

There Are No Missile Defenses at the Pentagon

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Abstract: This paper addresses the allegations that there are some sort of air defense systems located at the Pentagon, or more precisely that they were present on September 11th, 2001 and only some sort of defense stand-down perpetrated by the government prevented their use. I intend to show that this is false, as well as the origin of these rumors, and other logical and factual fallacies employed by 9/11 conspiracy theorists.

The Origin of the Myths

Despite scholarly pretenses to the contrary most of the research that goes on in the 9/11 conspiracy community, does not involve the rigorous fact checked scholarly work that most of us learned in college, it merely involves doing a Google search and repeating a rumor, no matter how absurd the source or argument, that you found on a web page which validates your previously held viewpoint.

The perfect example of this is the claim that there were some sort of anti-aircraft defenses at the Pentagon on September 11th 2001, which were disabled to allow the Boeing 757, (or cruise missile, A-3 Skywarrior, Global Hawk, whatever the theory of the day) to hit it. This alternatively has been described as anti-aircraft missiles, missile batteries, underground missile batteries (whatever those are), automated missile batteries, or even anti-aircraft guns. This is despite the fact, that no reliable source has ever reported the existence of any type of anti-aircraft defenses at the Pentagon on 9/11, and those claiming that they exist can provide no proof, or even anything beyond vague speculation as to what and where they are.

This claim most recently was made in the (supposedly) peer reviewed Journal of 9/11 Studies, in a paper titled "Intersecting Facts and Theories on 9/11" by Joseph Firmage. The fact that this completely specious claim would be made in a supposedly peer reviewed journal, only demonstrates the lack of actual review, but I will get back to that later, first I would like to get into the history of how this rumor started, as it exposes a lot about the conspiracy movement.

The originator of this myth appears to be French author Thierry Meyssan, who also started much of the "missile hit the Pentagon" theories in his book 9/11: The Big Lie. On page 18 he writes:

We also know that these anti-aircraft defenses include five batteries of missiles installed on top of the Pentagon and fighters at the Presidential airbase of Saint Andrews.

The footnote for this though, references the "Official Website of Saint Andrews airbase" (it is actually supposed to be Andrews Air Force Base, not St. Andrews, which last I checked was a golf course in Scotland). While the exact URL has changed, the new page on the websiteⁱ is easy enough to find. It is

not, however, an “official website” at an af.mil address but a commercial publication www.dcmilitary.com, which describes itself in their “about this guide section” as (emphasis added)r:

Published by Comprint Military Publications, **a private firm in no way connected with the U.S. Air Force**, under exclusive written contract with the 89th Airlift Wing, Andrews Air Force Base, Md. This commercial enterprise publication Andrews Base Guide is an authorized publication for members of the U.S. military services. **Contents are not necessarily the official view of, or endorsed by the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense or the Department of the Air Force.**

This source is in no way official (the .com should have been a big clue to the author), and given the title, it is doubtful this page ever contained anything about the Pentagon at all, much less 5 secret missile batteries being located on the roof. The page does mention the units at Andrews, which include the airlift wing responsible for transporting senior officials of the US government, as well as an Air National Guard fighter wing, although it does not mention its role in air defense.

In the sequel “Pentagate” Meyssan reasserts himself with:

Five extremely sophisticated antimissile batteries protect the headquarters of the army of the United States from any airborne attack. How can one explain the fact that this anti-aircraft defense was not used?ⁱⁱ

This time he does not even bother to footnote the claim, even an inaccurate one. He continues on page 116 with:

If it was a missile involved, a hypothesis might be formulated that would explain the absence of reaction from the defense system. Each military aircraft in fact possesses a transponder which is much more sophisticated than those of civilian planes, and notably permit it to declare itself in the eye of its possessor as friendly or hostile.ⁱⁱⁱ

This time Meyssan does at least provide a footnote (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/navy/ntsp/apx100-A.htm>) but the claim is still misleading. Yes, the article does talk about aircraft transponders, but it is talking about manned aircraft, not missiles. There is not even the faintest suggestion that these systems are used in missiles, and no reason to believe they would be. Once again, Meyssan makes an incredible claim, fails to support it, and leaves the burden on the critic to prove the non-existence of his claim.

David Ray Griffin, one of the first American writers to touch on this subject, writes it thusly, footnoting Meyssan:

Third, the Pentagon is ringed by anti-missile batteries, which are programmed to destroy any aircraft entering the Pentagon's airspace, except for any aircraft with a US military transponder.[33] If, by some fluke, Flight 77 had entered the Pentagon's airspace, it could have escaped being shot down only if officials in the Pentagon had deactivated its anti-aircraft defenses.^{iv}

The footnote for this references “33. Thierry Meyssan, 9:11: The Big Lie (London: Carnot, 2002), 112, 116 “. The book referenced does not, however, mention this subject on those pages, in yet another instance of sloppiness on the part of the authors, he probably meant to the aforementioned Pentagate instead.

This still does not change the fact, of course that neither Griffin nor Meyssan provide any evidence whatsoever, or even a vague source, as to these missiles ringing the Pentagon, other than their furtive belief that they must be there. Simply repeating an unproven claim, does not improve its validity in any way.

In his book, “The 9/11 Commission Report: Omissions and Distortions” David Ray Griffin avoids having to source this claim entirely, by using a popular conspiracy theorist tactic and phrasing it in the form of a question:

Is it not true, as has been reported that the Pentagon is protected by five very sophisticated anti-missile batteries? It is not true that they are set to fire automatically if the Pentagon is approached by any aircraft not sending out a “friendly” signal from its transponder- meaning any aircraft other than one belonging to the US military.^v

I don’t know, Dr. Griffin, is it? You are making the claim, it is up to you to provide the proof. If this fact is so well known that you can ask your readers, who would not be expected to have inside knowledge Pentagon defenses, and expect an affirmative response, then why are you unable to provide evidence of your claims?

Automated Defenses

It is important to note, that these two authors not only claim that there are “anti-missile batteries” (note the plural) ringing the Pentagon, but that these “batteries are programmed to destroy any aircraft entering the Pentagon’s airspace, except for any aircraft with the US military transponder”. Note that this only applies to military transponders, not valid civilian ones.

This claim is of course ridiculous to anyone who does even the most superficial research, even a “scholar”. The Pentagon, in fact, is located less than 2 miles, and directly in the flight path of Reagan National Airport.



If there were missile batteries automatically shooting down all non-military aircraft, the US military would soon be facing serious logistical problems replacing all the ordinance they were expending at the Pentagon.

Keep in mind, that although the Pentagon is a military facility, it is also an office building in a major metropolitan area. We are not talking about a remote secret facility in the Nevada desert, approximately 24,000 people work there.^{vi} As you can see from the picture up above, a major freeway runs just in front of it. Griffin is not talking about a small man portable anti-aircraft device (MANPAD) like the Stinger, but multiple automated batteries of missiles, with the obligatory radars and communications systems needed to operate it. Even a small Stinger would be hard to hide, much less a larger and more complicated setup.

Not only can Meyssan and Griffin not provide any proof, they can't even provide the most basic of information. Which of these 24,000 employees have seen these missile batteries? Where are they located? What model of missiles are they? Which air defense units man them? While some details may be classified, certainly at least some information would leak out, but we have nothing

Anti-aircraft Guns

The aforementioned Joseph Firmage takes this shoddy research one step further claiming:

The Pentagon was well prepared for aerial attacks, with batteries of anti-aircraft guns surrounding the headquarters of the world's most powerful military. They did not fire a shot that day.

Mr. Firmage incredibly changes the completely unsupported claim of "anti-missile" batteries, into the even more ridiculous "anti-aircraft guns". Not only is there no substantiation for making this claim, "anti-aircraft guns" do not even exist in the US military inventory, with the exception of the missile defense "Phalanx" system, mounted on US navy warships.

I think someone would have noticed one of these floating around the Pentagon:



The US Army actually used to have a similar weapon, the M-163 Vulcan Air Defense System, but it was retired in the early 1990's.^{vii} An effort was made to replace the aging system with the Sergeant York, but it was cancelled in the 1980s after numerous technical problems and budget overruns.^{viii} The M-163 was then replaced with the Avenger, the vehicle mounted version of the Stinger missile system.

Contrary Proof

Now that I have pointed out repeatedly that there is absolutely no proof, or even a hint of missiles or anti-aircraft guns at the Pentagon on 9/11. Some skeptics may demand of me, however, to prove that there were no anti-aircraft defenses at the Pentagon. Aside from the logical difficulty of proving a negative, and the fact that the burden of proof lies in those making such a claim, I will do so. The proof lies in the fact that the Pentagon was forced to emplace missile defenses at the Pentagon *after* 9/11, from CNN September 11th, 2002.

For the first time since the Cuban missile crisis almost 40 years ago, armed missile launchers will be protecting the nation's capital by day's end Tuesday -- a precaution that comes amid a heightened alert status on the eve of the one-year anniversary of the September 11 attacks.^{ix}

I would also like to point out that when they finally did place air defenses at the Pentagon, it was not these mythical "automatic anti-missile batteries" or non-existent "anti-aircraft guns", it was the Avengers that I mentioned previously.



So why were there no missile batteries at the Pentagon before 9/11? The conspiracy theorists claim there must have been, that is what their entire argument is based upon, the unerring logic of it all. Well, why didn't they bother to ask someone who would know, rather than making absurdly embarrassing claims? As Richard Clarke, chief counter-terrorism official for both Presidents Clinton and Bush explained:

The Secret Service and Customs had teamed up in Atlanta to provide some rudimentary air defense against an aircraft flying into the Olympic Stadium. They did so again during the subsequent National Security Special Events and they agreed to create a permanent air defense unit to protect Washington. Unfortunately, those two federal law enforcement agencies were housed in the Treasury Department and its leadership did not want to pay for such a mission or run the liability risks of shooting down the wrong aircraft. Treasury nixed the air defense unit, and my attempts within the White House to overrule them came to naught. The idea of aircraft attacking in Washington seemed remote to many people and the risks of shooting down aircraft in a city were thought to be far too high. Moreover, the opponents of our plan argued, the Air Force could always scramble fighter aircraft to protect Washington if there were a problem. On occasions when aircraft were hijacked (and in one case when we erroneously believed a Northwest flight had been seized), the Air Force did intercept the airliners with fighter jets. We succeeded only in getting Secret Service the permission to continue to examine air defense options, including the possibility of placing missile units near the White House. Most people who heard about our efforts to create some air defense system in case terrorists tried to fly aircraft into the Capitol, the White House, or the Pentagon simply thought we were nuts.^x

Now why haven't all of these authors and "scholars" who have put all this effort into publishing books and papers, done this most basic research? Who are the people who are reviewing their work?

New Proof?

Now after Meyssan and Griffin published two books each on this subject, some more specific claims have surfaced regarding missiles at the Pentagon. Conspiracy theorists have of course grabbed on to this as proof that they were right, although there is no reason to believe that these claims are any more legitimate than they were when they were based solely on speculation.

The most popular testimony recently is that of April Gallop, a clerk at the Pentagon who was injured on September 11th, and who first became famous in the conspiracy theorist community for her bizarre stories on men in suits interviewing her at the hospital. In a recent interview posted on the conspiracy oriented blog “George Washington”^{xi} Ms. Gallop states the following:

Me: Do you have any theory about how a Boeing 757 could have hit such a secure building without any anti-aircraft defenses being activated or any warning alarms sounded?

AG: I have thought about this very question numerous times. And then I realized I needed to rephrase the question. The real question is what is the probability or likelihood that no anti-aircraft defense, warning alarms or additional security mechanism functioned on that particular day?

And then we need to think how likely is it then there was a glitch in all the security mechanisms, anti-aircraft defense and warning alarms?

This is a vague response though. It is not apparent whether she is talking about anti-aircraft defenses specifically at the Pentagon, or more general, such as the failure of NORAD to intercept the planes. She continues later, in response to a leading question:

Me: I would imagine that security procedures are different now than they were prior to 9/11, so I don't think you would be revealing any confidential information by answering this question. I have heard that, as of 9/11, the anti-aircraft batteries were automated, in other words, that they would have automatically fired against any incoming aircraft that did not transmit the appropriate friend or foe signal. Is that true?

AG: Yes that is true. They are either to attempt to guide the incoming aircraft that has violated the airspace to a safe location to land. Making reasonable effort to guide it down. Or shoot it down.

She is somewhat more specific here, as she answers his question in the affirmative. Her answer is not very helpful though. She gives no details as to what type of weapons are located there, and how she would know about it. She does not state that she has ever seen them, or even how she knows about this in the first place. Ms. Gallop is a clerk with no military background, and appears somewhat confused by the question. Her references to “attempt to guide the incoming aircraft” and “Making a reasonable effort to guide it down” appear to be discussing the tactic of using interceptor aircraft to escort hostile aircraft to a landing strip, not to a missile battery, which cannot guide an aircraft anywhere.

Furthermore this contradicts the interviewers question regarding an automatic shoot down system. If it were automatic, then there would be no “guiding” procedures. The plane would be shot down based on the cold calculations of a computer, not based on whether it followed some guidance or not. We have already discussed the difficulty of having an automated missile battery at the Pentagon, so the evidence

points to her attempting to agree with her interviewer, rather than possessing any actual knowledge of anti-aircraft defenses at the Pentagon. Additionally, she appears quite traumatized, and reasonably so, by her experiences as a victim of the attack, and it is natural for her to seek to try and question how it could have happened to her, no matter how rational the argument.



Although neither Meyssan, who wrote two books on this subject, nor David Ray Griffin, who wrote two books sourcing Meyssan, provide any source for this claim, Mr. Griffin does provide some sources after the fact on a web post, dated March of 2006. This brings up some interesting issues of academic standards, as he is originally making a claim with no source, essentially arguing that it is widespread public knowledge, and then after-the-fact, backing up the claim with an extremely obscure source, which he had no knowledge of at the time he made the original claim. But let's look at what it is regardless, from footnote 92 of Griffin's on-line paper "9/11: The Myth and the Reality".^{xii}

Thierry Meyssan, who has referred to these anti-missile batteries (*Pentagate* [London: Carnot, 2002], 112, 116), has said with regard to his source of information: "The presence of these anti-missile batteries was testified to me by French officers to whom they were shown during an official visit to the Pentagon. This was later confirmed to me by a Saudi officer."

This is creating entirely new standards of reference. Meyssan does not mention this in his books and Griffin does not say how he heard this, so this is from anonymous sources, cited by a third party, from yet an entirely different unreferenced source. This is so far past the standards of mere hearsay that a new term should have to be created for it. Anonymous-unreferenced-third-party-sources-twice-removed perhaps?

Aside from that the story seems questionable as to its content. These batteries are so secret that the Pentagon denies all mention of them, and the mere hint of a rumor has not leaked to the mainstream press, even after the 9/11 attacks, but yet Pentagon officials regularly show them to visiting dignitaries? Not to mention that short of running the story on Al Jazeera, I can think of no surer way of informing Islamic terrorists of one stripe or another, then to tell French and Saudi officials.

Griffin then mentions another source, citing a fellow 9/11 conspiracy theorist whose father worked at the Pentagon who claims.

When I was 10 or 11, to the best of my memory, which means 1957 or 58, I recall going outside and sitting down on a silver metal box. My father told me to get off of it. When I asked why he said it was a surface to air missile. (I could be off by 2-3 years on this recollection, but it was certainly before 1961).^{xiii}

Even omitting the fact that the presence of missiles over 40 years previously does not prove anything contemporary, the GI Joe fantasies of a young boy in the 1950s can hardly be used as proof of anything. Besides, Meyssan claimed the missiles were on the roof, not buried in the lawn.

The activist, John Judge, then continues, discussing a tour he made of the Pentagon in 1998:

Col. Robinson then pointed to the roof of the Pentagon, just above us, and said, "And we have cameras and radar up there to make sure they don't try to run a plane into the building." That was a startling and almost non-sense statement to me in 1998, but recall that the method of attack and the target of the Pentagon were mentioned in the Bojinka Plan, retrieved from Ramsi Yusef's computer in the Philippines in 1996. Certainly they did not expect "cameras and radar" to stop the attacking plane, there was some method of defense coordinated with them (SAM's, interceptors, etc.).

This is not evidence of anything though. This is mere speculation based off of a statement from a third party made during a building tour. There is no way of knowing what the colonel was referring to, or whether he was just trying to impress the tourists. Once again, if this is so secret, why is it they tell tourists and visiting dignitaries, yet nobody who has worked there has seen them, or the press hasn't found out about it?

Finally, Mr. Griffin concedes that the government has stated that there are no missile defenses at the Pentagon (although oddly he left that out of his two books)

The Pentagon, to be sure, has denied that it had any anti-aircraft batteries at that time, saying that they had thought them "too costly and too dangerous to surrounding residential areas" (Paul Sperry, "Why the Pentagon Was So Vulnerable," WorldNetDaily, Sept. 11, 2001^{xiv}). But can anyone believe that Pentagon officials would have let such considerations prevent them from protecting themselves?^{xv}

Yes, actually I can believe it. The members of our military put their lives in danger every day to defend this country, it is not too much to believe that they would not want to waste money and put at risk the lives of civilians for air defenses in a crowded urban area. Apparently Mr. Griffin does not believe them, based entirely on speculation, anonymous sources, and the observations of a 10 year old boy in the 1950s.

Conclusion:

In this paper I have shown the origin of the conspiracy theorists claims regarding anti-aircraft defenses at the Pentagon. I have shown how they were initially made without sources or substantiation, arguing that it was "something everyone knows". I have also shown that their claims are not even internally consistent, and change from person to person, even to the point of claiming that anti-aircraft guns, which don't even exist in the land forces of the US military, are emplaced there. Furthermore I have pointed out that there is a large amount of evidence showing that there were no air defenses at the Pentagon, including statements by knowledgeable government officials and reliable media sources. And lastly, I have shown that belated attempts to justify these claims are based largely on hearsay, and inconsistent, vague, and unsubstantiated claims.

Given the loose standard for sources and the immediate embracing of convenient rumors in the 9/11 conspiracy theory community, I hold no fantasies that this will be the end of these claims, but I hope that at least some people, upon reading this paper, will demand more from those making these claims in the future.

ⁱ Meyssan references in footnote 10 Official Website of Saint Andrews airbase
<http://www.dcmilitary.com/baseguides/airforce/andrews>
The current address is:

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- http://www.dcmilitary.com/special_sections/sw/081406d.shtml
ii Page 112, Pentagate (London: Carnot, 2002) Thierry Meyssan
iii Ibid page 116
iv <http://www.911review.com/articles/griffin/madison.html#ftnote>
v Page 36, The 9/11 Commission Report: Omissions and Distortions, David Ray Griffin. 2005
vi <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/pentagon.htm>
vii <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/land/m163.htm>
viii <http://www.fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/land/m247.htm>
ix <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/US/09/10/ar911.air.defense/>
x Page 131, Against All Enemies, Richard A. Clarke
xi <http://georgewashington.blogspot.com/2006/07/interview-with-april-gallop.html>
xii <http://www.mindfully.org/Reform/2006/911-Myth-Reality-Griffin30mar06.htm>
xiii <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/JFK/JohnJudge/P56A.html>
xiv http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=24426
xv <http://www.mindfully.org/Reform/2006/911-Myth-Reality-Griffin30mar06.htm>