

Powell praises courage shown aboard Flight 93

By The Associated Press DAN NEPHIN (Associated Press Writer)

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QUICK SUMMARY "We fight back": Powell speaks at Pa. 9/11 ceremony, praises Flight 93 passengers as heroes



Photo credit: AP | Wells Morrison with the FBI rings the large bell during the name presentation and "Bells of Remembrance" portion of the ceremony near the temporary memorial and crash site of United Flight 93, Friday, Sept. 11, 2009, in [Shanksville](#), Pa. United Flight 93 crashed in Shanksville, Pa, Sept. 11, 2001, after passengers and crew diverted the hijacked airplane from its intended target Washington, D.C. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

SHANKSVILLE, Pa. (AP) — The 40 passengers and crew aboard Flight 93 became worthy successors to the heroes of U.S. battles dating back to the Revolutionary War when they made the decision to fight the terrorist who hijacked their plane, former Secretary of State Colin Powell said Friday.

Speaking under a dull gray sky in a field near Shanksville to mark the eighth anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, Powell said the choice was clear for the passengers and crew of the plane taken over by four suicidal fanatics.

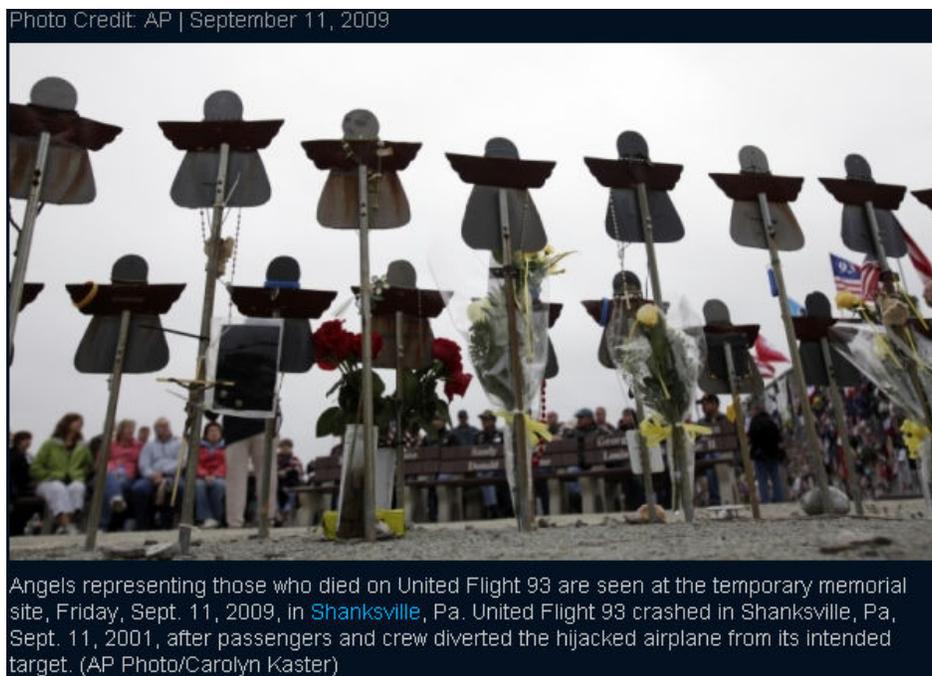
"As much as we may try, we can never truly grasp the emotions that must have gone through the hearts and the minds of the passengers and crew as they realized the mortal danger they were in," he said.

"The choice before them was clear and daunting: If they had any chance of survival, they had to attack not only to save themselves, but to save hundreds, if not thousands, of their fellow citizens and to show the terrorists that they would never defeat us," he said. "They refused to let it just happen, they acted."



The terrorists pushed them to the back of the plane, thinking that would keep them under control, he said: "But they misunderstood Americans. We fight back. We will never be cowed."

"They had a moment, which against all odds, was theirs to seize. In place of fear that might have paralyzed them, they found courage to attack" and forced the "monsters to abort the mission," he said.



Flight 93 was traveling from Newark, N.J., to San Francisco when hijackers took it over with the likely goal of crashing it into the White House or Capitol. Passengers and crew hatched a plan to storm the cockpit after learning of the coordinated attacks, and the 9/11 Commission concluded that the hijackers downed the plane in Pennsylvania as the hostages revolted.

The country is grateful and thankful, he said.

"Your loss, as painful as it was, saved thousands of other family members," Powell told the family members.

Powell said the Flight 93 memorial, which is to be completed in time for the 10th anniversary of the attacks, was a fitting tribute from a grateful and thankful nation. The \$58 million memorial will cover 2,200 acres around the crash site in rural southwestern Pennsylvania.

Retired Gen. Tommy Franks said the memorial would remind future generations of the character revealed through the adversity faced by the passengers and crew.

"Their lives were not taken, their lives were given," Franks said.

Several hundred people attended the morning ceremony, but visitors continued to arrive through the morning and into the afternoon.

Colleen Haftman, 53, of Charleroi, posed at the temporary memorial, a chain link fence upon which countless people place mementos, to have her picture taken with a small U.S. flag she placed there several years ago.

She and her husband, Tim Haftman, 55, have come to every memorial except one, when he could not get off work.

"It's just something we need to do," she said.

Jose Melendez-Perez visited the site for the first time. He was the Orlando International Airport customs agent credited with refusing U.S. entry to a man officials believe was supposed to be the fifth hijacker aboard the flight.

"It's more intense, more emotional than I thought," he said, dressed in his dark blue uniform. "It gives me chills."

He said he had great admiration and respect for the passengers and crew who fought back.

Gordon Felt, whose brother was aboard Flight 93, said he is often asked what message the family members wish for visitors to take.

"Courage, for that is what our loved ones displayed that day," said Felt, president of Families of Flight 93. "Courage in the face of overwhelming odds."

The memorial, he said, will stand testament to their courage, and give all hope that they might draw from their own courage should they face a similar situation.

Felt estimated that about 60 to 75 relatives of the victims attended the ceremony.

Former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, who was the governor of Pennsylvania at the time of the attacks, said eight years later we still ask why something so "brutally senseless" happened that day.

He said the reason was too profound to truly understand but we must "honor the day that lives were saved and heroes were made in the skies of Shanksville."

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