

**BULLDOG PRIDE FUND Receives 2 Anonymous Gifts Totaling \$525:  
~ IN MEMORY OF MARK KENDALL BINGHAM ~ May 22, 1970 – September 11, 2001**

**The New York Times**

## Passenger on Jet: 'Gay Hero' or 'Hero Who Was Gay?'

JAN 16, 2002 • By EVELYN NIEVES /THE NEW YORK TIMES

**SAN FRANCISCO** - **Mark Bingham** was one of those people who pop up all over the high school yearbook, a popular, brawny, 6-foot-5 rugby player who could have played any sport, just as he could have talked his way into any room.

When the story of the passengers on **United Airlines Flight 93** who fought their hijackers on **Sept. 11** became public, everyone who knew Mr. Bingham was sure he was one of the leaders. The hijackers commandeering the cockpit had to be right in front of Mr. Bingham as he sat in seat 4-D in first class. Those who remembered him fighting off an armed mugger knew he was a man of action, never one to back away from a confrontation.

In the weeks and months since **Sept. 11**, Mr. Bingham, a 31-year-old public relations executive who played rugby for the University of California [Berkeley], has become one of the most celebrated heroes of that day.

He has also become an icon among gays. The man tearfully eulogized by Senator John McCain of Arizona is also the subject of a cover story and Person of the Year in *The Advocate*, the national gay and lesbian biweekly news magazine. He has inspired a Web site, **markbingham.org**, and plans for a permanent memorial in his honor in the Castro, San Francisco's famous gay neighborhood.

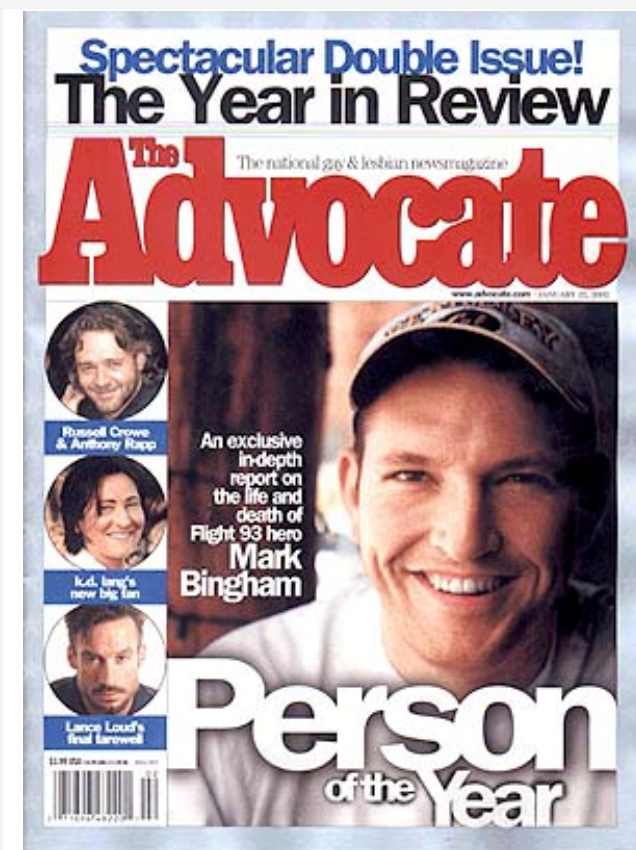
That he was gay might seem irrelevant to any discussion about his role in **Flight 93**, many gay rights advocates say. **Sept. 11**, they agree, was a transformative day for the nation, when what was notable about this country of diverse groups is how everyone united in grief and outrage.

But the sexual orientation of **Sept. 11** heroes is not really irrelevant, gay civil rights groups contend, at a time when openly gay men and lesbians are barred from the military and when gay couples do not have the same rights as heterosexual ones.

"When you ask what difference does it make if the heroes were gay, I say I agree with you," said Judy Wieder, editor in chief of *The Advocate*, which devoted its Oct. 23 issue to "the gay heroes of the terrorist tragedy."

"That's precisely our point," Ms. Wieder said. "They were just like everybody else. So we ask, why is it that when they died, they were equal to everyone, but had they lived, they would not have the same equality as heterosexuals?"

The importance of identifying gay heroes became especially important, gay advocates say, when the Rev. Jerry Falwell and the Rev. Pat Robertson asserted, just two days after the attacks, that an angry God had allowed the terrorists to succeed because the United States had become a nation of abortion, homosexuality, secular schools and courts and the American Civil Liberties Union.



“Maybe because of the lack of visible heroes for us, there's a greater significance in finding heroes,” said Joan M. Garry, executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), which has been critical of news organizations that did not mention Mr. Bingham's sexual orientation. Later profiles were more forthright, Ms. Garry said.

Mr. Bingham's sexual orientation was not his full story, his friends and his mother, Alice Hoglan, say.

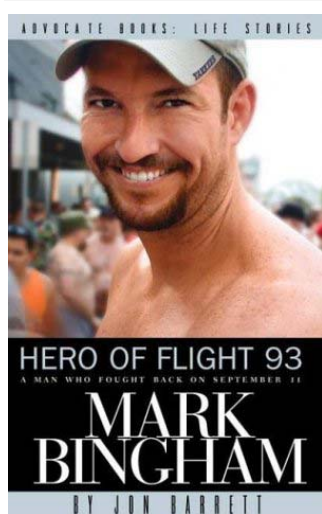
“Mark was a fully alive person,” said Ms. Hoglan, a flight attendant for United Airlines who raised her son as a single mother. “I don't mind at all that he is being identified as a gay hero, though that was just one aspect of him. He was proud of being gay, just as he was proud of being a Republican, and proud of playing rugby, and proud of his friends.”

Daniel Chu, a Chi Psi fraternity brother of Mr. Bingham in the early 1990's, who registered and maintains the **markbingham.org** Web site, said his friend's sexual orientation was not the impetus for the site.

“Most of us in the fraternity didn't know about Mark's sexual orientation,” he said, “and we didn't find out about it until a week before he graduated. School was not really Mark's No. 1 priority. Mark was always about people. Always.”

The Web site has become a sprawling tribute, with testimonials from friends gay and straight.

“I don't think he would have asked for this,” Mr. Chu said. “But I'm sure he's cracking up to see a big deal made of something he did every day. If a friend needed help, he was always there. If a friend needed someone to talk to, he was always there. That's the way Mark was. He loved life and lived it to its fullest.”



To gay advocates, part of Mr. Bingham's appeal as a gay hero, or a hero who was gay, is that he was not a stereotype.

For Michelangelo Signorile, a gay journalist, what was notable about the early coverage of the Sept. 11 heroes is not that it omitted Mr. Bingham's sexual orientation but that it seemed to overlook Mr. Bingham entirely.

In many of the early reports, he said, most of the attention was focused on Mr. Bingham's seatmate on the plane, **Todd Beamer** [Fresno State alumnus], who is believed to have uttered the now-famous “**Let's roll**” comment as the passengers sought to overcome the hijackers.

“I feel that in general the average American doesn't have any idea who Mark Bingham is,” Mr. Signorile said. “Everyone knows Todd Beamer because he had a wife, he was heterosexual, he had a story, the great American family. But we just didn't hear that much about Mark Bingham.”

For many gays and lesbians, Mr. Signorile said, there has been a real tension between two ways of looking at the issue of whether Mark Bingham should be seen as an American who acted heroically and who happened to be gay, or whether he should be honored as an example of a gay man who became a hero.

“In the gay community you see both of these strains, an ambivalence because many have both of these feelings,” Mr. Signorile said. “On the one hand they say: ‘Why focus on it?’ And, on the other hand, they say, ‘We want people to know.’” [Ed. Note— *THE ADVOCATE* posthumously selected Mark Bingham as “Person of the Year” for 2001. ~ “*HERO OF FLIGHT 93: MARK BINGHAM— A MAN WHO FOUGHT BACK ON SEPT. 11*” by Jon Barrett was published by Advocate Books in 2002].

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