

FLIGHT OF VALOR notes

As told by Dan Croft, Director of Somerset Community Band, who commissioned this piece of music that James Swearingen completed in time for the band to prepare and perform for the first year anniversary Community Memorial Service in Somerset.

BACKGROUND:

About 30 minutes after leaving Newark NJ for San Francisco CA, Flight 93 was hijacked by four Islamic terrorists as part of the 9/11/2001 attacks, diverting it toward Washington, D.C. Several passengers and crew members made telephone calls aboard the flight and learned about the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. As a result, the passengers decided to mount an assault against the hijackers and wrest control of the aircraft. The plane crashed in a field near Shanksville in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, killing all 44 people aboard, including the hijackers.

Their story in this music:

Unknown to them as they boarded, the passengers and crew became citizen soldiers on flight 93, giving their lives for our country. The opening heroic theme sets the tone for the piece that so well depicts the events of that tragic flight.

Measure 17 introduces the hymn "It Is Well With My Soul" with the lower instruments entry on the second beat indicating the something on board was not quite right.

Measure 39 – Dissonance begins and grows as the terrorists gain control of the cockpit and the plane.

Measure 63 – The music moves into a melodic section that represents the passengers and crew saying their good-byes to their families and loved ones on the ground, knowing that they would not survive. There is strength, calm, love, tension – a lot of emotions with loved ones simultaneously "in the style of a fugue."

Measure 79 – The dissonance continues as the terrorists increase their ugly plot. The passengers and crew mount their counterattack in the intense measure of 99 that builds – culminating in the most dissonant – fortissimo to the point of ugly --- sound representing the plane's deadly crash --- defeating the terrorists' plans.

Measure 107 – GRAND PAUSE – then a long silence

Measure 108 – slowly, quietly, out of the still hot ashes hope rises once again in the beautiful strains of "It Is Well With My Soul". In this section we feel strength and stability even in the most horrific acts – God is with us in all things. We will not be defeated. The passengers in their heroic actions defeated evil.

Measure 148 – The piece returns to conclude with the heroic theme and a victorious ending. Flight 93 has been called the "first victory in the war on terrorism".

Additional note:

Unbeknownst to James Swearingen when he composed the piece, "It Is Well With My Soul" was the favorite hymn of Todd Beamer, the passenger who commanded, "Let's Roll!" that began the courageous counterattack.

The story the music tells never loses its power. "We have performed this hundreds of times, and it never gets old – and it never will get old because of what it stand for," Dan Croft explains before conducting "Flight of Valor".