Flt 93 Blogburst: How come the design meeting minutes have been â€œlost?â€•

Description

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Alec Rawls, who has been working with Tom Burnett Sr. to stop the Crescent of Embrace memorial to Flight 93, explains the circumstances (related by Mr. Burnett in 2008, but not published until now).

Mr. Burnett had been telling his fellow design competition jurors that the crescent is a well known Islamic symbol. In addition to the giant central crescent (now called a broken circle) Tom also objected to the minaret-like Tower of Voices. â€œI made a point at that meeting,â€• says Mr. Burnett, â€œto tell people that we have an Islamist design here that canâ€™t go forward, please, stay with me.â€•

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One of the left-wing design professionals on the jury, Tom Sokolowski (then director of Pittsburgâ€™s Andy Warhol Museum) thought that objecting to the crescent shape, just because it happens to be used by Muslims, was anti-Muslim bigotry. In a rude attempt to shut down criticism, Sokolowski actually called Mr. Burnett â€œasinineâ€• for objecting to the huge Islamic-shaped Crescent. (Sokolowski would later repeat this performance to the press, calling a local preacher â€œasinine,â€• â€œsmall minded,â€• â€œbigoted,â€• â€œrepellant,â€• and â€œdisgustingâ€• for protesting the Crescent design.)

It was in this atmosphere, charged with universal awareness amongst the jurors that the giant crescent was indeed a well-known Islamic symbol shape, but also charged with uncertainty as to whether people would be allowed to mention this fact, that another family member, Sandra Felt, started to explain what she liked about the Crescent design. She liked the â€œembracingâ€• nature of it, says Mr. Burnett. She liked the way it â€œreached outâ€¦â€•

At which point another family member â€œlost itâ€• (Mr. Burnettâ€™s description), screaming in agony: â€œI donâ€™t want to reach out to those people! THEY MURDERED MY DAUGHTER!â€•

The Park Service claims it â€œlostâ€• the minutes

This extreme level of conflict on the jury over perceived Islamic symbolism should have come out years ago. The jury included a designated, non-voting, minutes taker. This was *not* supposed to be a private deliberation. These were volunteer citizens, doing the peopleâ€™s business, and the jury minutes were *supposed* to be made available to the public.

The Memorial Project and the Park Service claim that the minutes were â€œlost.â€• No doubt, but that doesnâ€™t mean the loss was accidental, and defenders of the Crescent design had good reason to make the minutes go away. Any faithful record would have been explosive, revealing these fierce objections from multiple Flight 93 family members to the blatant Islamic symbolism in the Crescent design.

The ballot wasnâ€™t supposed to be secret either, but the Park Service refuses to account for what they claim was a 9 to 6 tally in favor of the Crescent design. What does 9 to 6 even mean on what was a ranked vote amongst three designs? Did every ballot that did not rank the Crescent *last* get counted

as a vote in favor?

The whole thing is fishy, and there is one most obvious reason why the defenders of the Crescent might want to keep the vote details hidden. The seven family members on the jury were outnumbered by eight academics and design professionals. Thus all six of the votes against the Crescent *could* have come from the kin, with only Sandra Felt voting for it. This is more than just possible. It is likely.

Another mother of the murdered said only that she agreed with Mr. Burnett, and he thought that the other two men amongst the family members (Gerald Bingham and Ed Root) were on his side as well, though both have since spoken out against his ongoing effort to rescind the chosen design. Bingham and Root are angry at the anguish that the families are still being put through over the memorial design, but could such men have voted for the Crescent in the first place, in the face of that motherâ€™s anguished cry?

A vicious left-wing ideologue like Sokolowski, yes, but it seems almost inconceivable that family members could vote for a design that other family members saw as a tribute to the terrorists, or at the very least, as reaching out to Islam. Since Bingham and Root are willing to speak out, can they please tell us whether they voted for the Crescent? If they didnâ€™t, then the vote amongst the family members was at least 5 to 2 against.

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In support of Powerlineâ€™s John Hinderaker

The immediate impetus for making these revelations public now is to support John Hinderakerâ€™s 10th anniversary 9/11 post:

> You may remember that there was considerable controversy when the design for the Flight 93 memorial was unveiled. It was called â€œCrescent of Embrace.â€• The crescent is, of course, the central symbol of Islam, and the design apparently was intended to symbolize some sort of rapprochement with that religion. The winning design was chosen by a jury, and some members of the jury, including Thomas Burnett, whose son was one of the heroes who brought down the airplane, vigorously opposed it. As I understand it, no one on the jury questioned the Muslim reference inherent in the crescent, but a majority believed that it would somehow be â€œhealingâ€• for the memorial to be, in part at least, a sort of tribute to Islam.

That was Johnâ€™s response to Tom Sr.â€™s revelations, and his statement is fully supportable, but for people to know why, the supporting information has to be available to everyone. Now it is.

Given the conflict between Mr. Burnett and Tom Sokolowski, there could not have been any doubt in any jurorâ€™s mind that the Crescent was an Islamic symbol shape. Indeed, the jury made a specific request, not honored by the Park Service or by architect Paul Murdoch, that:

> The crescent should be referred to as â€˜the circle or arc,â€™ or other words that are not tied to specific religious iconography.

The only question was whether the use of this Islamic symbol shape should be seen as bad, and for a majority to favor the crescent design, a majority just have decided that it *wasnâ€™t* bad, even in the

face of family members who found it horrific.

Maybe these left-wing design professionals actually wanted to torture the families, but the generous interpretation is the one John gives: that they saw the Crescent design as symbolizing â€œsome sort of rapprochementâ€• with Islam. Certainly that seems to have been Sandra Feltâ€™s idea, and at least one family member not on the jury thought it obvious that this must have been the intent of *everyone* who voted for the Crescent design. Mark Binghamâ€™s mother, Alice Hoglan, just wished that the outreach to Islam had been made explicit:

> The Flight 93 Memorial selection committee has admitted to misgivings about the word â€˜crescent.â€™ I almost wish that instead they could claim they deliberately chose the crescent design as a gesture of peace and unity with the Islamic world. If they were to make that claim, I would not object. I would welcome such a compassionate gesture.

Unfortunately, regardless of the intentions of the jurors, architect Paul Murdoch did not have a compassionate gesture in mind.

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A terrorist memorial mosque

Mr. Hinderakerâ€™s anniversary post does not investigate whether the giant crescent actually does point to Mecca (allowing it to serve as an Islamic mihrab), or whether the Tower of Voices really is a year-round-accurate Islamic prayer-time sundial. Perfectly understandable, as these claims take some work to check and John had only just learned that the memorial controversy is still aboil, after thinking that it had been resolved in 2005.

But he *does* provide links to the evidence, and notes that some of it is accessible just by looking. Like why in the world does the Tower of Voices have an Islamic-shaped crescent on top?

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The minaret-like Tower of Voices is formed in the shape of a crescent and is cut at an angle at the top so that its crescent arms reach up to the sky, as seen on mosque minarets across most of the Islamic world.

Literally dangling down below these symbolic Islamic heavens are the symbolic lives of the 40 heroes. This symbolic damnation is repeated over and over in Murdochâ€™s design. The memorial is not just any mosque, it is an al Qaeda victory mosque.

So much for trying to reach out to Islam without bothering to vet what part of Islam is being reached out to. Nothing could be worse for the decent people of the Islamic world than to hand a great victory to the very worst in the Islamic world. That is the problem with doing this Muslim-outreach thing on the sly.

Knowing the American people would never go along with *intentional* Islamic outreach, the Memorial Project had to cover up what actually went on in the jury room, and once they got into cover-up mode, they just kept covering up revelation after revelation about what is actually contained in Murdochâ€™s design.

Sokolowskiâ€™s own vile cover-up: attributing the Crescent choice to the families, after vilifying family members who opposed the Crescent design

Here is how the *Post-Gazette* reported on local preacher Ron McRae, who believed that architect Paul Murdoch had intended the Crescent as a tribute to Islam:

> Itâ€™s a memorial to the terrorists,â€• McRae said. â€œItâ€™s not a memorial to the innocent Americans who died there.â€•
>
> But Tom Sokolowski, the director of the Andy Warhol Museum, and one of the Stage II jury members, said that claim is â€œasinine.â€•
>
> â€œIf the families of the 40 people who were killed felt this was an appropriate symbol to honor their loved ones, then I think he is delusional,â€• he said. â€œTo take this small-minded, bigoted view is disgusting and repellent.â€•

Sokolowski knew that family members on the jury had taken that exact same â€œdisgusting and repellentâ€• view because he had said as much to their faces, and now here he was pretending that it was McRae, not himself, who was vilifying the families. Absolute moral trash of the highest order, even if he *is* just a feckless little worm. By *intent*, he is as evil as Murdoch.

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Gordon Feltâ€™s defense of the Crescent design is also belied by what transpired on the jury:

> Gordon Felt, whose brother, Edward, died in the crash, called the focus on the crescent an â€œunfortunate distraction,â€• from the fourth anniversary memorial service tomorrow at the crash site.
>
> Still, he continued, â€œIt would be silly of us to have some sort of symbolism [in the memorial] that would be offensive to people.â€•

This from the man whose own sister in law had spoken in favor of the â€œreaching outâ€• symbolism of the Crescent, symbolism that was seen by other family members as intending to reach out to Islam, inspiring the most dreadful offense. All this is FACT, and Gordon Felt waves off any thought of it as â€œsilly.â€•

Did Gerald Bingham lie in his letter to the Memorial Project?

Mr. Binghamâ€™s letter to the Memorial Project (p. 21 here) was timed to counter Mr. Burnettâ€™s appearance at the 2008 Project meeting. It in-effect calls Mr. Burnett a liar, denying that Tom Sr. had ever raised any protest about Islamic symbolism when they served on the jury together:

> Attention: Joanne Hanley
> RE: Mr. Tom Burnettâ€™s disapproval of the Memorial scheduled to be built honoring those on United Flight 93
>
> Please read the following letter into the minutes of the Flight 93 board meeting scheduled for August 2, 2008.

> I served on the Jury to select the final design for the Flight 93 Memorial along with Mr. Burnett. As I recall, Tom liked the design with a line of rocks along a 2 Â½ mile walking trail. He indicated in his discussion with me that when it came to final vote that this would be the design of his choice. After the vote was taken and his design was not chosen he was very upset. Not once during these discussions did he mention that the design chosen by a majority vote of the committee had anything to do with a â€œsymbol to the terroristâ€• as he is now saying.
>
> The final design was chosen because itsâ€™ layout fit the landscape where the plane crashed and kept with the surrounding area.
>
> I believe that Mr. Burnett has forgotten that this memorial is for 40 individual people who were on a flight taken over by terrorists and that all 40 of those people became heroes that day. All he is accomplishing at this point is causing other families aggravation and needless controversy.
>
> We need to forge ahead with the plans as voted upon and join together as one just like our loved-ones did on United Flight 93, September 11, 2001.
>
> Respectfully,
> Gerald Bingham
> Father of Mark Bingham

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Mr. Binghamâ€™s denial that Tom Sr. said anything about Islamic symbolism is contradicted by numerous data points, starting with the fact that Mr. Burnett spoke out to the press immediately after Crescent design was unveiled in 2005:

> Tom Burnett Sr., whose son died in the crash, said he made an impassioned speech to his fellow jurors about what he felt the crescent represented.
>
> â€œI explained this goes back centuries as an old-time Islamic symbol,â€• Burnett said. â€œI told them weâ€™d be a laughing stock if we did this.â€•
>
> But his fellow jurors â€” and it turns out, many of the other family members â€” disagree with his interpretation.
>
> â€œI got blown off.â€•
>
> But not entirely. The jurors, in their final report, suggested the name of Murdochâ€™s design be changed from crescent to something with less religious significance, like an arc or circle.

This is corroborated by Helene Fried, who helped to manage the design competition:

> Fried said the connection was raised by some history buffs on the jury during three days of deliberations last month.

Compare â€œold time Islamic symbol,â€• with â€œhistory buffs.â€• And if the Juryâ€™s statement that the Crescent name is â€œtied to specific religious iconographyâ€• was not in response to Mr. Burnettâ€™s protests, where did it come from? Is Bingham saying that *others* on the jury were *more* vehement than Mr. Burnett in pointing out and objecting to this tie?

Then there is Mr. Burnettâ€™s account of Tom Sokolowski calling him â€œasinineâ€• for objecting to the Islamic symbolism of the crescent. This is corroborated by the fact that Sokolowski used the exact same language to condemn Pastor Ron McRae. Altogether, the evidence is overwhelming that it is Gerald Bingham who is lying when he accuses Mr. Burnett of lying.

For the sake of the families

Bingham makes his motivation clear. He opposes Mr. Burnett because:

> All he is accomplishing at this point is causing other families aggravation and needless controversy.

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But notice what Bingham doesnâ€™t say. He is willing to discuss how *Mr. Burnett* voted, but he keeps his own vote secret. (Gerald Bingham has been divorced from Mark Binghamâ€™s mother Alice Hoglan since the 1970â€™s, so her stated approval of Muslim-outreach in the Flight 93 Memorial should not be linked to him.)

If Bingham voted for the Crescent, his secrecy about his vote would make no sense. Everyone from Sokolowski on up appeals to the will of the families. Bingham himself does this. These appeals obviously turn on whether the nine votes for the Crescent design came from family members or from the cadre of left-wing design professionals who outnumbered the families 8 to 7.

For Binghamâ€™s objective of ending the controversy, the most weighty thing he could say is that he voted for it, but he doesnâ€™t. And how *could* he have voted for the Crescent? This is a man who is so keen to avoid pain for the families that he is even willing to tell slanderous lies about the one family member he blames for dragging out the controversy. Surely such a man would never have voted in the first place for a design that was already causing the most extreme anguish to multiple family members.

Ed Root is also loud in his condemnations but mum about his vote

Jury member Ed Root also attacks Mr. Burnett and Mr. Rawls for continuing to oppose the Crescent design (p. 22 here):

> Those who oppose this Memorial, for whatever misplaced reasons, have voiced their belief on numerous occasions. That is a striking example of the democracy we hold dear. When those unfounded beliefs turn to a zealotry that attempts to overthrow the very democratic process that selected the winning design it does a terrible disservice to those who worked long and diligently during the design process and, to me, it mocks those very 40 that we long to honor. Our nation is one of laws and due process. To let a few destroy what many have built is not democracy, but tyranny.

Yet Root too keeps his vote secret. It could just be embarrassment, not wanting to admit that he voted for such an obvious perversion, crammed to the gills with Islamic-shaped crescents. Or it could be that he was better than that, and despite the magnificence of Murdochâ€™s Crescent, was unwilling to vote for as design that other family members found so appallingly offensive.

Mr. Burnett says he liked Mr. Root, and it is easy to see why. They both believe the passengers and crew were fighting, not just to stop the terrorist attack, but to get back to their families:

> â€œThe people of Flight 93 wanted to live,â€• Root said while visiting â€œFather Alâ€• and the chapel in July. â€œThereâ€™s no doubt in my mind, they didnâ€™t want to die.â€•
>
> That distinguishes the passengers and crew from the hijackers, in Rootâ€™s eyes.
>
> â€œ[The passengers and flight attendants] wanted to try to get control of the plane and, if possible, to survive,â€• he said. â€œBut they knew from all of the phone calls that if they didnâ€™t do something, it would be far worse. So it really is this comparison of philosophies of a free society versus a terrorist society. One is, their cause is death; the other is, their cause is life. And thatâ€™s what makes this worthy of a national memorial. Thatâ€™s what makes this worth being remembered.

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Maybe he can join with Mr. Burnett in demanding an explanation for Memorial Superintendent Keith Newlinâ€™s claim that it was the passengers and crew who crashed the airplane: â€œThey are the oneâ€™s who brought the plane down,â€• says Newlin. This is his way of avoiding the implication that the circle-breaking crescent-creating theme of the memorial can only be depicting the actions of the terrorists. â€œ[The terrorists] TRIED to break the peace,â€• says Newlin, â€œbut they failed.â€• Surely Root would disagree.

But Root is wrong about who is refusing to respect democratic principles. Their 15 person jury does not take precedence over the will of the *nation*, clearly expressed in the national uproar over the original Crescent of Embrace design. The Memorial Project promised to remove the offensive featuresâ€”the Islamic symbol shapesâ€”but they never did. They just disguised them.

â€œThe difference is at best a subtle oneâ€•

Thanks to Powerline for exposing this as well:

Crescent and Bowl side by side
Crescent of Embrace, left. Circle of Embrace, right.

They call it a broken circle now, but the unbroken part of the circle, what symbolically remains standing in the wake of 9/11, is just the original Crescent of Embrace. All they did was recolor the graphics, then add an extra arc of trees, placed to the rear of a person facing into the giant crescent, that explicitly represents a broken off part of the circle. As a result, Murdochâ€™s circle-breaking crescent-creating theme is now even *more* explicit, and so are its obvious terrorist-memorializing implications.

Will other front-line conservative blogs and publications take notice?

John Hinderaker is a top lawyer, a lifelong expert at evaluating evidence. When he announces that there is serious substance to the Flight 93 controversy, serious people ought to listen.

Everybody understands the difficulty. With multiple Flight 93 family members crying their anguish against anyone who prolongs the controversy, people need to actually look at the facts before taking a position. So take a look! MANY of the facts are perfectly straightforward and utterly damning. Not everyone can be as brave as Pamela Geller, but no one should let the whiff of danger stop them from examining this most important issue.

Weâ€™re talking no less than the re-hijacking of Flight 93 by an actual al Qaeda sympathizing architect. Think 9/11 folks. The whiff of danger should be an attractant, a chance to tackle a hijacker. Those lied-to and in some cases lying family members need to have their fat pulled out of the fire. Ride to the sound of the guns.

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