

[PG Home](#)
[PG News](#)
[Sports](#)
[Lifestyle](#)
[A&E](#)
[Photo Journal](#)
[AP Wire](#)
[Business](#)
[Classifieds](#)
[Web Extras](#)
[Weather](#)
[Health & Science](#)
[Search](#)
[PG Store](#)
[PG Delivery](#)
[Nation & World](#)
[Sports](#)
[Local News](#)
[Health & Science](#)
[Neighborhoods](#)
[Lifestyle](#)
[Business & Technology](#)
[Opinion](#)

## 2 planes had no part in crash of Flight 93

Business jet, military cargo plane were in area of hijacked United Flight 93

Sunday, September 16, 2001

By Bill Heltzel and Tom Gibb, Post-Gazette Staff Writers

*Correction/Clarification: (Published Sept. 18, 2001) In Sunday's story about the FBI investigation into the crash of a hijacked United Airlines jetliner in Somerset County, we said Paul Sledzik of the federal Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team is employed by the Armed Forces Institute of Technology. In reality, the organization is the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.*


[post-gazette.com](#)

**Headlines  
by E-mail**

Two other airplanes were flying near the hijacked United Airlines jet when it crashed in Somerset County, but neither had anything to do with the airliner's fate, the FBI said yesterday.

In fact, one of the planes, a Fairchild Falcon 20 business jet, was directed to the crash site to help rescuers. The request for the jet to fly low and obtain the coordinates for the crash explains reports by people in the vicinity who said a white or silver jet flew by moments after the crash.

A C-130 military cargo plane was also within 25 miles of the passenger jet when it crashed, FBI spokesman Bill Crowley said yesterday, but was not diverted.

"There was a hole in the ground -- that was it," said Yates Caldwell, the pilot who was at the controls of the 10-passenger corporate jet for Greensboro, N.C.-based apparel maker VF Corp. "There was no way to know what it was .... I didn't know there had been a crash until I landed, until I was on the ground in Johnstown."

With the recovery Friday night of the cockpit voice recorder from United Flight 93, workers at the crash site have shifted their focus to a long, arduous search for what remains of the jet and its victims.

"There was a feeling of satisfaction" when the voice recorder was found, Crowley said. But the workers' excitement was tempered by the realization that there is much work still to be done. By one estimate, the job of sifting the debris for body parts, pieces of the jet and evidence of the hijacking will take three to five weeks.

The voice recorder would have picked up the last 30 minutes of conversation in the cockpit, unless the hijackers turned it off or it was

too severely damaged in the crash. It was found around 8:25 p.m. Thursday, 25 feet below the ground in the crater gouged out by the doomed jet. It appeared to be in good condition.

"We're focusing on retrieving evidence," Crowley said. "Once we find it we move it out of here."

Debris from the crash has been found up to 8 miles from the crash site, but searchers are concentrating on the crater where most of the remains are located. Papers and other light objects were carried aloft by the explosion after impact of the plane and they were transported by a nine-knot wind.

Crowley said investigators have found no evidence of a bomb. According to news reports, a crew member keyed a cockpit microphone so that air traffic controllers could hear conversations. One voice, in broken English and Arabic accent said, "There is a bomb on board."

One part of the recovery effort involves about 100 volunteers from the federal Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team. The team includes specialists such as anthropologists, pathologists, radiologists, and dentists who have been trained in disaster recovery procedures.

The team, led by Paul Sledzik of the Armed Forces Institute of Technology, set up and began working on Friday.

First, agents at the crash site collect debris and screen it in sieves. Some are working in the crash pit, some are around it on their hands and knees, according to Dr. Dennis Dirkmaat, a forensic anthropologist from Mercyhurst College in Erie, who is assisting at the scene.

As agents find items -- bones, jewelry, clothing -- they hand-deliver them to deputy coroners stationed at the perimeter of the crime scene. The deputies deliver the items to a temporary morgue.

Each unique item is numbered, photographed, X-rayed, and described in writing. Items are separated by categories and sent to stations of specialists.

"Right now, we're not trying to identify individuals as we see the remains," Dirkmaat said. "The first step is documentation of what we have."

Although the items collected are "extremely fragmentary," Dirkmaat said, he is 100 percent certain that individuals will be identified. So far, none have been identified.

As remains and personal affects are identified, that information will be turned over to Somerset Coroner Wallace Miller. He will work with families to determine what becomes of the remains.

Miller said it might take quite some time before remains are identified. DNA evidence, he said, will be one of the most useful tools. But the labs capable of analyzing that evidence will be overwhelmed by DNA evidence from the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

"We understand that these are individuals and loved ones and people who are missed ... and that their families are awaiting closure. We are sympathetic, but we are obligated to be as meticulous as possible."

The state Department of Transportation began paving a temporary road to the site yesterday, to make it easier to get heavy equipment and vehicles in and out of the fields.

The road also will enable families of victims to go up to a viewing area near the crater, to pay their respects. The area will be cleaned up, "to make it respectful," Crowley said.

Families will be taken to the viewing area over the next few days. They will not be allowed at the crater itself, because that is still considered a crime scene. State police, the FBI and United Airline officials plan to keep the families away from reporters, "to ensure their privacy once they get there," Capt. Frank Monaco said.

He said the first group to visit the site, on Friday, left flowers, photographs and a United States flag.

The viewing area might be opened to the news media by Thursday.

More than 200 people are working at the site, from the FBI, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, National Transportation Safety Board, Federal Aviation Administration, Pennsylvania State Police, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, and local volunteer fire departments. The Salvation Army and American Red Cross have more than a hundred volunteers and staff members handling support services, such as providing meals. The Red Cross, for example, has 25 mental health workers providing counseling for workers.

The Salvation Army and Red Cross are "providing a tremendous amount of support," Crowley said.

Cooler weather has made the work a bit easier. Searchers are wearing Hazmat suits that are sealed. As a result, workers are prone to becoming dehydrated. But the cooler weather has made it easier to work in the suits.

 **E-mail this page to a friend**

Take me to... 

[Contact Us](#) [Search](#) [Site Map](#) [Help](#) [About Us](#) [Advertise](#) [Corrections](#)

Copyright © 1997-2008 PG Publishing. All rights reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) [Privacy Policy](#)