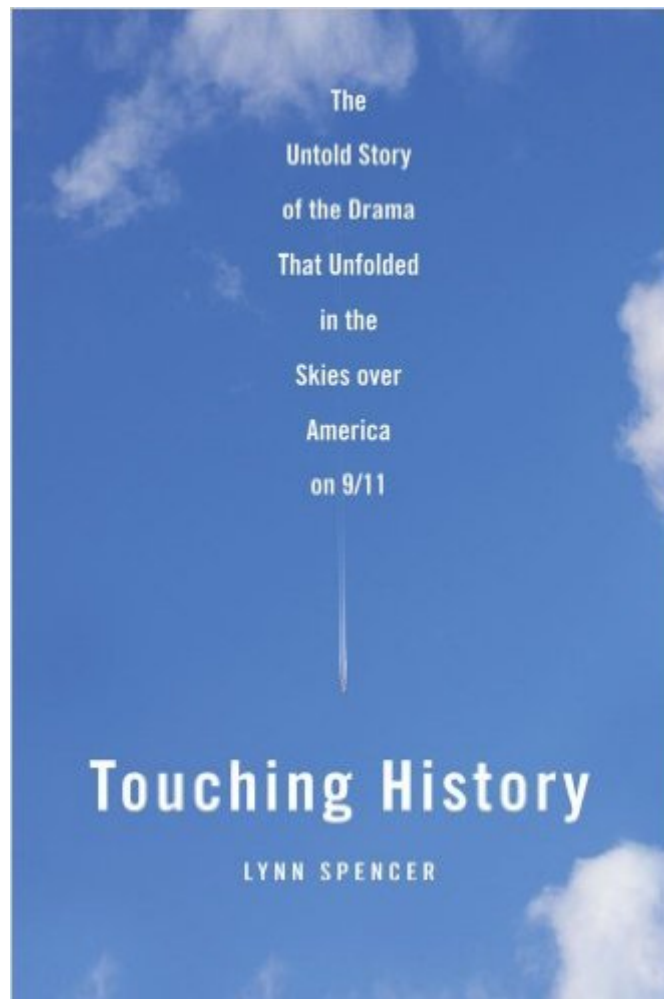


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Touching History: The Untold Story Of The Drama That Unfolded In The Skies Over America On 9/11



Synopsis

On the azure blue morning of 9/11 the skies were pronounced "severe clear," in the parlance of airline pilots; a gorgeous day for flying. Nearly 5,000 flights were cruising the skies over America when FAA Operations Manager Ben Sliney arrived at the Command Center for his first day on that job. He could never have anticipated the historic drama that was about to unfold as Americans who found themselves on the front lines of a totally unprecedented attack on our homeland sprang into action to defend our country and save lives. In this gripping moment-to-moment narrative, based on groundbreaking reporting, Lynn Spencer brings the inspiring true drama of their unflinching and heroic response vividly to life for the first time, taking us right inside the airliner cockpits and control towers, the fighter jets and the military battle cabs. She makes vital corrections to the findings of the 9/11 Commission Report, and reveals many startling, utterly unknown elements of the story. As a commercial pilot herself, for whom the attacks hit terribly close to home, she knew that the true scope and nature of the response so brilliantly improvised that morning by those in the thick of the action -- with so little guidance from those at the highest levels -- had not at all been captured by the news coverage or the 9/11 Commission. To get to the truth, she went on a three-year quest, interviewing hundreds of key players, listening to untold hours of tapes and pouring through voluminous transcripts to re-create each heart-stopping moment as it happened through their eyes and in their words as the drama unfolded. From the shocking moment at 7:59 a.m. that American 11 fails to respond to a controller's call, until the last commercial flight has safely landed and military jets rule the skies, all Americans will find themselves deeply moved and amazed by the grace and fierce determination of these steely men and women as they draw on all of their exquisite training to grasp, through the fog of war, what is happening, put their lives on the line, and mount an astonishing response. This beautifully crafted and deeply affecting account of the full story of their courageous actions is a vital addition to the country's understanding of a day that has forever changed our nation.

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Customer Reviews

I picked this book up at Costco two days ago having heard nothing about it. It tells the story of the response to the 9/11 attack as it was improvised by the military, the airline pilots and the air traffic controllers. A little bit of it was shown in the movie "United 93" but in that film it appeared that the military was completely ineffective. In fact, the military response was rapid and effective but the nation's air defense command was fighting to stay in existence at the time and had extremely limited capability. In an afterward to the book, General Larry Arnold tells how he was informed by a superior that, "If everyone would turn off CNN, there wouldn't be a threat from Osama bin Laden." General Arnold was, at the time, commander of the Continental U.S. North American Air Defense Command and the statement was made two weeks before 9/11. On September 7, 2001, the Secretary of the Air Force and the chief of staff of the USAF decided to cut off funding for air defense. On 9/11, there were only 14 jet fighters available in the entire U.S. to be scrambled for an alert and all air defense units were National Guard, many of whose pilots were also airline pilots. In spite of this critical weakness, by two hours after the first airliner hit the World Trade Center, there was a combat air patrol over Washington. They were there in time to stop United 93, had that been necessary. The rapid response by Air Force, Air National Guard and FAA personnel, often using telephones to relay information between incompatible communication systems, was totally improvised by the people involved. This story has not been told before and it makes a gripping tale. It was not all locking the barn door after the horse was gone, either.

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