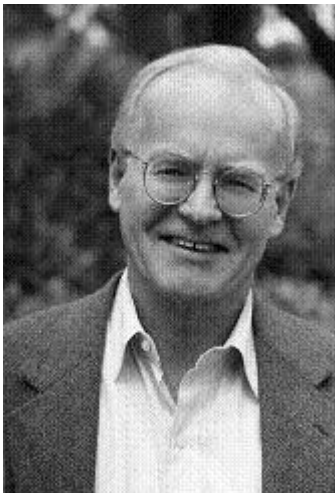
Ted Olson's Report of Phone Calls from Barbara Olson on 9/11: Three Official Denials

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Late in the day on 9/11, CNN put out a story that began: "Barbara Olson, a conservative commentator and attorney, alerted her husband, Solicitor General Ted Olson, that the plane she was on was being hijacked Tuesday morning, Ted Olson told CNN." According to this story, Olson reported that his wife had "called him twice on a cell phone from American Airlines Flight 77," saying that "all passengers and flight personnel, including the pilots, were herded to the back of the plane by armed hijackers. The only weapons she mentioned were knives and cardboard cutters."[2](#)

Ted Olson's report was very important. It provided the only evidence that American 77, which was said to have struck the Pentagon, had still been aloft after it had disappeared from FAA radar around 9:00 AM (there had been reports, after this disappearance, that an airliner had crashed on the Ohio-Kentucky border). Also, Barbara Olson had been a very well-known commentator on CNN. The report that she died in a plane that had been hijacked by Arab Muslims was an important factor in getting the nation's support for the Bush administration's "war on terror." Ted Olson's report was important in still another way, being the sole source of the widely accepted idea that the hijackers had box cutters.[3](#)

However, although Ted Olson's report of phone calls from his wife has been a central pillar of the official account of 9/11, this report has been completely undermined.

Olson's Self-Contradictions

Olson began this process of undermining by means of self-contradictions. He first told CNN, as we have seen, that his wife had "called him twice on a cell phone." But he contradicted

this claim on September 14, telling *Hannity and Colmes* that she had reached him by calling the Department of Justice *collect*. Therefore, she must have been using the “airplane phone,” he surmised, because “she somehow didn’t have access to her credit cards.”⁴ However, this version of Olson’s story, besides contradicting his first version, was even self-contradictory, because a credit card is needed to activate a passenger-seat phone.

Later that same day, moreover, Olson told *Larry King Live* that the second call from his wife suddenly went dead because “the signals from cell phones coming from airplanes don’t work that well.”⁵ After that return to his first version, he finally settled on the second version, saying that his wife had called collect and hence must have used “the phone in the passengers’ seats” because she did not have her purse.⁶

By finally settling on this story, Olson avoided a technological pitfall. Given the cell phone system employed in 2001, high-altitude cell phone calls from airliners were impossible, or at least virtually so (Olson’s statement that “the signals from cell phones coming from airplanes don’t work that well” was a considerable understatement). The technology to enable cell phone calls from high-altitude airline flights was not created until 2004.⁷

However, Olson’s second story, besides being self-contradictory, was contradicted by American Airlines.

American Airlines Contradicts Olson’s Second Version

A 9/11 researcher, knowing that AA Flight 77 was a Boeing 757, noticed that AA’s website indicated that its 757s do not have passenger-seat phones. After he wrote to ask if that had been the case on September 11, 2001, an AA customer service representative replied: “That is correct; we do not have phones on our Boeing 757. The passengers on flight 77 used their own personal cellular phones to make out calls during the terrorist attack.”⁸

In response to this revelation, defenders of the official story might reply that Ted Olson was evidently right the first time: she had used her cell phone. However, besides the fact that this scenario is rendered unlikely by the cell phone technology employed in 2001, it has also been contradicted by the FBI.

Olson’s Story Contradicted by the FBI

The most serious official contradiction of Ted Olson’s story came in 2006 at the trial of Zacarias Moussaoui, the so-called 20th hijacker. The evidence presented to this trial by the FBI included a report on phone calls from all four 9/11 flights. In its report on American Flight 77, the FBI report attributed only one call to Barbara Olson and it was an “unconnected call,” which (of course) lasted “0 seconds.”⁹ According to the FBI, therefore, Ted Olson did not receive a single call from his wife using either a cell phone or an onboard phone.

Back on 9/11, the FBI itself had interviewed Olson. A report of that interview indicates that Olson told the FBI agents that his wife had called him twice from Flight 77.¹⁰ And yet the FBI’s report on calls from Flight 77, presented in 2006, indicated that no such calls occurred.

This was an amazing development: The FBI is part of the Department of Justice, and yet its report undermined the well-publicized claim of the DOJ’s former solicitor general that he

had received two calls from his wife on 9/11.

Olson's Story Also Rejected by Pentagon Historians

Ted Olson's story has also been quietly rejected by the historians who wrote *Pentagon 9/11*, a treatment of the Pentagon attack put out by the Department of Defense.¹¹

According to Olson, his wife had said that "all passengers and flight personnel, including the pilots, were herded to the back of the plane by armed hijackers."¹² This is an inherently implausible scenario. We are supposed to believe that 60-some people, including the two pilots, were held at bay by three or four men (one or two of the hijackers would have been in the cockpit) with knives and boxcutters. This scenario becomes even more absurd when we realize that the alleged hijackers were all small, unathletic men (the 9/11 Commission pointed out that even "[t]he so-called muscle hijackers actually were not physically imposing, as the majority of them were between 5'5" and 5'7" in height and slender in build"¹³), and that the pilot, Charles "Chic" Burlingame, was a weightlifter and a boxer, who was described as "really tough" by one of his erstwhile opponents.¹⁴ Also, the idea that Burlingame would have turned over the plane to hijackers was rejected by his brother, who said: "I don't know what happened in that cockpit, but I'm sure that they would have had to incapacitate him or kill him because he would have done anything to prevent the kind of tragedy that befell that airplane."¹⁵

The Pentagon historians, in any case, did not accept the Olson story, according to which Burlingame and his co-pilot did give up their plane and were in the back with the passengers and other crew members. They instead wrote that "the attackers either incapacitated or murdered the two pilots."¹⁶

Conclusion

This rejection of Ted Olson's story by American Airlines, the Pentagon, and especially the FBI is a development of utmost importance. Without the alleged calls from Barbara Olson, there is no evidence that Flight 77 returned to Washington. Also, if Ted Olson's claim was false, then there are only two possibilities: Either he lied or he was duped by someone using voice-morphing technology to pretend to be his wife.¹⁷ In either case, the official story about the calls from Barbara Olson was based on deception. And if that part of the official account of 9/11 was based on deception, should we not suspect that other parts were as well?

The fact that Ted Olson's report has been contradicted by other defenders of the official story about 9/11 provides grounds for demanding a new investigation of 9/11. This internal contradiction is, moreover, only one of 25 such contradictions discussed in my most recent book, *9/11 Contradictions: An Open Letter to Congress and the Press*.

NOTES

1 This essay is based on Chapter 8 ("Did Ted Olson Receive Calls from Barbara Olson?") of David Ray Griffin, *9/11 Contradictions: An Open Letter to Congress and the Press* (Northampton: Olive Branch, 2008).

2 Tim O'Brien, "Wife of Solicitor General Alerted Him of Hijacking from Plane," CNN, September 11, 2001 (<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/11/pentagon.olson>).

3 This was pointed out in *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 8.

4 *Hannity & Colmes*, Fox News, September 14, 2001 (<http://s3.amazonaws.com/911timeline/2001/foxnews091401.html>).

5 “America’s New War: Recovering from Tragedy,” *Larry King Live*, CNN, September 14, 2001 (<http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0109/14/lkl.00.html>).

6 In his “Barbara K. Olson Memorial Lecture,” delivered November 16, 2001 (<http://www.fed-soc.org/resources/id.63/default.asp>), Olson said that she “somehow managed . . . to use a telephone in the airplane to call.” He laid out this version of his story more fully in an interview reported in Toby Harnden, “She Asked Me How to Stop the Plane,” *Daily Telegraph*, March 5, 2002 (<http://s3.amazonaws.com/911timeline/2002/telegraph030502.html>).

7 I discussed the technical difficulties of making cell phone calls from airliners in 2001 in *Debunking 9/11 Debunking: An Answer to Popular Mechanics and Other Defenders of the Official Conspiracy Theory* (Northampton: Olive Branch, 2007), 87-88, 292-97.

8 See the submission of 17 February 2006 by “the Paradroid” on the Politik Forum (<http://forum.politik.de/forum/archive/index.php/t-133356-p-24.html>). It is quoted in David Ray Griffin, *9/11 Contradictions: An Open Letter to Congress and the Press* (Northampton: Olive Branch, 2008), 75.

9 *United States v. Zacarias Moussaoui*, Exhibit Number P200054 (<http://www.vaed.uscourts.gov/notablecases/moussaoui/exhibits/prosecution/flights/P200054.html>). These documents can be more easily viewed in “Detailed Account of Phone Calls from September 11th Flights” (<http://911research.wtc7.net/planes/evidence/calldetail.html>).

10 FBI, “Interview with Theodore Olsen [sic],” “9/11 Commission, FBI Source Documents, Chronological, September 11,” 2001Intelfiles.com, March 14, 2008, (<http://intelfiles.egoplex.com:80/2008/03/911-commission-fbi-source-documents.html>).

11 Alfred Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11* (Washington DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2007).

12 O’Brien, “Wife of Solicitor General Alerted Him of Hijacking from Plane.”

13 9/11 Commission Staff Statement 16 (http://www.9-11commission.gov/staff_statements/staff_statement_16.pdf).

14 Shoestring, “The Flight 77 Murder Mystery: Who Really Killed Charles Burlingame?” *Shoestring911*, February 2, 2008 (<http://shoestring911.blogspot.com/2008/02/flight-77-murder-mystery-who-really.html>).

15 “In Memoriam: Charles ‘Chic’ Burlingame, 1949-2001,” USS Saratoga Museum foundation (available at http://911research.wtc7.net/cache/planes/analysis/chic_remembered.html).

16 Alfred Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11* (Washington DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2007), 12.

17 Of these two possibilities, the idea that Ted Olson was duped should be seriously entertained only if there are records proving that the Department of Justice received two

collect calls, ostensibly from Barbara Olson, that morning. Evidently no such records have been produced.

This article is based on Chapter 8 of Dr. Griffin's new book, "9/11 Contradictions: An Open Letter to Congress and the Press," (Northampton: Olive Branch, 2008).

This book reframes the central events of 9/11 as a series of 25 internal contradictions. The only way that its readers will be able to continue to accept the official story is to accept mutually contradictory accounts.

"9/11 Contradictions" may have the best chance of any of DRG's books (or indeed any book) of opening up a new investigation into 9/11.

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