

BY JEFF MAYSH in Boston
mirrornews@mirror.co.uk

WHEN Caroline Ogonowski gazes at this tender photo of herself in a cockpit with her pilot dad bitter sweet memories flood back.

It's one of her most treasured photos as it is a reminder of her hero father.

But it also takes her back to the worst day of her life. The day her dad became the first victim of the 9/11 attacks on New York and her childhood ended.

Capt John Ogonowski was the pilot of American Airlines Flight 11, hijacked 15 minutes into a flight from Boston to Los Angeles.

The terrorists forced their way into the cabin of the Boeing 767 and overpowered the crew.

Terror mastermind Mohamed Atta took control of the jet and crashed it into the north tower of the World Trade Center, killing all 92 people onboard.

TERRORISTS

A further 1,600 are believed to have died as a result of the plane strike.

But Captain Ogonowski had bravely managed to engage the aircraft's radio system so air traffic controllers could listen to the terrorists' conversations in the aircraft's cabin.

They would realise Flight 11 was not the only seized flight in the air that horrific morning.

At 8.23am Boston air traffic control overheard hijacker Atta's chilling warning to the terrified passengers: "We have planes."

And 23 minutes later, American Airlines Flight 11 struck the northern face of Tower 1 of the World Trade Center, travelling at around 466mph and carrying 10,000 gallons of jet fuel. Now, 10 years

9/11 REMEMBERED: THE

My dad was pilot of Flight 11..I still can't watch the towers exploding

DEVOTED DAUGHTER

I was told my father was involved and my memories go very blurry

▲ GRIEVING Caroline today

on, those recordings still haunt Caroline who still can't watch documentaries about the atrocity.

"The photographs of the buildings exploding just leave me numb, but I don't ever want to hear the recordings of the terrorists' voices."

Caroline was 14 and busy studying at her new school, Bishop Guertin High,

when a teacher announced that there had been an "incident" in New York. "They said we should say a prayer," recalls Caroline. "Then they told the children that a plane had hit the twin towers."

"Outside of my classroom I was taken to one side and told that my father was involved. After that, all my memories go very blurry."

Very quickly, Caroline was taken home. "When I finally saw the television, I couldn't comprehend what had happened.

The sheer scale of it astonished and confused me," she says.

Days after the tragedy, Caroline says she still clung on to the hope that somehow her father had got out alive.

"At 14, I felt so young, and in a way that day was the end of my childhood. From that moment on the house would be full of TV news crews and reporters and police for weeks afterwards."

"I was just so lucky I had my mom and sisters who were such a huge part of my

recovery." Caroline's mother Peggy struggled to deal with her own grief as well as looking after her two other daughters Laura, 16 and Mary, 11.

Caroline, who is now 24, says her Vietnam veteran dad was her idol, as she grew up on the family's 150-acre hay farm in Dracut, Massachusetts, 30 miles outside Boston.

"He was extremely quiet, yet he had this understated intelligence that made people gravitate toward him, and these



▲ LOVING Caroline sits on John's lap in his cockpit

super blue eyes that sucked you in. Dad had two uniforms - the smart blue uniform of American Airlines, and his blue jeans and worker boots for the farm," says Caroline.

"We grow delicious blueberries and peaches, and my fondest memories are eating the fruit with my dad. He used to call me 'Caroline pumpkin-corn'."

Every September since, as summer comes to an end and the fruit ripens, it's the first sign for Caroline that the anni-

versary is near. "Sometimes when the hay is grown high and I wander through the fields, it's as if I can feel him," she says. "And every year, I look back on the worst day of my life."

"Even 10 years on, every time there's a big life event, a birthday, or a wedding, there's always someone missing."

"No matter how happy the occasion, there's always that little ache," she says.

"I sometimes think about my wedding, whenever it might be, and how it'll feel

to walk down the aisle without him."

But remarkably Caroline doesn't feel any anger towards the terrorists who killed her father.

"I don't let September 11 affect my daily life, not any more. I admit I was happy when Bin Laden was killed, but I don't harbour any kind of deep anger inside of me."

On the 10th anniversary, Caroline will

It's as if I can still feel him. Each year I look back on the worst day of my life



▲ TWIN HELL Flight 11 has hit and Flight 175 is about to crash

be at a large memorial service in Boston, an event she has not attended in recent years.

"There'll be a wreath-laying service, and I'm reading an introduction."

Caroline, an English graduate, received an MA in counselling and psychiatry at Boston College, and lives in historical Back Bay, Boston, just a mile from Boston's Logan airport where her

father left on what would be his last flight. "My father would be so proud of all of us," she says, "Events of September 11th inspired me to give something back."

Today she works at the Veterans Administration, in Bedford, Massachusetts, caring for America's war veterans, and their widows and children.

She adds: "9/11 changed my life, but for the better. I'm very aware of how much my father achieved, and how much potential I have. I don't waste a single day."