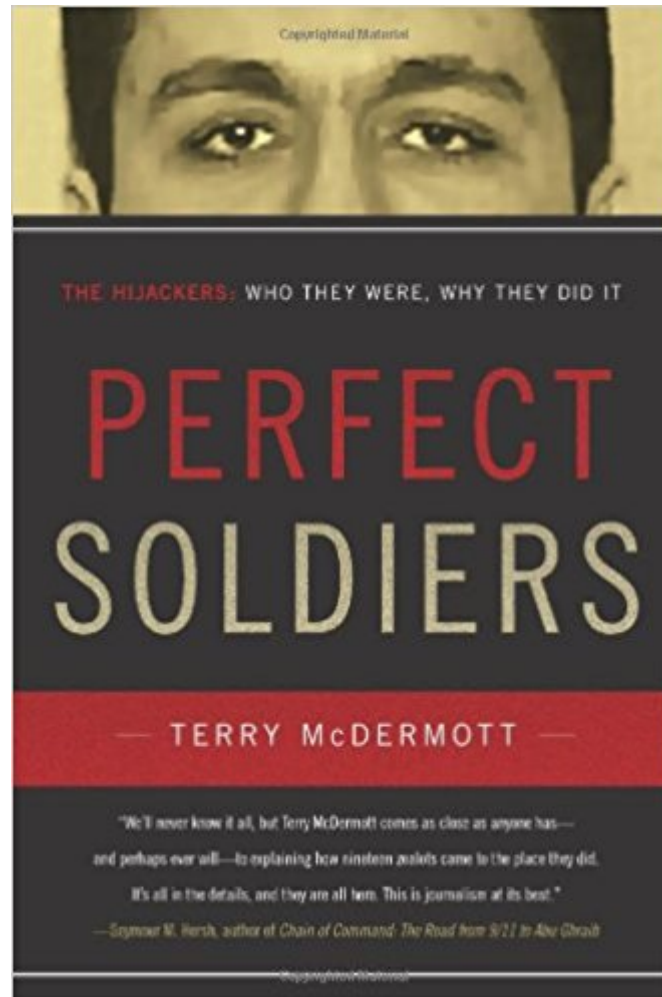


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Perfect Soldiers: The 9/11 Hijackers: Who They Were, Why They Did It



Synopsis

The attacks of September 11, 2001, were a calamity on a scale few had imagined possible. In their aftermath, we exaggerated the men who perpetrated the attacks, shaping hasty and often mistaken reporting into caricatures we could comprehend -- monsters and master criminals equal to the enormity of their crime. In reality, the 9/11 hijackers were unexceptional men, not much different from countless others. It is this ordinary enemy, not the caricature, that we must understand if we are to have a legitimate hope of defeating terrorism. Using research undertaken in twenty countries on four continents, Los Angeles Times correspondent Terry McDermott provides gripping, authoritative portraits of the main players in the 9/11 plot. With brilliant reporting and thoughtful analysis, McDermott brings us a clearer, more nuanced, and in some ways more frightening, understanding of the landmark event of our time. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

McDermott has written what is so far the definitive narrative of the 9/11 hijackers. He divides his book into three parts: First, he profiles the backgrounds and personality profiles of the hijackers, many who started as regular citizens and slowly drifted into their extremism, often by chance. Second, he explains the political forces in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan that helped to revive Jihad and give power to Osama Bin Laden. Third, he focuses on the actual plot to hijack the planes on 9/11. The reportage is remarkable and provides clues to the hijackers' personalities that have so far not been publicized. What's scary is the effective way the author shows the hijackers often came

from privileged backgrounds and then drifted into the fringes of society where, needing direction and identity, they were susceptible to the extremist rhetoric of fundamentalism and violent jihad. Where I might disagree with McDermott is his characterization of the hijackers as "fairly ordinary men." Perhaps I have a different definition of "ordinary" than does McDermott who uses hundreds of salient illustrations to paint these men anything than as ordinary: They are often portrayed as sullen spoiled narcissistic brats and bullies. One of the most prominent of the hijackers, Mohamed Atta, in particular is an extreme personality study in repressed sexuality, narcissism, and sociopathic hatred of others. He cannot smile or enjoy life in the slightest so that when he eats food he mutters to himself how boring and tedious the task of eating is. Everyone who knew him, even people who shared in his beliefs, found him an obnoxious presence. Sullen, brooding, and controlling, he made the hairs on people's neck bristle whenever he entered a room.

This account reads well and should be read by anyone still trying to sort out, or to create, the meaning of the events of 9/11. It is the best account of the hijackers that we have to date. However, in the end it does not begin to answer the question: why? Atta seems not to have been, despite the author's contention, an ordinary person. He seems to have been intensely, perhaps morbidly, introverted; to have been under extreme family pressures for achievement, which he did not satisfy; to have been raised in a family environment that was extremely rigid, unfriendly, cold; to have had no capacity whatever for understanding anything outside of his own extremely narrow views; and to have had no capacity to adapt socially. He was almost universally disliked, by both those who had brief exposure and those who had long-term exposure to him, with the exception of a few of his radical Islamist associates. Every prospect of change or difference forced him into an even more intense withdrawal. His will, written in 1996, shows a morbid fascination in the contemplation of his own dead body, a horror of women, and a dread of sexual humiliation (he specified that those who would have contact with his body's genital areas must wear rubber gloves). There is an element of pathos in Jarrah's story, but not enough detail to tell a complete story. He split his time between jihadist plotting and living the high life of a foreign student in Germany and, eventually, the U.S. He engaged in a long-term and passionate romance with a Turkish/German woman who seems to have had no inkling of his murderous plans or Islamist mindset. Jarrah seems to have been a virtual split personality, or at least possessed of a level of profound ambivalence that he could not consciously acknowledge.

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