

It's Better to Be Lucky AND Good

By Samantha Bigelow

On the morning of 9/11/01, Heather Penney was at Andrews Air Force Base preparing for training when someone came into the conference room and said, "Someone just flew a plane into the world trade center." Heather Penney, nicknamed Lucky, was brave enough to fly an unarmed F-16 fighter jet to try to stop Flight 93. Who was Heather Penney and why did she try to stop a hijacked plane unarmed? The purpose of this essay is to discuss her and her place in the history of 9/11.

Heather Penney bravely flew an unarmed mission to try to stop hijacked plane Flight 93. She was only 25 at the time. Heather Penney was a literature major at Purdue University, with the intention of teaching in her future. However when she heard that combat aviation was becoming available for women, she chose to follow in her father's footsteps. John Penney, who is currently retired, m., was a combat pilot during the Vietnam War.

Heather Penney grew up loving aviation. She learned to fly while in college and earned her private pilot's license. She even competed in the 1994 Air Race Classic, a competition where female pilots teamed up to fly a total of 2,427 miles over 4 days. When she joined the Air National Guard she became a member of the 121st Fighter Squadron, and was among the first women to fly F-16 fighter jets. After Heather Penney heard about the 2nd tower of the world trade center being hit, she and other people at the briefing ran to the television and saw the horrifying sights of the destroyed world trade center. In the moment of confusion they heard about the Pentagon being hit as well, and then they were told about a fourth hijacked plane still in the air headed for Washington D.C. Colonel Sasseville looked at Penney, giving her the order that she would be coming with him on this mission. Because Penney was in a training squadron the F-16s that Sasseville and Penney were going to fly would not be armed so they would have to go on a suicide mission. When they took off they were fully aware

that if their mission was successful they would not be coming back. As Penney was flying she thought about ejecting out of her fighter plane just before she rammed into Flight 93. However, she scrapped that idea because she realized that she only had one chance and she did not want to mess up. As they looked for Flight 93, they came up with a plan of action Sasseville would ram the cockpit while Penney would ram the tail. As they continued flying they got the news that Flight 93 had crashed into a field in Pennsylvania. This happened because the passengers were able to get control of the plane. Penney and Sasseville were ordered to escort the President back to his home, then fly back to Andrews Air Force Base.

After 9/11 she rose to the rank of Major and served two tours in Iraq before retiring. She now does interviews about her experience on 9/11, she works for Lockheed Martin, and she does motivational speaking. On the day of 9/11 Heather Penney does not believe herself to be the hero but all of the passengers on Flight 93 and the first responders who risked and lost their lives to save others. Heather Penney inspires me because I have just recently become interested in aviation and being a young woman who is interested in aviation Heather Penney's contributions have opened up more possibilities to female pilots. I think that we could all learn from Heather Penney. Heroism is not about saving the world, but it is about selflessness and service.

Bibliography

Timmons, G. (2020, Sep 9) *On 9/11, Heather Penney tried to bring down Flight 93 in a kamikaze mission.* History Channel.

<https://www.history.com/news/911-heather-penney-united-flight-93>

Von Wodtke, C. (2016, Sep 11) *This is the story of Heather 'Lucky' Penney, who was asked to do the unthinkable on 9/11.* Military Times.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/2016/09/11/this-is-the-story-of-heather-lucky-penney-who-was-asked-to-do-the-unthinkable-on-9-11/>

Fighter pilot, a Purdue alumna, was prepared to sacrifice her life on 9/11. (2021, Sep 9)

Purdue University News.

<https://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/stories/2021/stories-at-purdue/fighter-pilot-a-purdue-alumna-was-prepared-to-sacrifice-her-life-on-911.html>