



F8 American Airlines Flight 587

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The attendee will learn how forensic dentists were able to organize and handle two concurrent mass disasters: Flight 587 and the World Trade Center.

On November 12, 2001, American Airlines Flight 587 took off from John F. Kennedy International Airport and crashed into Belle Harbor, NY (in the borough of Queens) shocking once again the city of New York already reeling from the attacks of September 11th. All 260 people on the flight along with 5 people on the ground perished. The airspace over New York was closed, with the assumption that this was another terrorist attack.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner City of New York, its forensic dentists, and the members of the New York Society of Forensic Dentistry's Dental Identification Team faced the unprecedented task of running two mass disaster identification efforts at the same time.

Since the Manhattan office of the Chief Medical Examiner of the City of New York was already set up for the processing and identification of the World Trade Center victims, it was decided to bring the victims of Flight 587 to Manhattan some 20 odd miles away, rather than setting up a new recovery site at the Medical Examiner's Queens office.

In the Manhattan office, new protocols were set up to differentiate the victims of Flight 587 from the victims of the World Trade Center. New computer databases, new identification numbers, and different visual cues, i.e., the colors of paper, folders, etc., were implemented.

The teams of pathologists, medical legal investigators, FBI investigators, the NYPD, and other agencies as well as the forensic dental teams were in place and began processing the victims. NYPD detectives processed property, including wallets, jewelry, and other personal effects on the victims, which helped give clues in the identification process. After the pathologists performed the autopsies, the postmortem dental teams examined the full body radiographs to confirm presence of dental remains. The jaws were dissected as necessary and radiographs and chartings were done. This information was then entered into computers using the WIN-ID program.

The antemortem dental team began the task of gathering dental records. Flight 587 was bound for Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, an island in the Caribbean. Many of the victims were from the Dominican Republic and the task of getting dental records was made more difficult not only because of the language barrier but the possibility of no existing dental records whatsoever.

After 2 weeks, all the postmortems were completed. All postmortem chartings were entered into the computers with incident numbers differentiating Flight 587 from the World Trade Center. After about 4 weeks, all dental records that were available were received and processed into the computer databases. Postmortem and antemortem comparisons using WIN-ID were done and completed. The victims of Flight 587 that could be identified by forensic dentistry were completed after 4 weeks. Other means of identification including DNA were utilized to identify those whom no antemortem dental records were available.

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