

[Received October 03, 2001]

EMAIL 09/30/01 to MR. Evey (Pentagon Renovation  
Project Head)  
Mr. Evey-

I enjoyed speaking with you today-

We were very fortunate to get out of 4E-446.  
I not only credit the folks who built this fortress 60  
years ago, but I especially credit you and your staff  
who have engineered the life-saving renovations. If  
those windows hadn't been reinforced, or the kevlar  
type coating not in place (among other things), it is  
quite likely that we wouldn't be here right now.

Below is an account I put together the day after the  
attack- it helped to sum up some things. The only  
differences now are that it was our window that was  
partially broken and our first office window was  
actually the second window over to the right of the  
cut (as opposed to the third). The back of our office  
(where my desk was) is 10 paces to the edge of  
destruction (approx 25-30 feet). Our office did not  
burn as initially reported.

Thank you and your staff for all that you have done  
and will do in rebuilding her. This tragedy could have  
been so much worse for so many. We're even more  
fortunate than we originally thought and we are  
grateful. Thank you and God Bless You.

-Tom James

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SEPT 12, 2001

Thank you all for your calls and messages. Please do  
not feel inclined to respond to this message as it  
only serves to clarify one of the experiences that  
took place this past Tuesday. I am not bragging that  
I got out... I haven't behaved with any great bravery...I  
like so many have felt a range of emotions and am very  
fortunate..

To recap:

This was my first full week in the Pentagon working a  
new job as an Aide for VADM Totushek. We were going  
about the usual schedule conducting a turnover with  
the previous Aide, LT Pete Benton, planning trips,  
etc. when we overheard the first panicked news report

on the radio.

It seemed so unreal and we began checking the web and shortly interrupted the Admiral in his office and asked if he could check CNN for any updates. Information was sparse at this point.

I heard a helicopter landing right outside our window and turned to watch it touchdown ...the helo pad is there and I wondered as I watched him land if this arrival had anything to do with the New York attack realizing it probably did not. I turned back to the computer and began reading the only breaking news report I had found about the attack. I was shocked in realizing what sort of hell must be taking place inside those towers.... Two hits and thousands of lives snuffed out in seconds..this was obviously war...

In that moment, I heard the most sensational noise.... a split second of high pitched whine followed by a booming echoing crash like nothing I have ever witnessed. The next few seconds seemed so much longer and are constantly replayed in my mind... I remember yelling out as I found myself on the floor and somehow being pushed against the wall.... glass and debris rained down on top of me as I came to the stark realization that it was happening to us as well...At that moment, I knew it was coming through and I quickly thought it strange that this might actually be it for us...The next second I was wondering if I could make it under the desk, and wasn't sure it would make a difference anyway.... And then, it suddenly seemed so quiet ...I simply could not believe that I was still there and not hurt...As I stood and turned however, I was met with the horrific sight of a wall of orange flames consuming the view against the window. I could feel the intensity of the heat... The glass had apparently come from the next office over through the false overhead (although I would only determine this later.)

I knew an airplane had hit us... I was surprised to still be there... I also knew that there had to be another one inbound right behind it to finish us off... I began shouting over and over, "Get out, get out, get out.....!" as I made my way around the desk and out into the now battered hallway with the Admiral , Chief Pieper and LT Benton who were all okay. The alarms flashed and echoed with an automated voice to , "exit the building immediately..." Smoke filled the hallways from our immediate left as people began emerging in daze and shock. To my immediate left, where the hallway had been now was white with smoke and dust. Ceiling tiles,glass, debris and pipes now hung and I

was amazed and relieved when several people wandered out crying but miraculously and seemingly okay...maybe everyone was actually all right...(we did not know the severity of the hit and imagined it had at most been twin turboprop)...

The main width of corridor four is wide enough to drive a truck through. It quickly filled with people moving the hundred yards or so to the escalators as smoke and dust filled in behind us... My adrenaline rush and desire to run was tempered by the fact that my Admiral was there and I knew that I needed to stay with him...I was convinced at this point that we were going to get hit again and maybe numerous times... We were completely helpless.... there was no place to hide, and I just knew that the second attack was imminent – it would surely catch all of us as we moved along in a sea of people toward the exit ...but we kept moving in what can only be described as a quiet and orderly progression...Admiral Totushek calling out with authority to, "Walk, don't run...walk..." Once outside, the previously bright blue sky was now dark with black smoke as we saw the blaze and the charred damage from a distance.

Fearing car bombs or another air attack, we quickly got into my car and all four of us drove to the Navy Yard and to the Admiral's Quarters, which was undergoing lock down upon our arrival. I had escaped with my wallet and car key already in my pocket; more than anyone else had at that point. Somehow, that second hit never came (maybe thanks to some brave passengers who overcame their captors) and what had seemed like the end was countered by random luck...fate if you will.... The next offices over on the outside ring are gone. Our reportedly later burned....

The entire feeling inside the building was surprise and helplessness as there is no where to go when this is happening...but only to follow suit like thousands others and calmly but quickly walk out and hope that fate is on your side.

The initial feelings were of total shock and disbelief with the realization that hundreds had just died instantly within feet of where we had been. I became consumed the second day with a blinding anger and a desire for a massive retaliation against an entire region in the Middle East...It was only the second night, while I was having dinner at the home of some dear friends, Mr. and Mrs. Brunelli, when I inexplicably had to fight to keep it together...All of this has now been overcome with a determination to do whatever it takes to fight and win

a war...

Our survival was as much a testament to fate as it was to those folks who built the Pentagon over 60 years ago... Facing the Pentagon, our office window is three removed to the right of the destruction.

Like that generation 60 years ago, I pray we have the same determination and will they had during WWII. We will undoubtedly need this in the coming days, months, and years if we are to win this war.

-LCDR Tom James