

Q115 – What major event happened on September 11, 2001 in the United States?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:

On September 11, 2001, nineteen terrorists hijacked four airplanes and used them for suicide attacks on the United States. This was a direct assault on American freedom by religious fanatics.

The attack was funded by Osama bin Laden – an anti-Semite who raged against the existence of Israel and led the terrorist group al Qaeda. The hijackers smuggled weapons onto the planes, stormed the cockpits, killed the crews, and took over. Two planes hit the Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City.

When the first plane struck, I was at the Supreme Court in a meeting with Chief Justice Rehnquist and some other judges. When the second plane struck, we disbanded -- not knowing what more was in store. But we soon found out.

Just across the river from Washington, DC, the third plane struck the Pentagon – headquarters of the Department of Defense. A friend of mine was on that plane. She called her husband on her cell phone to say goodbye.

Passengers on the fourth plane knew from phone calls about the fate of the others. We still don't know the target of that plane. Probably the Capital or the White house. Todd Beamer was among countless heroes that day. He led a group of fellow passengers and flight attendants to fight the hijackers. As a result, the plane crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and no one survived.

Almost 3,000 people died on 9/11 – nearly as many has died in the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The attacks of 9/11 changed America – from airport security to the war on terror at home and abroad.