

9/11 commission hears flight attendant's phone call

Betty Ong: 'I think we are getting hijacked'

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WASHINGTON (CNN) --The flight attendant's voice was calm and composed, but her telephoned words to the American Airlines operations center the morning of September 11, 2001, were chilling.

"The cockpit's not answering," flight attendant Betty Ong said. "Somebody's stabbed in business class, and, um, I think there's Mace that we can't breathe. I don't know; I think we are getting hijacked."

Ong, 45, was on board American Airlines Flight 11, the Boeing 767 en route from Boston, Massachusetts, to Los Angeles, California, that was flown into the north tower of the World Trade Center.

While family members wept in the audience, four minutes of Ong's 23-minute phone call was played Tuesday during a hearing held by the Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, known as the 9/11 commission.

Nydia Gonzalez, who was on the receiving end of the call, also fought her emotions as she described the call, which came in at about 8:20 that Tuesday morning.

"Several media accounts of what occurred on Flight 11 claim that Betty was 'hysterical with fear,' 'shrieking' and 'gasping for air,' Gonzalez testified. "I am here to tell this commission that those accounts are wrong.

"Betty was calm, professional and in control throughout the call. I honestly believe, after my conversation with Betty, that the 81 passengers and nine crewmembers on Flight 11 had no idea of the fate they were to encounter that day."

After Ong's description of the scene on board, Gonzalez and a second call-taker asked Ong what seat she was in.

Ong identified herself and her seat number, and said, "OK, our number one got stabbed, our purser is stabbed. Nobody knows who stabbed who, and we can't even get up to business class right now because nobody can breathe."

Commission members said Tuesday that the phone call and other evidence indicated the hijackers used Mace or pepper spray to help seize the plane and isolate passengers from the cockpit. Mace was also found in hijacker Mohamed Atta's luggage, which was left at Logan Airport in Boston.

Ong said the flight attendant working in first class was also stabbed.

In response to questions about the cockpit, she said, "We can't even get into the cockpit, we don't know who is up there."

One of the voices in the control center replied, "Well if they were shrewd, they would keep the door closed."

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