

**Sunday Masonic Paper No 765**  
**Reflections on 9/11 - Fourteen Years Later**  
**by RWBro Wayne D. Anderson**

Fourteen years ago, I was working at Bombardier Mass Transit North America in Millhaven. That day dawned clear and bright a beautiful Ontario Fall day. But at 8:45 Eastern Standard Time on the 11th of September 2001 the world changed. Four teams of hijackers walked past the security at three major metropolitan airports and hijacked four aircraft. Two were crashed into the World Trade Towers, one into the Pentagon, and one was brought down in a farmers field in rural Pennsylvania before it could reach its target. That fourth aircraft and the people onboard is another total story of bravery and heroics.

We first received word by a phone call from one of my co-workers wives she called to say there had been an "accident" in New York. Our department was not that large and we were a close group, she knew our Boss and a few other co-workers were in New York and she had concerns for their safety. As we did not have connection to television at the office our next best bet was the Internet, and by this time, we found out later, the second plane had struck. As the news and word spread around the office – small groups gathered around computers some had our Canadian News on, some had US feeds. The shock and sadness went around the office like ripples on a pond, then the awareness came that we had people in New York. My supervisor and I started trying to make contact – but as you remember cell phones were almost impossible to use. Eventually later in the day we got word that all our friends and co-workers were safe.

Over five thousand people perished that day on the four aircraft, the Twin Towers, the Pentagon and a farm field in rural Pennsylvania and the first responders who bravely ran into the World Trade and Convention towers. It was numbing to think of all this tragic loss the heroics that day, the sadness and conversely the joy at knowing friends were safe.

I would like to relate to you a story from that fateful time – a story of goodness, graciousness and charity.

On the morning of Tuesday, September 11, Delta flight 15 was about 5 hours out of Frankfort and flying over the North Atlantic. All of a sudden the curtains parted and the Stewardess was told to go to the cockpit, immediately, to see the captain. As soon as she got there she noticed that the crew had that "All Business" look on their faces. The captain handed her a printed message. It was from Delta's main office in Atlanta and simply read, "All airways over the Continental United States are closed to commercial air traffic. Land ASAP at the nearest airport. Advise your destination."

No one said a word about what this could mean. They knew it was a serious situation and they needed to find terra firma quickly. The captain determined that the nearest airport was 400 miles away from them in Gander, Newfoundland. He requested approval for a route change from the Canadian traffic controller and approval was granted immediately — no questions asked. They found out later, of course, why there was no hesitation in approving our request. While the flight crew prepared the aeroplane for landing, another message arrived from Atlanta telling them about some terrorist activity in the New York area. A few minutes later word came in about the hijackings.

They decided to LIE to the passengers while they were still in the air. They told them the plane had a simple instrument problem and that they needed to land at the nearest airport in Gander, Newfoundland, to have it checked out. They promised to give more information after landing in Gander. There was much grumbling among the passengers, but that's nothing new! Forty minutes later, they landed in Gander. Local time at Gander was 12:30 PM .... that's 11:00 AM EST. There were already about 20 other aeroplanes on the ground from all over the world that had taken this detour on their way to the US.

After they parked on the ramp, the captain made the following announcement: "Ladies and gentlemen, you must be wondering if all these aeroplanes around us have the same instrument problem as we have. The reality is that we are here for another reason." Then he went on to explain the little bit he knew about the situation in the US. There were loud gasps and stares of disbelief. The captain informed passengers that Ground control in Gander told us to stay put. The Canadian Government was in charge of our situation and no one was allowed to get off the aircraft. No one on the ground was allowed to come near any of the aircraft. Only airport police would come around periodically, look them over and go on to the next aeroplane. In the next hour or so more planes landed and Gander ended up with 53 aeroplanes from all over the world, 27 of which were US commercial jets.

Meanwhile, bits of news started to come in over the aircraft radio and for the first time we learned that aeroplanes were flown into the World Trade Centre in New York and into the Pentagon in DC. People were trying to use their cell phones, but were unable to connect due to a different cell system in Canada. Some did get through, but were only able to get to the Canadian operator who would tell them that the lines to the U.S. were either blocked or jammed. Sometime in the evening the news filtered to them that the World Trade Centre buildings had collapsed and that a fourth hijacking had resulted in a crash. By now the passengers were emotionally and physically exhausted, not to mention frightened, but everyone stayed amazingly calm. They had only to look out the window at the 52 other stranded aircraft to realize that they were not the only ones in this predicament. They had been told earlier that they would be allowing people off the planes one plane at a time. At 6 PM, Gander airport told them that their turn to deplane would be 11 am the next morning.

Passengers were not happy, but they simply resigned themselves to this news without much noise and started to prepare themselves to spend the night on the aeroplane. Gander had promised us medical attention, if needed, water, and lavatory servicing. And they were true to their word.

Fortunately they had no medical situations to worry about. They did have a young lady who was 33 weeks into her pregnancy. They took REALLY good care of her. The night passed without incident despite the uncomfortable sleeping arrangements. About 10:30 on the morning of the 12th a convoy of school buses showed up. They got off the plane and were taken to the terminal where we went through Immigration and Customs and then had to register with the Red Cross.

After that the crew were separated from the passengers and were taken in vans to a small hotel. The Crew had no idea where their passengers were going. They learned from the Red Cross that the town of Gander has a population of 10,400 people and they had about 10,500 passengers to take care of from all the aeroplanes that were forced into Gander! They were told to just relax at the hotel and they would be contacted when the US airports opened again, but not to expect that call for a while. They found out the total scope of the terror back home only after getting to their hotel and turning on the TV, 24 hours after it all started. Meanwhile, the air crew had lots of time on our hands and found that the people of Gander were extremely friendly. They started calling us the "plane people." The crew enjoyed their hospitality, explored the town of Gander and ended up having a pretty good time.

Two days later, they got that call and were taken back to the Gander airport. Back on the plane, they were reunited with the passengers and found out what they had been doing for the past two days.

What they found out was incredible.....

Gander and all the surrounding communities (within about a 75 Kilometer radius) had closed all high schools, meeting halls, lodges, and any other large gathering places. They converted all these facilities to mass lodging areas for all the stranded travelers. Some had cots set up, some had mats with sleeping bags and pillows set up. ALL the high school students were required to volunteer their time to take care of the "guests." The Delta 15 two hundred and eighteen passengers ended up in a town called Lewisporte, about 45 kilometers from Gander where they were put up in a high school. If any women wanted to be in a women-only facility, that was arranged. Families were kept together. All the elderly passengers were taken to private homes.

Remember that young pregnant lady? She was put up in a private home right across the street from a 24-hour Urgent Care facility. There was a dentist on call and both male and female nurses remained with the crowd for the duration. Phone calls and e-mails to the U.S. and around the world were available to everyone once a day. During the day, passengers were offered "Excursion" trips. Some people went on boat cruises of the lakes and harbors. Some went for hikes in the local forests. Local bakeries stayed open to make fresh bread for the guests. Food was prepared by all the residents and brought to the schools. People were driven to restaurants of their choice and offered wonderful meals. Everyone was given tokens for local laundry mats to wash their clothes, since luggage was still on the aircraft. In other words, every single need was met for those stranded travelers.

Passengers were crying while telling us these stories. Finally, when they were told that U.S. airports had reopened, they were delivered to the airport right on time and without a single passenger missing or late. The local Red Cross had all the information about the whereabouts of each and every passenger and knew which plane they needed to be on and when all the planes were leaving. They coordinated everything beautifully. It was absolutely incredible.

When passengers came on board, it was like they had been on a cruise. Everyone knew each other by name. They were swapping stories of their stay, impressing each other with who had the better time. Our flight back to Atlanta looked like a chartered party flight. The crew just stayed out of their way. It was mind-boggling. Passengers had totally bonded and were calling each other by their first names, exchanging phone numbers, addresses, and email addresses. And then a very unusual thing happened.

One of our passengers approached a Steward and asked if he could make an announcement over the PA system. On commercial aircraft they never, ever allow that. But this time was different. The Steward handed him the mike. He picked up the PA and reminded everyone about what they had just gone through in the last few days. He reminded them of the hospitality they had received at the hands of total strangers. He continued by saying that he would like to do something in return for the good folks of Lewisporte. He said he was going to set up a Trust Fund under the name of DELTA 15 (our flight number). The purpose of the trust fund is to provide college scholarships for the high school students of Lewisporte. He asked for donations of any amount from his fellow travelers. When the paper with donations got back to us with the amounts, names, phone numbers and addresses, the total was for more than \$14,000! The gentleman, a MD from Virginia, promised to match the donations and to start the administrative work on the scholarship. He also said that he would forward this proposal to Delta Corporate and ask them to donate as well. Currently, the trust fund is at more than \$1.5 million and has assisted 134 students in college education.

The author of this story said "I just wanted to share this story because we need good stories right now. It gives me a little bit of hope to know that some people in a faraway place were kind to some strangers who literally dropped in on them. It reminds me how much good there is in the world." "In spite of all the rotten things we see going on in today's world this story confirms that there are still a lot of good people in the world and when things get bad, they will come forward. Let's not forget THIS fact.

My Brethren; It is my hope that through this story of blessing and charity to others we can remind ourselves that this is what it feels like to love. This is what it feels like to know peace. May our practice of being on the square and showing kindness and brotherly love to all, allow us to know peace. May this peace not stay only with us, but radiate out from each of us, our homes, our lodges, and even in to the world, through our thoughts and words and actions, and may we be a blessing to others. May everyone know peace.

Brethren, permit me to finish by quoting R.W. Bro. Cliff Farber, Frontenac DDGM 2001-2002 at his Official Visit to Queen's Lodge

January 9, 2002:

*“Freemasonry represents the highest ideals yet devised by man. Our Fraternity demonstrates equal respect for all and supports the rights and freedoms of all. Ours is an organization that is dedicated to the good of mankind. We are obligated to treat all people with equal dignity and respect and to respect the rights and freedoms of all. We must stand firm behind these Masonic principles.*

*As Masons, let us continue to enjoy the rights and freedoms that still exist for us. Let us continue to support Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth but let's extend those feelings beyond our Masonic boundaries. Let us continue in an effort to make the world a better place in which to live and a better place for the generations to follow.”*