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APROPOS

by Tina Darmohray

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Re-Routed Packets

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On September 11, 2001, I was teaching a tutorial in the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta as part of Networld+ Interop. Shortly after the tutorial began, it was interrupted by the news of the hijacks and crashes of several US passenger airplanes. I don't think any of us initially realized the impact of what had happened. For some of us, the events of that day threw a wrench in our travel plans. For others, so much more was changed.

I was originally scheduled to fly out Wednesday on a 6:50 p.m. nonstop to San Jose, California. By Wednesday noon that flight had been cancelled, and I began to try to figure out what else I could do to get home. Several folks in my course offered to let me stay at their houses. One even suggested that I would solve their babysitting problem for back to school night if I came that evening!

Despite the kind offers, I decided it was best to make tangible progress toward California. I knew that Mark Mellis, who lives in Los Angeles, was stranded in Boston and was also trying to sort out his options to get home. Another instructor teaching on Tuesday, Karl Andersen, lives in New Jersey and, like me, had decided in favor of making progress toward home rather than waiting for air travel to start up again. The

three of us discussed our options and the probability for success of each (leave it to network security geeks) and cooked up a plan to achieve our common goal of getting home in the midst of the massive travel interruption.

Basically, Karl and I would drive north and meet Mark, who would drive south, to the corner of I-81 and I-70 in Hagerstown, Pennsylvania. From there, Karl would continue home to New Jersey, and Mark and I would head west on I-70, a route that passes through several towns served by Southwest Airlines. Not knowing when air travel would resume or what it would be like when it did, Mark and I thought we might have a better chance of getting on a small carrier out of the Midwest than a larger carrier out of the hub airports. This way, we figured we'd either drive to the Pacific Ocean or catch a plane, whichever came first. What we didn't know at the time is that we'd be sharing this adventure with so many other travelers; middle America was filled with people trying to get home (*http://www.mellis.com/911roadtrip/*).

Judging from my sampling in the continental breakfast areas in the hotels where we stayed, a full 75% of the folks were in the same predicament we were. Some of the people were like us and had been stranded on business or vacation, while others, in the air on Tuesday, had been put down in random locations around the US. In Pennsylvania I talked to a fellow who was in the air on his way to vacation in Las Vegas when his plane had been put down in Indianapolis. He said their captain came on the speaker and said that their plane was OK, but there had been a "national incident" and they had been asked to land. Gosh! I can't imagine what would have been running through my mind with that kind of lead-in but no further details. Since hearing that, I've wondered what folks who listen to the air-traffic channel

on the planes heard in real time while this drama was playing out.

The longest drive I heard about was from a couple I talked to in Missouri who had been flying back from a trip to Alaska when their plane landed in Seattle. As it was, they were driving the diagonal from Washington to Orlando, Florida, but they both agreed, it could have been a *lot* farther!

At midday on Friday, Mark and I passed the Indianapolis airport and saw commercial airlines taking off from the runways and jet trails in the otherwise clear sky. It was a welcome sight. A quick cell phone call to Southwest Airlines revealed that we couldn't make their scheduled flight out of St. Louis that evening, but we could get on one out of Kansas City the next morning; we booked it.

We arrived three-and-a-half hours early for our flight out of Kansas City on Saturday. The airport was deserted and security was heightened. Everyone's nerves were frazzled. The ticketing agent who was helping me came out of his skin when he realized that he'd failed to tag the previous customer's luggage, and for an instant, didn't know what to do or think.

Our flight from Kansas City, through Las Vegas to San Jose, was uneventful, save the genuine appreciation by the flight attendants and crew members for us choosing air travel. The flight attendants high-fived me on the way out in San Jose. I've heard similar stories from other travelers. Accounts have it that first-flights into airports were greeted by cheering airport workers out on the tarmac.

My non-scientific sampling of others who tried to get to their destinations the week of September 11 shows that it was harder to get on planes at the large airports. Not being able to get a flight until

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Saturday, Sunday, or even later was relatively common. Amazingly, when folks finally did get off the ground, those flights, which had been so hard to get, turned out to be only two-thirds full. Alternative forms of travel, such as Greyhound, Amtrak, and car rentals, were frequently sold out. I did hear several accounts of companies chartering buses to get groups of co-located employees home with good success (I thought that was pretty clever). I heard from one of my tutorial attendees who lives near me in California that he left from Atlanta Friday night and drove 2,800 miles in three days via Oklahoma and Arizona.

Now that we've gotten back and have had the chance to hear how others did the same, Mark, Karl, and I have applied some hindsight to our quickly concocted plan. Mark believes our initial reaction, and subsequent plan, reflects our collective system/network administration background. He maintains successful system administrators are pragmatic. In the face of building moves, application conversions, and OS upgrades, we know our best chance for success lies in having multiple ways to achieve the goal: built-in disaster planning, if you will. Our experience tells us that occasionally the upgrade goes off without a hitch, but if we positively have to have the site up at the end of the availability window, we know we must also plan for the worst case. That way, when things fall apart midway through the migration, our chances for success are much better, since we planned for other options early on. Of course we'll accept it if things work out for the best, but if we *must* be home on Monday, we rent a car first then check the airports along the way.