

05 - AIRCRAFT-ASSISTED PILOT SUICIDES IN THE UNITED STATES, COPYCAT PHENOMENON AND SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

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Reference 1: Vuorio A*, Laukkala T*, Junttila I, Bor R, Budowle B, Pukkala E, Navathe P, Sajantila A: Aircraft-Assisted Pilot Suicides in the General Aviation Increased for One-Year Period after 11 September 2001 Attack in the United States. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2018 Nov 12;15(11)

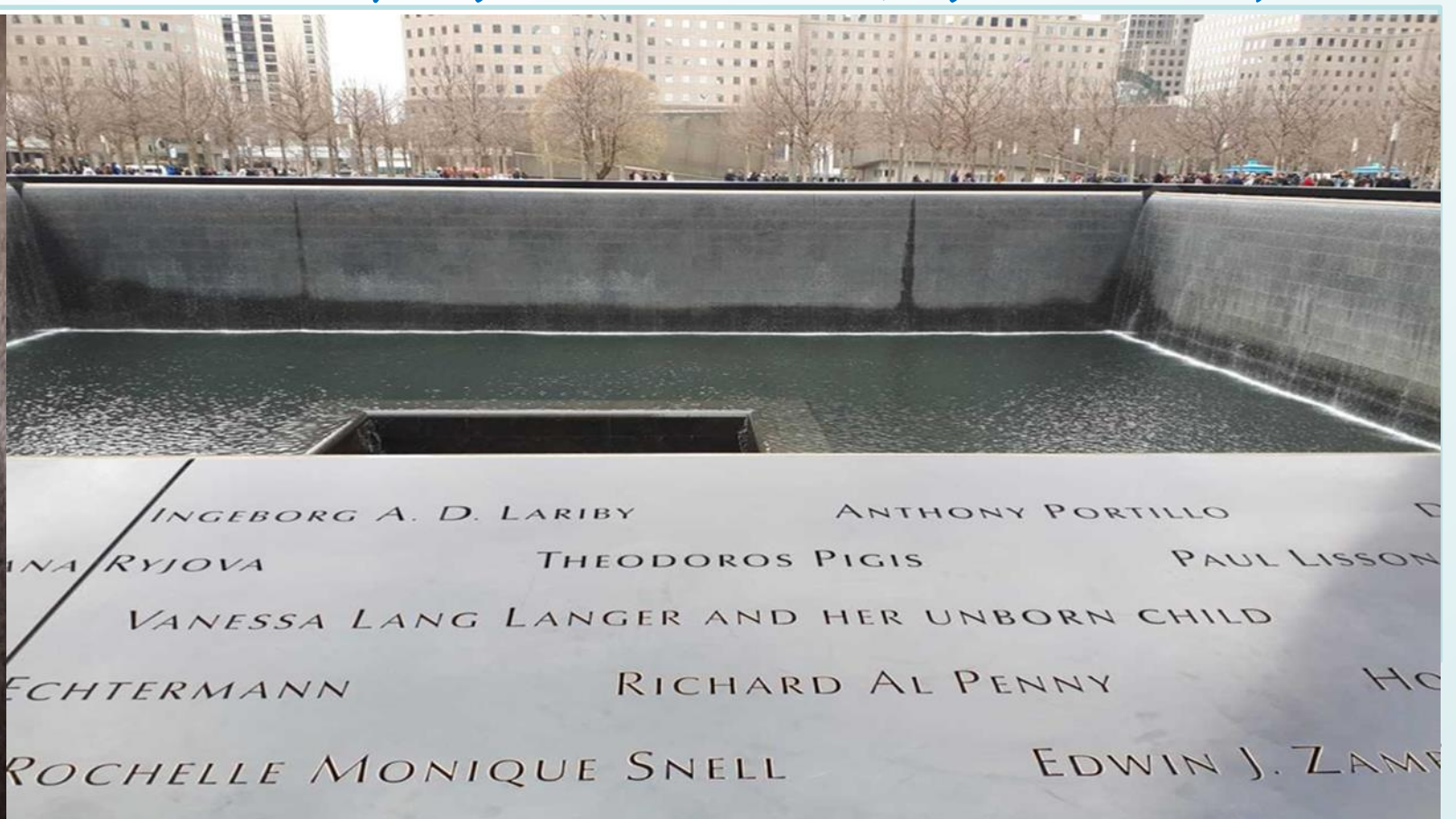
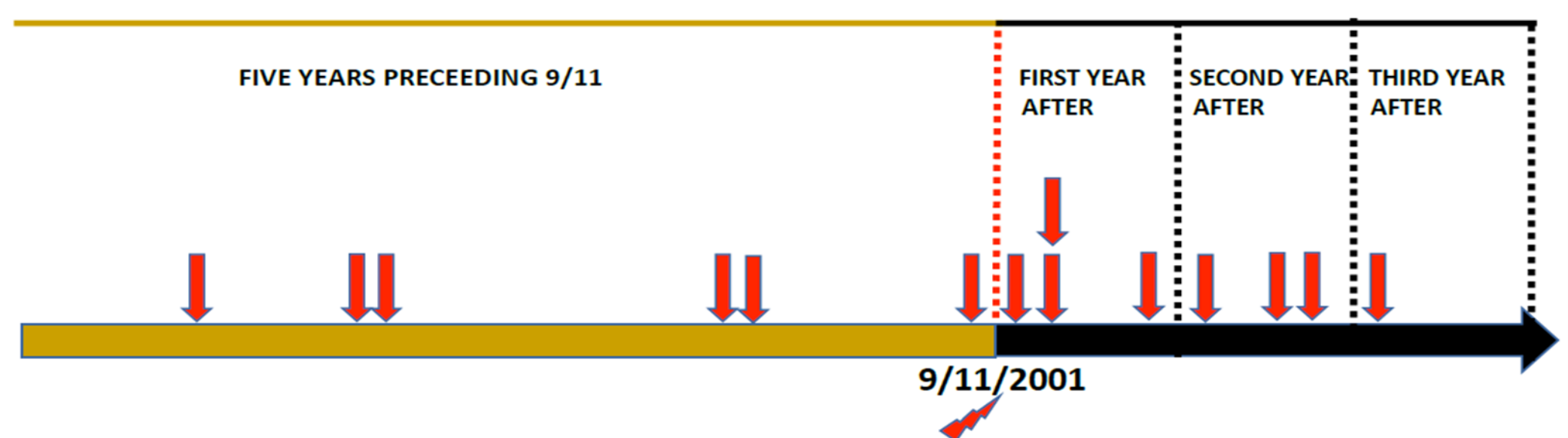
Background and Aims: Pilot aircraft-assisted suicides (AASs) are rare. There is limited understanding of copycat phenomenon, defined as suicidal behavior provoked by media exposure, among pilots. The aim of this study was to evaluate the possible effect of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks had on pilot AASs in the U.S.

Methods: Fatal aviation accidents in the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) database were searched using the following search words: "suicide", "murder-suicide" and "homicide-suicide". The timeline between September 11, 1996 and September 11, 2004 was analyzed. Only fatal accident reports in which NTSB reported the cause of the fatal accident to be pilot suicide were included.

Results: Fourteen pilot or co-pilot AASs were analyzed. Please see Figure 1. The relative risk (RR) of the pilot AASs in all fatal accidents in the U.S. was calculated in order to compare the one- two and three-year periods after the September 11 terrorist attacks with five years preceding the event. The relative risk (RR) of a fatal general aviation aircraft accident being due to pilot suicide was 3.68 -fold (95% confidence interval 1.04-12.98) during the first year after September 11, 2001 but was not statistically significantly elevated later.

Conclusions: This study showed an association, albeit not a determinate causal effect of September 11, 2001 with pilot AASs. The copycat effect was present for one year after September 11, 2001. The causal factors behind this association remain unclear, but some of these pilots with no data on previous psychiatric issues had recent stressful events before the incident, such as legal or interpersonal difficulties.

Figure 1. Pilot AASs and September 11, 2001 (Adopted from ref. 1)



No Day Shall Erase You from the Memory of Time -Virgil