

Reported Cell Phone Calls from the 9/11 Planes

Further Reflections Evoked by a Critique

By [David Ray Griffin](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#)

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Earlier this year, Andrew Kornkven posted a comment and a blog critical of my discussion, in Chapter 17 of my book *9/11 Contradictions*,¹ of reported cell phone calls from the 9/11 airliners. In this reply, I respond to both of these criticisms, referring to former as his “Comment,”² to the latter as his “Blog.”³ (All quotations are from the Blog unless otherwise indicated.) Although Kornkven’s criticisms are based on confusions and other errors, my response to them has led me to report some information about this issue that I had not previously published, although much of it is in my most recent book, *The New Pearl Harbor Revisited*.⁴ This distinction means that, although many of my comments, especially in the first parts of this essay, consist of responses to confused criticisms (which the reader will probably want to move through quickly), this essay does, especially in its later parts, contain several points of great importance.

Kornkven begins his Comment by saying: “David Ray Griffin continues to put forth a misleading line of argument regarding the ‘cell phone’ calls.” With the term “continues,” he alludes to the fact that he had written an earlier critique, to which I wrote a reply.⁵ In that reply, I gave some reasons for being dubious of Kornkven’s theory as to what really happened, which lies behind his criticism of my position. According to his theory, there really were hijackers on the planes, but they were not Arab Muslims, or even Muslims of any sort. He also holds that relatives of victims did not actually report receiving cell phones calls. Instead, this claim was invented by the corporate media to trick the foreseen 9/11 truth movement into denying that the calls occurred, because the calls had revealed real truths that the government did not want to be known.

Why, I wondered, if the hijackers were not really devout Muslims, expecting to receive a heavenly reward for their martyrdom, would they have volunteered to commit suicide simply to provide a pretext for a war against Muslims; Kornkven’s only escape from this conclusion would seem to be to speculate, implausibly, that they bailed out of the planes at the last minute. I also wondered why, if the corporate media had falsely claimed that some of the families had reported receiving cell phone calls, the Internet carries no stories about complaints from these relatives published in local papers.

In the present essay, in any case, I do not argue against Kornkven’s own thesis. I simply reply to his charge (in his Comment) that my discussion is “misleading” and to his charge (in his Blog) that it contains “serious logical errors.”

The “Cell Phone Myth”

The central target of Kornkven's critique is what he calls the Cell Phone Myth, which he defines in his Comment as "the idea, advocated by Griffin, that the majority of calls were made on cell phones." However, I do not believe that there were *any* cell phone calls from the planes.

Kornkven evidently stated his meaning more accurately in the first paragraph of his Comment, in which he said: "Despite Griffin's claims to the contrary in Chapter 17 of *9/11 Contradictions*, neither the FBI nor the 9/11 [Commission] ever claimed that all, or even most, of the calls were made on cell phones." But I never said anything remotely similar to this.

With regard to the 9/11 Commission, I pointed out that its report mentioned cell phone calls, but without specifying how many such calls were allegedly made, only in relation to United Flight 93.⁶

With regard to the FBI, almost all of my discussion is about its 2006 report to the Moussaoui trial, at which it said that there had been only two cell phone calls from all four flights combined. With regard to the FBI's position prior to then, I made only two comments. My first comment was a complaint that "the FBI had not discouraged the press or the 9/11 Commission from claiming that passengers had used cell phones to report the existence of hijackers on the planes."⁷ Although that statement said nothing about what the FBI claimed, something was at least implied by my second comment: Using the word "authorities" to refer primarily to the FBI, I spoke of "one of the chief elements in the story about 9/11 told by authorities and the press from the outset—that the presence of hijackers on the flights had been reported by means of cell phone calls from those flights."⁸ I clearly suggested that the FBI immediately after 9/11 was stating that hijackers were reported on cell phone calls. To say that, however, is *not* to say that the FBI claimed that "all, or even most, of the calls were made on cell phones."

I said so little about the 9/11 Commission and pre-2006 FBI assertions because virtually all of my discussion in the chapter was about what was reported by the press and consequently widely believed. This feature of the chapter led to one of the strangest criticisms in Kornkven's Blog:

Griffin next presents a lengthy jumble of media reports claiming cell phone calls. It's hard to believe that a major figure in the truth movement would base his argument on stories appearing in *The Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, *The National Review*, and other pillars of the controlled media.

Kornkven's criticism would make sense only if I had been suggesting that these media reports were true. But I was not. I was simply documenting the point made in my opening sentence, namely:

A central element in the story of the hijackings of the four airliners, as it unfolded in the press . . . , was that passengers had reported the presence of Middle-Eastern hijackers on the planes by means of cell phone calls to family members and authorities.

Documenting this point required, of course, quoting the *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and

other mainstream (corporately controlled) publications.

With that confused criticism dismissed, I turn now to the question of whether my discussion of the press exemplified the Cell Phone Myth: Did I claim that the press portrayed a majority of the calls as having been made on cell phones? Hardly.

What I stated was that, according to press reports, “there were at least eleven cell phone calls from United Flight 93” plus “two each from UA 175 and AA 77.” As a result, “it has been widely believed that there were at least fifteen . . . cell phone calls.”⁹

According to the 2006 FBI report, there were a total of 64 calls (counting those from both onboard and cell phones) from the four flights. Prior to that report, it was widely believed that there were 40 or more calls. By portraying 15 of those (40 to 64) calls as coming from cell phones, the press did not come close to claiming that “most” or “the majority” of the calls from the flights were cell phone calls.

However, it is also true, as I pointed out, that many of the press stories gave special attention to the reported cell phone calls in providing evidence of hijackers on the flights. An early *Washington Post* story, for example, said: “Glick’s cell phone call from Flight 93 and others like it provide the most dramatic accounts so far of events aboard the four hijacked aircraft.” Another *Post* story about this flight said: “The plane was at once a lonesome vessel, the people aboard facing their singular fate, and yet somehow already attached to the larger drama, connected again by cell phones.” Referring to such stories, I wrote: “cell phone calls were portrayed as a central—even the principal—means by which we had learned what happened on the planes.”¹⁰ But I did not—as the figures in the previous paragraph show—portray the press as stating that the majority of the calls were made on cell phones.

Besides invalidly turning my statement that *some* cell phone calls were reportedly made into the claim that “*most* of the calls were cell phone calls,” Kornkven sometimes even changes the *most* to *all*. He did this in one of the charges quoted above, namely: “Despite Griffin’s claims to the contrary . . . , neither the FBI nor the 9/11 [Commission] ever claimed that all . . . of the calls were made on cell phones.” Kornkven also did this in asking: “Why does Griffin want to turn away from this evidence by imagining that the calls were cell phone calls?”

In logic, even more basic than the distinction between *some* and *most* is the threefold distinction between *none*, *some*, and *all*. In an article in which he is accusing someone else of logical errors, Kornkven should have been careful not to commit such a basic one.

This error, incidentally, led to a bizarre charge against Dylan Avery. Discussing *Loose Change 2*, Kornkven wrote:

“At the 1:07 mark of that film, Dylan Avery asks,

“‘next, what about the cell phone calls...?’

“Avery didn’t seem to have even considered the possibility that some or most of the calls were made on airphones, which is peculiar since, a few minutes later in the film, while describing Mark Bingham’s call to his mother from UAL93, he specifically mentions that Bingham twice told his mom that he was calling

from an airphone. The damage to the truth movement by this oversight is incalculable. Was it truly an oversight, or something worse?"

Kornkven took the very fact that Avery mentioned (some) cell phone calls to mean that he was alleging that *all* of reported calls were made on cell phones. This inference was especially strange given Kornkven's recognition that, shortly thereafter, Avery pointed out that Mark Bingham reportedly "told his mom that he was calling from an airphone." Kornkven then, on the basis of his own theory—according to which the media conspired with the government to create the impression that all or most of the calls were made from cell phones in order to cause the sure-to-rise 9/11 truth movement, knowing that high-altitude cell phone calls were impossible, to reject the calls as faked, thereby missing the valuable information in some of them that contradicts the official story—compounded his crime by hinting that Avery might be part of this conspiracy. ("Was it truly an oversight, or something worse?") Such suggestions could give "conspiracy theorists" a bad name!

Not content with this, Kornkven proceeded to compound his error still further, saying:

"Avery seems to have tacitly admitted his assumption was wrong: Loose Change Final Cut contains no references to phone calls whatsoever. Why has Griffin decided to carry on such a dubious notion?"

In the first place, given the fact that the credits at the end of *Loose Change Final Cut* reveal that I was the Script Consultant, why would Kornkven assume that Dylan Avery and I had some difference on this issue? In the second place, my chapter points out that the 2006 FBI report said that only two of the calls from all of the flights combined were made from cell phones,¹¹ and this is what Kornkven believes. So what "dubious notion" does he think I am carrying on?

Having dealt with Kornkven's myth of the Cell Phone Myth, I turn now to his charge that my chapter is misleading.

Misleading?

Kornkven suggested that there are two ways in which my discussion is misleading. First, pointing out that I discuss "the difficulty of cell phone calls at higher altitudes," Kornkven wrote: "This is completely irrelevant because most of the calls were made on airphones." A more objective statement would be: "According to the 2006 FBI report given to the *Moussaoui trial*, most—all but two—of the calls were made from onboard phones." (Kornkven does not add the qualification because he accepts that FBI report as a statement of what really happened.) One might suspect that, given the fact that two of the calls were reportedly made from cell phones, the difficulty of calling from higher altitudes has not become *completely* irrelevant. However, the FBI report said that those two calls were made from United 93 at 9:58, when it was down to 5,000 feet (at which level cell phone calls might at least arguably have gone through). Kornkven would be right to call my discussion misleading, therefore, if I had mentioned the difficulty of high-altitude cell phone calls in order to argue against the position taken by the FBI in 2006. But I did not. Here is my statement:

“In saying that only the two 9:58 calls from United 93 were cell phone calls, the FBI avoided a problem briefly mentioned in Chapter 8 [of 9/11 Contradictions], namely, skepticism about whether high-altitude cell phone calls from airliners are possible, especially calls that stay connected long enough for a conversation to occur. The FBI, when it had to present its evidence in a court of law, avoided this problem, because at 9:58, when the calls from Lyles and Felt were reportedly made, the plane, according to official reports, had descended to about 5,000 feet.”¹²

As the reader can see, my reference to skepticism about the possibility of high-altitude cell phone calls was solely for the purpose of suggesting why the FBI in 2006 had changed its public claim. That is, after having at first described about 15 calls as cell phone calls (as I will argue below), the FBI in 2006 characterized only two calls, both said to have been made from 5,000 feet, as cell phone calls. I suggested that it did this to avoid claiming the occurrence of calls that would widely be regarded as impossible.

I turn now to Kornkven’s second charge that my discussion is misleading: “Griffin is being misleading when he says the FBI say ‘it didn’t happen’ regarding the phone calls.” Actually, however, it is Kornkven who, by thus characterizing what I had said, was being misleading. He was referring to a letter in which I wrote: “It [the FBI] has said that there were no cell phone calls from passengers to relatives from any of the planes.”¹³ Kornkven admits that this statement is “perhaps technically true.” Although he does not explain why my statement is, in fact, true (or at least “perhaps” so), here is why: According to the FBI report, one cell phone call was made by passenger Edward Felt, who called 911, not a relative, and the other was made by CeeCee Lyles, who was a crew member, not a passenger. The FBI report did indicate, therefore, that “there were no cell phone calls from passengers to relatives.” (The distinction between passengers and crew members is made in all official reports and at least most media stories.)

If this statement is true, why does Kornkven consider it misleading? He says in his Comment:

“The FBI exhibit does not label the cell phone calls from CeeCee Lyles (UAL93) and Renee May (AAL77) as cell phone calls; but neither are they labeled airphone calls. Griffin seems to be suggesting none of the calls took place whatsoever, a position which the FBI does not hold.”

I am puzzled as to why Kornkven brought Renee May into the discussion. In his Blog, he quoted me as pointing out that it was only the call from Edward Felt and one of the calls from CeeCee Lyles that were said in the FBI’s 2006 report to have been cell phone calls. His claims about the calls by Lyles and May are, in any case, false.

The FBI’s graphic presentation on CeeCee Lyles *does*, contrary to Kornkven’s statement, label one of her calls a cell phone call. It can, to be sure, be difficult to get to this and the other graphics on the US government website containing the information about phone calls from the flights, because one’s computer must be able to open the zip file.¹⁴ Jim Hoffman, however, has helpfully made these graphics available on his website.¹⁵ The graphic for Lyles, in any case, clearly indicates that she made a “cell phone call” to a residential

number at 9:58 AM.¹⁶

The FBI report also explicitly labeled a 9:58 call from Edward Felt a cell phone call, although it is even more difficult to see this on the US government website. There is an easily accessible graphic about this call, which says, “call placed from bathroom,” from which one can infer that it must have been made from a cell phone. One need not, however, rely on inference. There is also an expanded graphic, which says: “9:58 AM: Passenger Edward Felt, using his cell phone, (732) 241-XXXX, contacts John Shaw, a 911 Operator from Westmoreland County, PA.” Although getting to this graphic (through a Flash expansion) can be difficult, it can easily be seen on Hoffman’s website.¹⁷

Given the fact that these two calls, and only these two calls, are said by the FBI’s report to be cell phone calls, we can infer that the FBI intended the remainder of the calls to be understood to have been made from onboard phones. We can make this inference because of what was said in the FBI’s oral report about phone calls from Flight 93 at the Moussaoui trial. A reporter wrote: “In the back of the plane, 13 of the terrified passengers and crew members made 35 air phone calls and two cell phone calls to family members and airline dispatchers, a member of an FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force testified Tuesday.”¹⁸ As this statement shows, all of the calls from this flight, except the two that were explicitly indicated on the graphics to be cell phone calls, were said at the trial to have been made from onboard phones.

From this discovery about Flight 93, we can infer that, although Renee May’s parents evidently believed that she had called from her cell phone,¹⁹ the FBI report implied, without specifically saying so, that she had used an onboard phone.

Accordingly, although Kornkven claims that “[c]alls made from Renee May on AAL77 and CeeCee Lyles on UAL93 were portrayed as being cell phone calls,” the truth is that only the reported call from Edward Felt and one of the two reported calls from CeeCee Lyles were portrayed as cell phone calls.

In any case, in explaining why he calls my “perhaps technically true” statement—that the FBI report said that “there were no cell phone calls from passengers to relatives”—misleading, Kornkven wrote: “Griffin seems to be suggesting none of the calls took place whatsoever, a position which the FBI does not hold.” Kornkven, in other words, thinks that I used my technically true statement to claim that the FBI said that there were no calls whatsoever. However, although I myself believe that none of the reported calls occurred, I made no such claim about the FBI. Rather, I pointed out that, according to the 2006 FBI report, most of the calls previously thought to have been cell phone calls were really made from onboard phones.

The Central Role Played by the Reported Cell Phone Calls

Kornkven began his Blog, in which he claimed to be exposing “logical errors” in my chapter, by quoting my statement that “the reported cell phone calls . . . played a central role in establishing that the planes were hijacked by al-Qaeda operatives.”²⁰

Kornkven said, in rebuttal, that “none of the evidence reported in the calls implicates al-Qaeda.” The fact that this was true of most of the calls—although not quite all, as I will show

below—is unsurprising. At that time, few Americans had heard of al-Qaeda. Those who fabricated the calls would not have been so obvious as to describe the terrorists as, say, wearing al-Qaeda T-shirts or otherwise indicating that they were members of al-Qaeda. Alternatively, if one believes, with Kornkven, that there were real callers on the planes speaking about real hijackers, the same point would hold: There would probably have been no basis for the passengers and crew members to describe the hijackers as members of al-Qaeda, whether they were or not.

In any case, the main point of my statement—as shown by my chapter title, “Were Hijackers Reported on Cell Phone Calls?”—was that “the reported cell phone calls . . . played a central role in establishing that the planes were hijacked.” The point of my sentence would have been clearer if I had ended it there, without adding “by al-Qaeda operatives.”

It is also true, however, that the reported calls played a central role in creating the myth that the planes were hijacked by members of al-Qaeda. To say that they played a *central* role is not, of course, to claim that they provided a *sufficient* basis for this myth. An essential role was also played by the claim that authorities found Mohamed Atta’s luggage filled with his will and other incriminating evidence, which “proved” that the hijackers were members of al-Qaeda. Contributions to this myth were also made by the photos of some of the alleged hijackers at airports and the “discoveries” of the amazingly durable passports of some of these men at the various crash sites. And there were still other elements of the official story that contributed to this myth.

But the contribution of the reported calls—from both cell phones and onboard phones—should not be underestimated. Besides providing the only evidence that the planes had been hijacked, some of the callers, as Kornkven recognizes, described the hijackers as “Middle Eastern-looking men.” Moreover, according to the husband of flight attendant Sandy Bradshaw, she, having gotten a close look at one of them, said: “He had an Islamic look.”²¹ Given those descriptions, the ground was laid for the authorities to identify these Islamic-looking, Middle Eastern-looking men as al-Qaeda operatives.

A central role in creating the twofold myth—that the planes had been hijacked and that the hijackers were al-Qaeda operatives—was played by some of the reported cell phone calls in particular. For example, the conversation in which Sandy Bradshaw reportedly told her husband that one of the hijackers had “an Islamic look” was described by the local paper as a “cellular phone conversation.” According to this story, which was surely based on her husband’s account, she had also told him that “many passengers were making cell phone calls.”²²

The most important reported cell phone call for creating this myth, however, was one that I did not discuss in *9/11 Contradictions* (although it is discussed in *The New Pearl Harbor Revisited*). I refer to the reported call from American Flight 11 by flight attendant Amy Sweeney, in which she told Michael Woodward, the manager of the American Flight Services Office in Boston, that her flight had been hijacked. Besides telling him that hijackers were of “Middle Eastern descent,” she reportedly gave their seat numbers, from which Woodward was able to learn the identities of three of them: Mohamed Atta, Abdul al-Omari, and Satam al-Suqami.²³ Amy Sweeney’s call was critical, ABC News explained, because without it, “the plane might have crashed with no one certain the man in charge was tied to al Qaeda.”²⁴

Kornkven was wrong, therefore, when he claimed that “none of the evidence reported in the calls implicates al-Qaeda”—although he cannot be blamed for not having learned about this

call from *9/11 Contradictions*.

Did Family Members Describe Some Calls as Cell Phone Calls?

Kornkven seems to state his central claim when he says: “the idea that most of the calls were cell phone calls was disseminated solely by our controlled media, and by Hollywood films.” As we have already seen, his charge that I ever endorsed this idea—that most of the calls were cell phone calls—is groundless. As far as I know, moreover, no one else has advocated this idea.

However, if we remove the exaggeration from Kornkven’s claim by changing “most” to “several,” we would have a claim worthy of examination, namely, that the idea that *several* of the calls were cell phone calls was disseminated solely by the controlled media and Hollywood films. Put negatively, Kornkven claims that neither family members nor the authorities stated that some of the calls were made on cell phones. I will deal only with family members here, saving the authorities for the next section.

Arguing that the evidence I have given about family members is weak, Kornkven’s first illustration involves the story about the reported calls from Peter Hanson on United 175. Having quoted my statement that “an Associated Press story . . . said ‘a minister confirmed the cell phone call to [Peter Hanson’s father], Lee Hanson,’”²⁵ Kornkven wrote: “Can we really conclude the minister is verifying that the call was made on a cell phone, and not on an airphone? Isn’t it more likely he is simply confirming that the call was made?”

For some reason, Kornkven eliminated from my statement the name of the minister—the Rev. Bonnie Bardot—an elimination that allowed him to refer to her as “he.”

In any case, the important problem is that Kornkven has again misconstrued the nature of my argument. He assumes that I was using the story to prove that the family members and the minister really described the call(s) as made from a cell phone. What I was illustrating, however, was simply that the press had thus portrayed the calls—in this case by saying that both Peter Hanson’s sister and a local minister referred to them as cell phone calls.

Nevertheless, the question pressed by Kornkven—whether the family members had themselves specifically said that they received calls from relatives using cell phones—is worth asking. And the answer, it would seem, is “Yes.”

Bradshaw, Wainio, Britton, and Hanson: With regard to the story about Sandy Bradshaw, are we to suppose that Kerry Hall, the reporter for the Greensboro *News & Record*, simply made up the claim that Sandy and several passengers were using cell phones, rather than having gotten this information from her husband, pilot Phil Bradshaw, even though Phil lived there in Greensboro?²⁶

A *Newsweek* story about United 93 said: “Elizabeth [Honor] Wainio, 27, was speaking to her stepmother in Maryland. Another passenger, she explains, had loaned her a cell phone and told her to call her family.”²⁷ Can we believe that *Newsweek*, rather than getting this information from the stepmother, simply made it up?

A story about passenger Marion Britton began: “She called longtime friend Fred Fiumano,

from whom she had borrowed a cell phone.”²⁸ The story, which quoted Fiumano, was surely based on an interview with him. Does Kornkven believe that the reporter—Jim McKinnon of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*—simply added the part about the cell phone?

Moreover, besides the fact that it would be implausible to claim that the people who received these calls did not describe them as cell phone calls, we have evidence that I did not mention in *9/11 Contradictions*: the FBI’s report about its interview with Lee Hanson, the father of Peter Hanson. This report says: “He [Lee Hanson] “believed his son was calling from his cellular telephone.”²⁹

Deena Burnett’s Testimony: Let us, however, focus primarily on the reported calls that Kornkven rightly described as the most important: those from Flight 93 by Tom Burnett to his wife, Deena Burnett. Kornkven began his argument by quoting this statement from me:

“Deena Burnett explicitly and repeatedly stated that these calls were made from Tom Burnett’s cell phone. She knew this, she said, because the caller ID identified his cell phone as the source.”³⁰

Kornkven then wrote:

“But did she? I have examined numerous media reports in the immediate years after the attacks, and have heard her state no such thing, explicitly or otherwise.”

As evidence that she did, I had cited an article entitled “Widow Tells of Poignant Last Calls,” published on the first anniversary of 9/11 by Greg Gordon of the McClatchy Newspapers. Gordon had written: “[A]nother call [came]. Deena’s ID told her it was Tom.”³¹ Kornkven wrote: “The article does mention Tom’s cell phone, but not that Deena said it was such. . . . Perhaps she saw the same information as from earlier calls on an airphone, and therefore knew it was Tom.” Is that plausible? Gordon’s article began: “Deena Burnett clutched the phone. . . . She was at once terrified, yet strangely calmed by her husband’s steady voice over his cell phone.” Would Kornkven have us believe that Gordon might have written that line even though Deena had not told him Tom was using a cell phone?

In any case, I had cited not only Gordon’s article but also Deena Burnett’s 2006 book, in which she explicitly said that her phone’s caller ID showed Tom’s cell phone number. Kornkven, trying to cast doubt on this, quoted one sentence from the page I had cited—“I didn’t understand how he could be calling me on his cell phone from the air”³²—and then said, dismissively:

“This is the only example I could find of her ‘repeatedly and explicitly’ claiming the call was [sic; Deena had reported several calls] from a cell phone. . . . Did she actually write it? . . . [T]his single statement, coming in a ghostwritten book [sic; the book is by “Deena L. Burnett (with Anthony F. Giombetti)”) published five years after the event, is meager evidence that the call was indeed from a cell phone.”

One problem here is that Kornkven, as the final sentence shows, again confused two distinct issues. The question he had been discussing was whether Deena *explicitly described* the calls as cell phone calls. But in the final sentence, he shifted to a different question: Were the calls received by her *really* cell phone calls?

That distinction is, of course, not trivial: My whole argument is based on it. I had earlier argued that, although Deena Burnett was convinced that the call had been made from Tom's cell phone, it could not have been (because of the high-altitude problem). More recently (in the revised edition of *Debunking 9/11 Debunking* and then in *9/11 Contradictions*), I have pointed out that, although Deena was convinced that the calls were from Tom's cell phone, the FBI report said that he had used an onboard phone.

In any case, the most important problem in Kornkven's argument here is that, in denying that Deena had *explicitly* described the calls as cell phone calls, he failed to quote the crucial sentence from the page I had cited. In the sentence I had in mind, Deena said: "I looked at the caller ID and indeed it was Tom's cell phone number."³³

So, unless the man who helped her write the book inserted this statement without her noticing it, then, yes, she did explicitly make it.

What about my statement that she said this *repeatedly*? Kornkven denied the appropriateness of this adverb on the basis of his (weak) argument that she perhaps did not really tell this to reporter Greg Gordon.

However, she also evidently said the same thing to the FBI. An FBI report of an interview with her on 9/11 itself, which began by stating that she "provided the following information," included these statements:

"Burnett was able to determine that her husband was using his own cellular telephone because the caller identification showed his number, [XXXXXXXXXX]. Only one of the calls did not show on the caller identification as she was on the line with another call."³⁴

Presumably, therefore, we can lay to rest the question of whether Deena Burnett reported that she saw her husband's cell phone on her caller ID.

This fact is of great importance for the thesis that the cell phone calls were faked. Although several other relatives reported that their loved ones had used cell phones to call them, anyone determined to reject the truth of these reports could claim that they were all based on faulty memory (even though the claim that several people had the same false memory would be rather implausible). But given Deena's explicit and repeated report—stated on 9/11 itself to the FBI, again (evidently) on the first anniversary of 9/11 to reporter Greg Gordon, and again five years later in her book—the only way to dismiss her claim would be to call her a liar.

Assuming that Kornkven would not resort to that tactic, and assuming that he accepts the 2006 FBI report, according to which the calls were *not* made from Tom's cell phone, I cannot see what option he has but to accept the idea that someone faked the calls to Deena, using a system that would fake Tom's cell phone number as well as his voice.

Moreover, if the call to Deena Burnett was faked, what should we assume about all the calls that were believed at the time to have been cell phone calls, because that is what the recipients of the calls were told, but are now said by the FBI to have been made from onboard phones? We should assume that these, too, were faked. If some of the calls had been genuine, reporting real hijackings, why would several people have been all set up with the equipment and information to fake some calls? This same reasoning applies to the reported calls from onboard phones, which were similar in nature. If some of the calls were faked, the presumption should be that they all were.

This is why Deena Burnett's story is so important. Unless people are willing to call her a liar or to reject the FBI's 2006 report, the calls she received cannot be explained except on the assumption that someone was prepared to fake several calls to her, pretending to be her husband calling on his cell phone. If even just one person was prepared to make such calls, this proves that the whole official story—that the airliners, to everyone's surprise, were taken over by hijackers—is false. The faked calls to Deena Burnett have thus turned out to be the Achilles Heel of the whole idea that real hijackers were reported by real phone calls from the airliners.

Were Cell Phone Calls Originally Reported by the FBI?

To recall where I am in the argument: I am examining a modified form of Kornkven's claim about Hollywood and the controlled media, namely, that they invented the whole idea that some of the passengers and crew made cell phone calls (with the possible exception of the two calls from United 93 said by the FBI in 2006 to have occurred at 9:58). Having examined one implication of that claim—that no relatives of passengers or crew members ever claimed cell phone calls were made from any of the airliners—I now turn to the other implication: "The FBI," Kornkven states, "never made such claims."

In a longer statement, Kornkven wrote: "[N]o 'authorities' ever stated that airphone calls were made by cell phones. That was done strictly by our controlled media." This formulation is problematic, because it reflects Kornkven's presupposition that the calls really happened but that they were, as the FBI finally said in 2006, "airphone calls" (except for the 9:58 calls from Felt and Lyles). A more neutral formulation would be: *No authorities (meaning FBI and other law enforcement officials) ever stated that any of the reported calls from the airliners were cell phone calls (except for the 9:58 calls from Felt and Lyles).*

One problem with this claim is that, even if it were true, Kornkven would have no way of knowing this. It is simply a hypothesis on his part. But the more serious problem is that there are good reasons to consider it false, and to assume instead that the press, in reporting that several of the calls were made on cell phones, was in part reporting what it had been told by the FBI.

The FBI Reports on Hanson and Burnett: One reason to believe this is that, as we have seen, some of the FBI reports of its interviews with family members reported, without contradiction, their belief that they had been called on cell phones. The FBI report of its interview with Lee Hanson said: "He believed his son was calling from his cellular telephone."³⁵ The report of the FBI's interview with Deena Burnett said, prior to the previously quoted statement:

“Starting at approximately 6:39 a.m. (PST), Burnett received a series of three to five cellular phone calls from her husband. . . . Approximately ten minutes later Deena Burnett received another call from her husband. . . . Approximately five minutes later she received another cell phone call from her husband.”³⁶

These FBI reports would have been accepted by reporters as statements of the truth. By virtue of writing these reports, therefore, the FBI’s behavior cannot be characterized as merely, in Kornkven’s words, “passive acquiescence” in the idea that cell phones were used.

The Reported Call from Amy Sweeney: The strongest evidence that the FBI originally endorsed the occurrence of high-altitude cell phone calls involves the reported call of flight attendant Amy Sweeney from American Flight 11. Although no phone calls from passengers were reported from this flight, two flight attendants, Sweeney and Betty Ong, were said to have made calls. The importance of these calls for the official story is shown by the 9/11 Commission’s comment that they “tell us most of what we know about how the hijacking happened.”³⁷ The importance of Sweeney’s call in particular for our present topic is that it was originally said to have been a cell phone call.³⁸

According to the official account, Sweeney called Michael Woodward, the manager of the American Flight Services Office in Boston and talked to him for twelve minutes (8:32 to 8:44 AM). Stating that her plane had been hijacked, she also reportedly said, as mentioned earlier, that the hijackers were of “Middle Eastern descent” and gave their seat numbers, from which the identities of three of them were discovered.³⁹

The public information about this reported call—its content along with its very occurrence—was based entirely on FBI documents. For example, Eric Lichtblau, in recounting this story in a *Los Angeles Times* article a week after 9/11, cited “an investigative document compiled by the FBI.” Since no one other than Woodward talked with Sweeney, this FBI document had to be drawn entirely from his statements. In 2002, for example, American Airlines spokesman John Hotard, referring to “Woodward’s original notes of his conversation with Sweeney,” said, “the FBI got a hold of them very quickly, and wrote a summary.”⁴⁰

Lichtblau had to rely entirely on this FBI summary because, he learned from an American Airlines spokesperson, their employees were under orders from the FBI not to discuss Sweeney’s call with the press.⁴¹

The only other publicly available document testifying to the occurrence of the call was an affidavit by FBI agent James Lechner, dated September 12, 2001, which was also based on an interview with Michael Woodward.⁴²

It is this affidavit that shows that the FBI first described the call as a cell phone call. According to this affidavit, Woodward said that Sweeney had been “using a cellular telephone.”⁴³

However, when *The 9/11 Commission Report* appeared in 2004, it said that Sweeney had used an *onboard* phone (which the Commission called an “airphone”).⁴⁴ On what basis was this claim justified?

In June 2004, Amy Sweeney’s husband was told that a previously unreported tape recording

had been discovered. How had it been made? This is the story: Michael Woodward did not record Sweeney's call, because his office had no tape recorder. But he repeated what he was hearing from Sweeney to Nancy Wyatt, an American Airlines colleague who was in his office at the time, and she then repeated the account by telephone to Ray Howland at American headquarters in Fort Worth, who recorded Wyatt's third-hand account.⁴⁵

Amy Sweeney's husband, expressing some scepticism, asked: "Suddenly it miraculously appears and falls into the hands of FBI? . . . Why did it surface now?"⁴⁶

The answer to this question can be reasonably inferred from the fact that the original story, according to which Sweeney had called from a cell phone, was doubly problematic: Besides being made from too far up to be believable, the call also allegedly stayed connected for twelve minutes, which would be impossible in a plane traveling several hundred miles per hour. This twofold problem was solved by a piece of information on the newly discovered recording: that Sweeney, thanks to "an AirFone card, given to her by another flight attendant," had used a passenger-seat phone.⁴⁷

This new account, however, raised the question of why Lechner's FBI affidavit had stated that, according to Woodward, Sweeney had used a *cell* phone. Although people sometimes misremember events after a passage of time, it would be difficult to explain this particular change in these terms. According to the new story, Woodward must have told Nancy Wyatt that Sweeney had borrowed a calling card in order to use an onboard phone. But if so, how could Woodward a few hours later have told Lechner that Sweeney had been using a cell phone?⁴⁸

That being completely implausible, it seems likely that the Wyatt recording was created, rather than discovered, in 2004.

The supposition that there was no recording made on 9/11 of a call from Nancy Wyatt to Dallas would be in line with Eric Lichtblau's account on September 20, 2001, which said:

"FBI officials in Dallas, where American Airlines is based, were able, on the day of the terrorist attacks, to piece together a partial transcript and an account of the phone call. American Airlines officials said such calls are not typically recorded, suggesting that the FBI may have reconstructed the conversation from interviews."⁴⁹

Why would FBI officials have need to "piece together a partial transcript" if they had received a recording of Wyatt's verbatim account of Woodward's word-for-word account of what he was told by Sweeney?

Is it conceivable that American Airlines would have withheld the recording from the FBI? Hardly. Nor is it conceivable that American Airline officials could have quickly forgotten such a dramatic event.

Likewise, the dramatic scenario, in which Woodward relayed Sweeney's words to Wyatt, who in turn relayed them to Dallas, where they were recorded, would have been fresh in Woodward's mind when he talked with Lechner. He would surely have mentioned this recording to Lechner, who surely would have mentioned it in his affidavit.

For many reasons, therefore, we can safely conclude that the recording was not made on 9/11. It was most likely created just shortly before its “discovery,” which was evidently first announced in June 2004.

My hypothesis is that it was created as part of a more general transformation of most of the reported cell phone calls—all except the reported 9:58 calls from Felt and Lyles—into calls from onboard phones, a transformation that was completed in time to prevent the 9/11 Commission from endorsing the occurrence of any high-altitude cell phone calls. As I pointed out in *9/11 Contradictions*, the Commission, while not taking issue with the press’s portrayal of certain calls from Flights 77 and 175 as cell phone calls, also did not positively endorse this portrayal. Likewise, the Commission did not endorse the view that any of the high-altitude calls from United Flight 93 were cell phone calls.

On this point, I had previously been in error. In *9/11 Contradictions*, I wrote:

“It was passengers on United Flight 93 who were most explicitly said to have made cell phone calls. Even the 9/11 Commission, which had not specifically referred to any of the calls from other flights as cell phone calls, said, in discussing United 93: ‘Shortly [after 9:32], the passengers and flight crew began a series of calls from GTE airphones and cellular phones.’”⁵⁰

At 9:32, the plane would have been at a very high altitude, and I took that statement to mean that some of the calls that began shortly after 9:32 were cell phone calls, even though the statement did not explicitly say this. It appears, however, that this ambiguous—even misleading—statement allowed the Commission to avoid either challenging or endorsing the idea that many of the passengers, such as Tom Burnett, had used cell phones to call their relatives.

The evidence that the Commission was not endorsing high-altitude cell phone calls from Flight 93 is contained in a document entitled “Staff Report, August 26, 2004,” which I learned about only after the publication of *9/11 Contradictions*. This document refers solely to the 9:58 AM calls by Lyles and Felt as cell phone calls.⁵¹ It agrees, therefore, with the report the FBI would submit to the Moussaoui trial in 2006. It would appear, accordingly, that although the 9/11 Commission did not inform the public of this fact, it knew in 2004 that the FBI had withdrawn support for the idea of high-altitude cell phone calls.

In any case, the FBI clearly changed its stance on the reported call from Amy Sweeney. Whereas the FBI affidavit in 2001 had said, on the basis of a reported interview with Michael Woodward, that Sweeney had used a cell phone, the FBI in 2004—on the basis of a “discovered” recording of Nancy Wyatt’s verbatim report of Woodward’s repetition of Sweeney’s statements—said that Sweeney had used an “airphone.”

Summary

Kornkven’s charges—that my discussion of reported cell phone calls has been misleading and characterized by logical errors—cannot withstand an examination of the evidence. The “Cell Phone Myth” of which he spoke is itself a myth. His critique proved useful, nevertheless, in providing the occasion for me to bring out several points: (1) Reported cell

phone calls were central to the creation of the claim that the airliners had been hijacked. (2) The FBI had actively participated in the creation of this claim. (3) The FBI, a few years later, renounced its endorsement of high-altitude cell phone calls and thereby had to make changes in its reports about several of the alleged calls—changes that are most obvious with respect to the alleged calls from Tom Burnett and Amy Sweeney. (4) These changes constitute an implicit admission by the FBI that its original claims about cell phone calls from the planes were false. (5) This admission should lead us to conclude that the whole story about phone calls was an elaborate fabrication.

David Ray Griffin is the author of over 30 books, including seven about 9/11, most recently The New Pearl Harbor Revisited: 9/11, The Cover-Up, and the Exposé.

Notes

1. David Ray Griffin, *9/11 Contradictions: An Open Letter to Congress and the Press* (Northampton: Olive Branch, 2008).
2. Andrew Kornkven, "Griffin's Cell Phone Argument is Misleading. . . ," 911Blogger.com, 10 June 2008 (<http://www.911blogger.com/node/16051#comment-189284>); henceforth cited as "Comment."
3. Andrew Kornkven, "David Ray Griffin and Cell Phone Calls: Serious Logical Errors in *9/11 Contradictions*," 911 Blogger.com, 10 June 2008 (<http://911blogger.com/node/16056>); henceforth cited as "Blog."
4. David Ray Griffin, *The New Pearl Harbor Revisited: 9/11, the Cover-Up, and the Exposé* (Northampton: Olive Branch, 2008).
5. Andrew Kornkven, "David Ray Griffin Burrows Further Down the Rabbit Hole of No-Phone-Calls-From-the-Planes," 9/11 Blogger, 6 October 2007 (<http://911blogger.com/node/11860>); David Ray Griffin, "Was Deena Burnett Really Not Duped? A Reply to Andrew Kornkven's Suggestion about Alleged Cell Phone Calls," 911Blogger, 10 October 2007 (<http://911blogger.com/node/11930>).
6. *9/11 Contradictions*, 173. My inclusion of the 9/11 Commission in this statement was an error, as I will explain later.
7. *Ibid.*, 173.
8. *Ibid.*, 179.
9. *Ibid.*, 177.
10. *Ibid.*, 170.
11. *Ibid.*, 178.
12. *Ibid.*, 179.
13. Griffin, "Statement of Support for the NYC 9/11 Ballot Initiative," 911 Blogger.com, 1 June 2008 (<http://www.911blogger.com/node/15910>).

14. United States v. Zacarias Moussaoui, Exhibit Number P200054 (<http://www.vaed.uscourts.gov/notablecases/moussaoui/exhibits/prosecution/flights/P200054.html>).
15. "Detailed Account of Phone Calls From September 11th Flights" (<http://911research.wtc7.net/planes/evidence/calldetail.html#ref1>).
16. United Airlines Flight #93, CeeCee Lyles (<http://911research.wtc7.net/planes/evidence/docs/calls/Flight93/CeeCeeLyles.jpg>).
17. To get to this less accessible graphic, go to the US government website (<http://www.vaed.uscourts.gov/notablecases/moussaoui/exhibits/prosecution/flights/P200054.html>).
18. Greg Gordon, "Prosecutors Play Flight 93 Cockpit Recording," McClatchy Newspapers, KnoxNews.com, 12 April 2006 (<http://www.knoxingles.com/shns/story.cfm?pk=MOUSSAOUI-04-12-06&cat=WW>).
19. See Natalie Patton, "Flight Attendant Made Call on Cell Phone to Mom in Las Vegas," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 13 September 2001 (http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj_home/2001/Sep-13-Thu-2001/news/16989631.html).
20. *9/11 Contradictions*, 182.
21. *Ibid.*, 175.
22. Kerry Hall, "Flight Attendant Helped Fight Hijackers," *News & Record* (Greensboro, N.C.), 21 September 2001 (<http://webcache.news-record.com/legacy/photo/tradecenter/bradshaw21.htm>).
23. Gail Sheehy, "Stewardess ID'd Hijackers Early, Transcripts Show," *New York Observer*, 15 February 2004 (<http://www.observer.com/node/48805>). In *The New Pearl Harbor Revisited*, I point out that these seat numbers, and hence the claimed identifications, were very problematic.
24. "Calm Before the Crash: Flight 11 Crew Sent Key Details Before Hitting the Twin Towers," ABC News, 18 July 2002 (http://web.archive.org/web/20020803044627/http://abcnews.go.com/sections/primetime/DailyNews/primetime_flightattendants_020718.html).
25. *9/11 Contradictions*, 171-72.
26. See "Flight Crew: Sandra Bradshaw," *Post-Gazette News*, 28 October 2001 (<http://www.post-gazette.com/headlines/20011028flt93bradshawbiop8.asp>).
27. "The Final Moments of United Flight 93," *Newsweek*, 22 September 2001 (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3067652>).
28. Jim McKinnon, "13-Minute Call Bonds Her Forever with Hero," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 22 September 2001 (<http://www.post-gazette.com/headlines/20010922gtenat4p4.asp>).
29. "9/11/2001: FD-302. Interview with Lee Hanson"

(<http://intelfiles.egoplex.com/2001-09-11-FBI-FD302-lee-hanson.pdf>); in “9/11 Commission, FBI Source Documents, Chronological, September 11,” 2001Intelfiles.com, 14 March 2008 (<http://intelfiles.egoplex.com:80/2008/03/911-commission-fbi-source-documents.html>).

30. *9/11 Contradictions*, 176.

31. Greg Gordon, “Widow Tells of Poignant Last Calls,” *Sacramento Bee*, 11 September 2002 (<http://holtz.org/Library/Social%20Science/History/Atomic%20Age/2000s/Sep11/Burnett%20widows%20story.htm>).

32. Deena L. Burnett (with Anthony F. Giombetti), *Fighting Back: Living Beyond Ourselves* (Longwood, Florida: Advantage Inspirational Books, 2006), 61.

33. Ibid.

34. FBI, “Interview with Deena Lynne Burnett (re: phone call from hijacked flight),” 9/11 Commission, FBI Source Documents, Chronological, September 11, 2001, Intelfiles.com, 14 March 2008 (<http://intelfiles.egoplex.com:80/2008/03/911-commission-fbi-source-documents.html>).

35. FBI, “Interview with Lee Hanson” (<http://intelfiles.egoplex.com/2001-09-11-FBI-FD302-lee-hanson.pdf>); in “9/11 Commission, FBI Source Documents, Chronological, September 11,” 2001Intelfiles.com, 14 March 2008 (<http://intelfiles.egoplex.com:80/2008/03/911-commission-fbi-source-documents.html>).

36. FBI, “Interview with Deena Lynne Burnett.”

37. *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 5.

38. My discussion of this reported call is heavily indebted to Rowland Morgan’s treatment of it in a book manuscript entitled “Voices.” When I wrote *9/11 Contradictions*, I erroneously said that “there were no reported cell phone calls from American Flight 11” (170), not then realizing that Sweeney’s reported call was originally said to have been made on a cell phone.

39. “Calm Before the Crash: Flight 11 Crew Sent Key Details Before Hitting the Twin Towers,” ABC News, 18 July 2002 (http://web.archive.org/web/20020803044627/http://abcnews.go.com/sections/primetime/DailyNews/primetime_flightattendants_020718.html).

40. Paul Sperry, “Flight 11 Stewardess’ Kin to Sue American Airlines,” WorldNetDaily.com, 19 June 2002 (http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=28012).

41. Eric Lichtblau, “Aboard Flight 11, a Chilling Voice,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 September 2001 [<http://web.archive.org/web/20010929230742/http://latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-092001hijack.story>]].

42. See page 2 of “Affidavit and Application for Search Warrant,” Four Corners: Investigative TV Journalism (<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/atta/resources/documents/fbiaffidavit7.htm>).

43. Ibid. Woodward and Sweeney are not identified by name in the affidavit, which simply

refers to the former as “an employee of American Airlines at Logan” and to the latter as “a flight attendant on AA11.” But their names were revealed in the “investigative document compiled by the FBI” to which Eric Lichtblau referred in his *Los Angeles Times* story of 20 September 2001, “Aboard Flight 11, a Chilling Voice.”

44. 9/11CR 453n32.

45. Gail Sheehy, “9/11 Tapes Reveal Ground Personnel Muffled Attacks,” *New York Observer*, 24 June 2004 (<http://www.observer.com/node/49415>).

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. A further problem is that Woodward would surely have told Lechner about the recording, so it would not have remained unknown until 2004.

49. Lichtblau, “Aboard Flight 11, a Chilling Voice.”

50. *9/11 Contradictions*, 173; quoting 9/11CR 12.

51. “Staff Report, August 26, 2004” (<http://www.archives.gov/legislative/research/9-11/staff-report-sept2005.pdf>), 45. My thanks to Elias Davidsson for informing me of this report. Thanks also to Tod Fletcher and Elizabeth Woodworth for help with this essay

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