

## **“White Paper”**

**Prepared by the Flight 93 National Memorial Project Partners**

**October 23, 2007**

This white paper addresses the issue of the Flight 93 Islamic conspiracy theory, and is presented on behalf of the Flight 93 project partners – the National Park Service, the Flight 93 Federal Advisory Commission, the Flight 93 Memorial Task Force, and the Families of Flight 93.

Mr. Alec Rawls, Palo Alto, California, claims and theories were fully investigated by university and religious scholars and found to be false, and based on incorrect and faulty assumptions, as well as misrepresentation of the facts. This document provides the background, actions taken, and current status of Rawls theories.

All of the Flight 93 project partners are committed to having a national memorial that conveys the full honor due to the heroes of Flight 93. Our priority, now, is to move forward with the acquisition of land, with fundraising, with the design and construction of the memorial, and to continue to honor the heroic actions of the heroes of Flight 93, who courageously and successfully thwarted the attack on our nation’s capital on September 11, 2001, thereby saving countless other lives.

### Design Process Background

When the design was first announced on September 7, 2005, some few questioned the memorial and perceived it to have unintended meanings. It might first be helpful to explain how the design was developed and the role of the Federal Advisory Commission, Families of Flight 93, and other partners in the selection process.

The design was chosen through a design competition process. Observers and participants have viewed the Flight 93 National Memorial design competition as an exceptionally open and inclusive process. It included the deliberations of two separate juries and there were many opportunities for both online and in-person public comment. Both juries were comprised of family members, design professionals, community members, and other prominent and/or qualified citizens. The Stage 1 jury narrowed down over 1,000 competition entries to five finalists. The Stage 2 jury chose the winning design. Members of the Stage 2 jury unanimously agreed that a democratic vote – majority rule – would decide the winning design. At the end of the process, the Stage 2 jury went on to vote unanimously to support the winning design, even if a jury member had not originally voted for it.

During the entire process, the families, the Flight 93 Federal Advisory Commission, and the Flight 93 Memorial Task Force, collaborated as full partners with the National Park Service. The NPS role in this process was to provide staff and logistical support.

Prior to beginning the design competition, the project partners created a mission statement for the memorial. The selected design best represents the goals of the mission statement for the memorial. The goals of the mission statement, developed jointly by the partners mentioned above, are as follows:

1. Honor the passengers and crewmembers of Flight 93 who courageously gave their lives, thereby thwarting a planned attack on Washington, DC;
2. Allow the public to visit the site and express feelings about the event and the passengers and crew of Flight 93; and
3. Respect the rural landscape and preserve the solemn and tranquil setting of the crash site of Flight 93.

The Board of Directors of the Families of Flight 93, the Federal Advisory Commission, and the Flight 93 Task Force continue to support the design process and the final design selected by the jury. In fact, the following formal actions have been taken by the Advisory Commission to support the design:

- On September 7, 2005, the Flight 93 Advisory Commission, through Motion 05-09, received the report of the Stage 2 jury, and established the winner of the memorial design competition. The Flight 93 Advisory Commission then forwarded the memorial design to the Secretary of the Interior on September 23, 2005.
- On February 18, 2006, the Advisory Commission again, through Motion 06-03, endorsed and celebrated the design for the Flight 93 Memorial. They reconfirmed and supported both the open process and the partnerships that led to this design, and encouraged this process to continue in this manner and move forward as quickly as possible.
- On October 7, 2006, through Motion 06-08, the Flight 93 Advisory Commission endorsed the release of the final General Management Plan and Environment Impact Statement pending final review by the DOI solicitor, and recommended the management plan to the Secretary of the Interior, which establishes the winning design as the preferred alternative in the plan.

#### Initial Response to Allegations of Purported Islamic Symbology

All of the partners agreed that the design does not imply or depict any religious iconography. The winning designer team, Paul Murdoch Architects with Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects, has stated repeatedly that the memorial is reflective of the landform, which follows the surrounding ridgeline, and intends to symbolically embrace the topography to point your attention to the true memorial – the sacred ground where the heroes of Flight 93 rest today. Indeed, the sacred ground – the cemetery where the plane crashed and where remains still lie today – is the focus and the purpose of the memorial. The circular landform provides “sideboards,” an “embrace,” and a focus to point your direction toward the sacred ground.

The design uses the existing topography; it does not alter it to fit some perceived icon or symbol. The natural topography is a circular bowl, the ends of which point towards the crash site. National Park Service design and construction projects always strive towards blending in with the natural environment; this project is exemplary in its attempt to work within the existing conditions. The project partners acted on the principle that the intent of the designer is in response to the landform and to the mission statement.

Neither Mr. Murdoch nor the many others involved in the process wished to have any perceived symbology blemish the intent and the focus of the memorial design. As part of the evolving design process, and in response to the second jury’s instructions, the design team explored several refinements to the design, which included negating any perceptions relating to Islamic symbolism. These refinements are completed. The perceived crescent shape was extended more completely into a circle to alleviate misinterpretation of the site plan graphic. The circle is symbolically broken in two places – the flight path of the plane as it enters the “bowl” topography, and the crash site itself. The entire design is referred to as “The Flight 93 National Memorial.”

These refinements to the design responded to and satisfied many of the initial outspoken skeptics who read Mr. Rawls’ initial blog, including Congressman Tom Tancredo, Colorado, and Reverend Ron McRae, Holshopp, PA. Philadelphia radio talk show host Michael Smercomish,

kept an open mind and brought a bus of his listeners to the site; they were transformed from critics to supporters following the trip.

Summary of the Review & Investigation of Purported Islamic Theory by Scholars

The National Park Service contacted several scholars to independently review Mr. Rawls' conspiracy theory document.

Dr. Daniel A. Griffith, Ashbel Smith Professor of Geospatial Information Sciences, U. of Texas @ Dallas performed a mathematical analysis of Rawls theories, and summarizes as follows:

“I am unconvinced that the logical reasoning or the mathematical arguments put forth by Mr. Rawls have much merit. ....He seems to overlook geometric constraints placed on memorial designs that wish to focus on the line of the Flight 93 flight path....Many of his arguments involve fallacious reasoning.....A number of those fallacies are noted in this report; this list is not exhaustive. Meanwhile, although Mr. Rawls's arithmetic calculations appear to be correct, much of his mathematics ignores salient plane and spherical geometry properties; just because calculations are correct does not make the resulting numbers meaningful. He repeatedly fails to use scientific methodology [e.g., “maybe two or three tenths of a degree” is not a scientific measurement of error]. Rawls claims that “Murdoch has been VERY imaginative;” my conclusion is that this statement better describes Rawls.”

“Based upon scientific methodology and reasoning, I find most of Mr. Rawls's (sic) assumptions to be unreasonable and his logic often to be flawed, rendering questionable and hence unsound generalizations (which might be referred to as theories). While his arithmetic calculations appear accurate and sound, placing them into their correct mathematical (especially geometry) context raises serious questions about their meaningfulness. His interpretations frequently appear unconvincing and speculative at best. Overall, he offers disparate **circumstantial evidence** (emphasis added) to force his conclusions. And, because most of his arguments are based on attempts to secure sympathy rather than intelligent agreement, they also can be characterized as **appeals to emotion** (emphasis added). Moreover, as S. I. Hayakawa declares: Cow 1 is not Cow 2: inferences should not be based upon sloppy assumptions.”

UPDATE FROM DR. GRIFFITH OCTOBER 5, 2007: The qibla locator at [www.qiblalocator.com](http://www.qiblalocator.com) (whose Beta 0.8.10 version became available only on 9/24/2007; see <http://nomi.ibnmasud.com/qiblalocator#references>) corroborates the calculations reported by Alec Rawls, which have not been in dispute. This locator gives essentially the same results for a variety of disparate locations, including Shanksville (PA), Buffalo (NY), Washington, DC, Savannah (GA), and Miami (FL), again bringing into question its uniqueness vis-à-vis the Flight 93 memorial. The geometric demonstration appearing on [caosblog.com/6042](http://caosblog.com/6042) is constructed by drawing a perpendicular transect to the Mecca-orientation line, rather than drawing the Mecca-orientation line perpendicular to a transect; the placement of this transect is a matter of interpretation, with the discrepancy between these two methods of construction being as much as 10 degrees. Neither a numerical calculation nor a geometric construction constitutes a mathematical proof, leaving the arguments based upon these pieces of evidence incomplete, and hence unconvincing.

Further, Dr. Kevin Jaques, Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana also analyzed Mr. Rawls' document:

“Rawls has a fundamental flaw in his reasoning, namely: just because something is ‘similar to’ something else does not make it the “same.” I doubt that anything I or any except in Islamic architecture or mosque design, could say would satisfy him. A typical example of this is on page 40 where he gives the shapes of two maple trees and says that because the shape is vaguely similar to the space created by an arch, they are the same thing. He then shows a single evergreen and says that because the shape is similar to a pointed arch, it is the same thing.”

“The biggest hole in his argument is that all of the elements he points to are common architectural features that one would find in a church or synagogue. The mihrab originated in pre-Islamic buildings and can be found in temples, churches, and synagogues around the Mediterranean.”

“Rawls sees a mosque because he wants to see it. This is the power of symbols. A symbol... generates powerful ‘moods and motivations’ that are culturally entrenched and interpreted.....These symbols have vastly different meanings depending on where one stands, the ideas that form an individual's worldview, and the aspirations one has for themselves and their communities. If one wants to interpret the structural elements of the design as symbolically referring to a mosque (and for Rawls, therefore, a symbol of evil) then there is no arguing against that interpretation. If one wants to interpret those very same elements as symbolically referring to a church or to nature then that is how you will interpret it.....”

A professor from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who wishes to remain anonymous wrote the following short analysis:

“But beside the malicious and wacky tone, his letter is filled with inconsistencies and misrepresentations, besides being quite racist. Some major talking points:

- Mihrab orientation is either correct or not. It cannot be off by some degrees. Besides, in the US, a debate has been going on as to which is the right Mecca orientation: the one going through the North Pole or the one that follows a flat representation of the globe.
- Mosques are never in the shape of a crescent or a circle. This defeats the purpose of lining up the worshipers parallel to the Qibla wall (Mecca orientation), which usually translates into a rectangular shape, or sometimes a square.
- The Crescent is a debatable Islamic universal symbol. Many groups do not use it. I know in fact of no militant group that uses it. Islamic modern states have opted to use it, sometimes with the star, which is a modern symbol with no Islamic connotation.
- The badly reproduced plans show a rather regular segment of a circle as the plan rather than a usual crescent, which makes his point moot.
- Finally, Rawls racism takes the better of him: he mixes Muslims with Jihadist (a word that has only modern political connotations) and calls all of them terrorists and enemies of the US, discounting the some 5 million Muslim Americans. He should be careful in using his words.
- But one word of advice: he should not be given much credence, as his purported accurate calculations crumble when measured against his inconsistencies and misrepresentations.”

### Communications with Mr. Rawls

In order to give Mr. Rawls further opportunity to explain himself, the National Park Service had repeated communications with him throughout 2006, including letters from Superintendent Joanne Hanley, NPS Director Mary Bomar, and regular phone calls between Mr. Rawls and Northeast Region Chief Ranger Jill Hawk. In addition, a special meeting was arranged onsite in Shanksville, Pennsylvania among NPS representatives; Mr. Rawls; Architect Paul Murdoch; and Ed Root, Families of Flight 93 Board of Directors and Stage 2 jury member. The project partners have gone above and beyond every courtesy that is due to Mr. Rawls to listen to his assertions.

When members of the Families of Flight 93 began receiving letters and phone calls from Mr. Rawls at their private residences in 2006, they were deeply disturbed, if not angry, over his efforts to invade their privacy. Indeed, many, such as Mr. and Mrs. Ed Root were incensed. The family organization and the project partners then requested the NPS to convey to Mr. Rawls their disagreement with his position and theories on this matter and to let him know that no further contact was welcome. The NPS complied with the Family's request.

### Recent Developments

At the July 28, 2007 Flight 93 Advisory Commission meeting, it was announced that the Flight 93 Memorial Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement was signed by the NPS Northeast Regional Director, thereby ending the formal planning process and formally ratifying the winning memorial design as the preferred alternative in the plan. Mr. Rawls has since intensified his attempts to sway the public and elected officials through further misrepresentation of facts on his blog site and website, both of which feature selections from his upcoming book.

Mr. Rawls continues to intimidate and threaten project partners. Flight 93 Advisory Commission Chairman John R. Reynolds wrote a letter to Mr. Rawls on August 6, 2007, which, is provided as **Attachment A**. This letter indicates that continued harassment will not be tolerated. Additionally, **Attachment B** is provided which charts the contrast between Mr. Rawls' claims vs. facts.