

contact a nearby military base to make the request. The Command Center told Cleveland that FAA personnel well above them in the chain of command had to make the decision to seek military assistance and were working on the issue.¹⁶¹

Between 9:34 and 9:38, the Cleveland controller observed United 93 climbing to 40,700 feet and immediately moved several aircraft out its way. The controller continued to try to contact United 93, and asked whether the pilot could confirm that he had been hijacked.¹⁶² There was no response.

Then, at 9:39, a fourth radio transmission was heard from United 93:

Ziad Jarrah: Uh, this is the captain. Would like you all to remain seated. There is a bomb on board and are going back to the airport, and to have our demands [unintelligible]. Please remain quiet.

The controller responded: “United 93, understand you have a bomb on board. Go ahead.” The flight did not respond.¹⁶³

From 9:34 to 10:08, a Command Center facility manager provided frequent updates to Acting Deputy Administrator Monte Belger and other executives at FAA headquarters as United 93 headed toward Washington, D.C. At 9:41, Cleveland Center lost United 93’s transponder signal. The controller located it on primary radar, matched its position with visual sightings from other aircraft, and tracked the flight as it turned east, then south.¹⁶⁴

At 9:42, the Command Center learned from news reports that a plane had struck the Pentagon. The Command Center’s national operations manager, Ben Sliney, ordered all FAA facilities to instruct all aircraft to land at the nearest airport. This was an unprecedented order. The air traffic control system handled it with great skill, as about 4,500 commercial and general aviation aircraft soon landed without incident.¹⁶⁵

At 9:46 the Command Center updated FAA headquarters that United 93 was now “twenty-nine minutes out of Washington, D.C.”

At 9:49, 13 minutes after Cleveland Center had asked about getting military help, the Command Center suggested that someone at headquarters should decide whether to request military assistance:

FAA Headquarters: They’re pulling Jeff away to go talk about United 93.

Command Center: Uh, do we want to think, uh, about scrambling aircraft?

FAA Headquarters: Oh, God, I don’t know.

Command Center: Uh, that’s a decision somebody’s gonna have to make probably in the next ten minutes.

FAA Headquarters: Uh, ya know everybody just left the room.¹⁶⁶

At 9:53, FAA headquarters informed the Command Center that the deputy director for air traffic services was talking to Monte Belger about scrambling