

**Naval Historical Center
Oral Interview Summary Form**

Interviewers:

Capt Gary Hall
Capt Michael McDaniel

Interviewer's Organization:

Naval Historical Center
Naval Historical Center

Interviewee:

Mr. Jarrell N. Henson

Current Address:

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Date of Interview:

23 Jan 02

Place of Interview:

Pentagon

Number of Cassettes:

One

Security Classification:

Unclassified

Name of Project: Pentagon Terrorist Attack Incident

Subject Terms/Key Words: NCC Survivor, survivor, awards, Pentagon; Terrorist Attack; 11 September 2001; triage; evacuation; Navy Command Center;

Abstract of Interview:

Interviewee Information: Mr. Henson was born in ██████████, Texas. His father worked at an oil company as a gas plant engineer. He graduated from high school in 1955 and attended Texas A & M graduating in 1960. He entered the Navy and went to Pensacola, attending the flight program. He received his wings and went to the A-3 RAG (Replacement Air Group) and reported to his first A-3 squadron in 1961 deploying with the *USS Saratoga*. They transitioned to the RA5C Vigilantes reconnaissance-attack community. He was in the first squadron created – deploying again on the *USS Saratoga*. Upon his return he went to the RAG as an instructor for three years. He returned to the fleet doing another Med cruise and subsequently a WESTPAC deployment aboard the *USS Constellation* (for about 11 months, with approximately 72 combat missions from 1969-1970). He returned to the Wing Staff as the Avionics Officer. From there he was selected to go to Navy Postgraduate School in Monterrey, Ca receiving a Masters in Personnel Management. He returned to the aviation community making another deployment prior to becoming the Executive Officer of RV-87. He again deployed to WESTPAC on the *USS Ranger*. Upon his return he became the squadron Commanding Officer, then became the SIXTHFLT Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans for VADM Harry Trane. He then went to the Pentagon to be the Carrier Ops Aircraft person in the Command Center for the CNO. He retired from the Navy in 1982. He then was hired as a civilian civil servant working in the Pentagon. His current position was as Interagency Support OP Code N323. mostly in Counterdrug Support.

Topics Discussed:

On 11 Sep he was working in the new Command Center. The Command Center was a huge SCIF area. There was one access with some emergency egresses. It was laid out so the duty captain and the watch team were the first section of the Command Center as you came in. Mr. Henson's office was at one side of the Command Center where his deputy and he had one room

adjacent to their staff that worked in a bay area. There was a small section between there, the graphics section. Directly across from Mr. Henson's group was N512. There was also METOC, the meteorological folks in a room off to the side, a briefing theater, the folks that do all the movement reporting and data collection have a section, the intelligence plot was directly across from his office, and then another office around the corner from him where the N312 Captain resided.

He came to work that morning a little before 7. He went through his messages and emails. His practice is a 0730 meeting with his staff that lasts until about 0800. His deputy was Captain Jack Panches who was killed; the Budget Analyst Paul Brady and his assistant, Tripp Lloyd; CDR Tom Moore, LT Dave Orn, (these two were out of town); and a GM-14 Rick Sandelli. Everyone turned to their normal day's event. Mr. Henson went down to a meeting with the Joint Staff about 0815. He left there around 0835 to go to OSD to work out budget issues. He was there until a little after 0900. They were on the second floor E ring just down from where the aircraft would hit. He walked out of their spaces a little after 0900. He went to the stairwell that accessed the helo pad where the would later plane hit. That was the entryway to the D corridor, first floor where he worked.

When he went into the Command Center he noticed a lot of activity at the duty captain's station. People were watching the large TV screens and he could see the twin tower event as he came in. He asked what was happening. He went down to his office where Jack Panches (his deputy) was watching on the large screen TV and saw the second tower hit by a second plane. He picked up the phone to cancel a meeting in Norfolk. He had just talked to Petty Officer Lewis and Williams and asked them to come into the office to amend the orders. They were standing by his desk while he was on the phone (it was 9:38). He heard a large thump noise, a single noise. The lights went out and a large volume of acrid black smoke appeared. Everything in the room concussed. The plane actually came across the command center. The rescue team said when they shined the light into the overhead they saw parts of the plane cockpit and landing gear. Mr. Henson was immediately struck and all this stuff fell on top of him. He was sitting upright in the seat but his head was pinned against his left shoulder with a massive weight on top of his head and he couldn't move in any direction.

He called for Petty Officer Lewis and Petty Officer Williams but they couldn't move either. He was sitting there for about 15 minutes and did not know that Jack Panches had left his office prior to the attack. He was calling out to Jack Panches unaware that he was not there. After about 15 minutes he managed to pull some objects loose from the left hand side and managed to get his head out from whatever was pinning it down. He was now just pinned at the waist. He could move his legs and kept exercising them so they wouldn't go to sleep.

He never thought it had been a bomb. He knew instinctively that it was another airplane that had hit them. The black smoke was another clue to him.

The pain was incredible with all the stuff on top of him. He knew he was wounded and couldn't stay conscious a long period of time with the pain and position he was in. He was trying to get help from anybody but it was totally black and he couldn't see. The only exception was the fires burning that gave an illumination effect. He couldn't see what was pinning him down other than it was a heavy structure. He couldn't shake or move his body. Breathing was hard to begin with and got more difficult. At one point he was coughing so much he thought he probably only had about 5 more minutes of life.

The smoke began to get very heavy and oily. He could feel the flames at this back. He was in a government chair that he guesses was fire retardant because he didn't sustain any burns from the flames. Petty Officers Lewis and Williams were now totally silent, not even coughing.

While this was happening there had been a small working party of people trying to find people they could help. Mr. Henson's room was totally sealed, it caught all the brunt of the things that came down from the back. He was putting all his energy into trying to get out of there. He never went into a phase where he was reflecting that this was it. He was still hollering, "Help". The group outside the cinder block walls of the Command Center found a small hole that went all the way through to his office. The working party could hear him calling for help. Two guys took a pole and enlarged the hole to get through it. They went through an electrical compartment that still had hot wires.

As they came into the office he saw the little penlights they were carrying moving. They asked, "Is anyone in here?" and he said, "Yeah, I am." One of the guys came across the room, across the pile of rubble, it was still falling from the overhead and the flames were melting the solder in the overhead. One of the guys crawled through this little tunnel, shone the light on him and said, "There's a guy alive here." Mr. Henson was still saying, "Help". The guy said, "I'm a doctor. I'm here to get you out." LCDR David Tarentino, the flight surgeon at his side, looked at his situation and tried to move the wood in Mr. Henson's lap. LCDR Tarentino laid on his back against Mr. Henson's chair and put his feet up against the wood and did a leg press at the same time Capt Dave Thomas (who had come in behind LCDR Tarentino) put his back against the same structure on the other side and together they moved this thing about an inch or so. This was enough for Mr. Henson to pull himself over the side so they could drag him out. As they started out Mr. Henson's leg caught on the cables to the printer and they had to disengage that part.

On the outside the Air Force Surgeon General Carlton was with his rescue party. Capt Thomas and LCDR Tarentino had not been part of an organized rescue party, they just happened to come together. As they came out Capt Thomas turned to LCDR Tarentino, ripped off his nametag and said, "I want to remember you." He still has that nametag to this day. A SEAL Commander, Craig Powell, had been at the entranceway holding up a portion of the roof so they would have a safe exit. He continued to do this until Mr. Henson and Capt Thomas got out. Mr. Henson had told LCDR Tarentino that he thought Jack Punches was still in there so Tarentino was still trying to find another body. The two petty officers that were with Mr. Henson were able to crawl across the debris and exited out the same hole as Mr. Henson.

They took Mr. Henson out the hole and put him on a litter. He was taken to a triage in the center courtyard. That was when he learned he had holes in his head and face. Mr. Henson's neck was so strained he couldn't sit up. They thought his neck or back was broken, put him in a splint and sent him by ambulance to the Emergency Care at Pentagon City where they sewed him up. They took x-rays that showed neck injuries so he was sent to Arlington Hospital. There must have been 50 people there taking x-rays, CAT scans and taking blood. He was well taken care of there for about 4 days. The worst part was clearing his lungs and getting his voice back. They did such a great job of doing the stitches that you can hardly tell they were there anymore.

He thinks there were 45 people lost in the Command Center. These are people he worked with everyday. He misses them. The people from the Psychology Department at Walter Reed check up on him periodically.

He wanted to be back in the Pentagon because the work he does wouldn't be effective without being in the Pentagon. The people he works with stayed in touch with him while he was in the hospital and at home. They set up at the Annex for a while with the Budget people working with the Marine Corps. Other people floated around, they stayed in touch via cell phones.

He feels he came back pretty easily. He attributes this to his family support structure. He also got calls from virtually everyone he has ever known. He heard from Gov. Gilmore and got a big bouquet from President Bush. All this kept him busy and made him appreciate that someone cared. He was never by himself.

His wife had been concerned because she hadn't been able to reach him via his cell phone. From the time he got out to the time he was treated by the triage team was no more than 15 minutes. As soon as he was able to articulate his next of kin they called her and told her he was there and being treated. After he received treatment he was able to call her himself and they told her they were taking him to Arlington Hospital. His wife, son and daughter and daughter-in-law were there at the emergency room at Arlington Hospital.

Aside from missing his deputy as a friend, he was also someone who had been trained for six years to work side by side with him. The stuff they do takes a long time to understand all the structures and funding lines. It usually takes about a year just to train a new action officer in his office. His work is more arduous without having his deputy there to split up the functions. They also have to be on the road a lot. They could always split up the road trips as well as overseeing the office back at the Pentagon before. In the budget cycle this deputy billet was lost, probably because they needed more billets for Homeland Defense.

Mr. Henson is a pack rat. In the old Command Center he had two big cabinets filled with documents. Prior to moving to the new Command Center they had scanned all the files they felt were critical and burned them on CD ROM. Those are all gone now. They spent the last four months recreating files.

When he was in the courtyard on the stretcher he remembers seeing the crystal blue sky. He didn't know who had pulled him out of the building. He thought their awards were way below what they deserved. (They received the Navy Marine Corps Medal) Mr. Henson feels they should have received the Navy Cross, it was enemy action.

When he was in the hospital NBC learned of his story and interviewed him. They put a little piece on MSNBC and on a local channel. He did this to try to find out who it was that saved him. From that interview and the publicity they learned who the saviors were. MSNBC did the follow on when Tarentino and Thomas actually came to Mr. Henson's house. He's had them over for dinner. He sees them all he can. He will be forever grateful because he was definitely a dead guy without them.

As they cleared the room where he was rescued from CDR Powell stepped aside and the whole structure came down. He believes he was the last person rescued from that area.

Abstracted by:
CDR Carol O'Hagan
28 Jan 02

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Capt Michael McDaniel
Capt Gary Hall

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Interviewee:

Mr. Jarrell (Jerry) N. Henson

Current Address:

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Subject Terms/Key Words: NCC Survivor; Navy Command Center; Award; Pentagon; Terrorist Attack; 11 September 2001; Rescue; Medical Care

Transcript of Interview:

Interviewee Information:

Mr. Henson was born in ██████████, Texas, and grew up in the East Texas oilfield. His father worked for the oil company as a gas plant engineer. He attended a small high school called Ebers Chapel and graduated in 1955. He went to Texas A&M and graduated in 1960. He entered the Navy directly from graduate school at A&M and went to Pensacola through the flight program. His first squadron was through the RAG at Sanford, Florida, for A-3s, went to his first fleet squadron in 1961 flying A-3 Sky Warriors aboard the *Saratoga*. After that deployment the heavy attack community transitioned to the 485C Vigilante Reconnaissance Attack Community. He was in the first squadron created which was RBH9, actually BH9 transitioned to RBH9, deployed again on the *Saratoga* this time in Vigilantes; 12 airplanes on a flight deck pretty well loaded...interesting tour. He came back and went into the RAG as an instructor and spent three years in a RAG again staying in the cockpit. He went back to the fleet and did another deployment to the Mediterranean, then was subsequently deployed to West Pac Yankee Station on board the *Constellation*. That was about an eleven- month deployment. He had about 72 combat missions in 1969-1970. He came back from that deployment back to the community this time on the wing staff as the avionics officer. He was selected to post graduate school and went to Monterrey, for a Master's Degree in Personnel Management. Came back to the community and was selected for command,

made one more deployment then became the XO for RBH7. He deployed again to West Pac on the Ranger this time. He completed an 18 -month tour as CO, which led him up to 1977. From the CO tour he went to the Sixth Fleet Staff, which was the ACOFS for plans for Flight Seven O'Hare to train. From that tour he rolled back to the Pentagon as Carrier Officer aircraftman in the Command Center for C&O. It was his introduction to the Pentagon and the end of his military career. He had about three and a half years on active duty there when he retired in 1982. Jerry was in the civilian world for six months while his application for civil service was processed. He came back to the same group and was hired at the Reconnaissance Center with a Navy 0-6 and a senior civilian. Because of his 20 years of reconnaissance, he fit in neatly. He spent the next twenty- two and a half years in the Pentagon and was working in the Pentagon as the head of the N323 OP Code for Interagency Support, which deals mostly with counter drug operations and other interfaces with different agencies such as Department of the Interior for outer continental shelf oil and gas matters. This deals with conflicts in military training areas and areas in which the interior wants to lease. He has kept that job along with the other jobs he had for about 20 years.

Topics Discussed:

TAPE ONE—Side One

Q. (724) Tell us about the physical layout of where your office was, who you worked around and with.

A. Okay. The layout was the Command Center was a huge skiff area, one access with some emergency aggresses, but basically it was just a very large room with a lot of independent workstations. It was laid out so that the duty captain and the watch team were the first section of the Command Center as you came in. My office--I had sort of a semi-private office down at one end of the Command Center where my deputy and myself had one room. It was adjacent to our staff that worked in the bay area. It was next to the watch team and the duty captain's team. There was a small section in between there. The graphics folks were actually adjacent to the duty captain team. Directly across from my group was N512, I think, a group of people. We were composed of N31 folks and N51 folks. It was kind of a combined group. There was also METOC, the

meteorological folks had a room off to the side. There was a briefing theater. The folks that do all the movement reporting and data collection had a section deeper in the Command Center. The intelligence plot was directly across from my office. Walk out of my office, walk straight into the Intel plot, probably about 30 or 40 paces. Then there was another office just around the corner from me where the N312 captain resided. So that's kind of the physical layout.

I came to work that morning a little before 7 o'clock. I went through all my messages, emails, and things. My practice is a 7:30 meeting with my staff, which usually lasts until about 8 o'clock. We review all the taskers, things that need to be done during the day, during the week.

Q. (755) Name some people on your staff.

A. My Deputy was CAPTAIN JACK PUNCHES, who was killed in the incident. The Budget Analyst was PAUL BRADY, GM-14. His assistant, TRIPP LLOYD, who was actually a contractor, but he is indistinguishable on the staff from everybody else. COMMANDER TOM MOORE does the Man-Reduction. LT DAVE ORN [phonetic], Supply-Reduction, Counter-Drug bid. Those two individuals were on a trip out of town to Jacksonville, so COMMANDER MOORE and LT ORN [phonetic] were actually out of the building that day. Another GM-14, RICK SANDELLI, who does the continuity of operations and those types of jobs.

Q. (767) So, you had a staff meeting?

A. Right. We had a staff meeting and then everybody turned to their normal day's events about 8 o'clock. I went from that meeting down to the Joint Staff to meet with them at 8:15. I was there on the Joint Staff, on the other side of the Pentagon until about 8:35. I left there and went to OSD. We had some budget issues that we were trying to work out. So, I met with the OSD Staff until about, probably, just a little bit after 9 o'clock. They were on the second floor, E-Ring, just down from where the aircraft hit. I walked out of their spaces, probably just a little bit after 9 o'clock, somewhere between 9 o'clock and 9:15. I walked down the E-Ring to the stairwell that accesses the helo-pad, which is, essentially, where the plane hit, but that was the entryway into the D-Corridor, first floor, where I worked. So, I had walked that stairwell just a few minutes before the incident. When I went into the Command Center, I noticed a lot of activity at the Duty Captain's Station. People were watching--we have very large TV screens and I could see the Twin Tower event as I came in. I asked, "What's happening?" I just got a couple of groups from guys that were watching and, again, more people were coming into that area, obviously, in reaction to the incident. I walked on past, went down to my office, where JACK PUNCHES, my Deputy, had the picture up on our TV. We had a large screen TV there. He was watching and I don't know if it was a replay or if it was the actual event at the second Tower, but, obvious to me that the first Tower was burning and I could see the airplane come around and come into the second Tower. We just convinced each other that that's not an accident. You could see that there were no clouds or anything. It had to be a deliberate act. That is my last recollection of conversation with JACK as we were both looking at the same picture, talking to each other about it. I wanted to--while it was on my mind--I had just come from OSD about the budget events that were fairly

significant so I picked up the phone and called down to Norfolk to the Hampton Inn to cancel a reservation for a meeting that we had planned in Norfolk, so I'm on the phone to the Hampton Inn. I had just talked to PETTY OFFICER LEWIS and PETTY OFFICER WILLIAMS about this same trip and I had asked them to come into the office because there were some problems with the orders and we were going to make some amendments and cancel part of the reservation. They were standing by my desk as I'm on the phone and at that time, as I learned later, was 9:38, which was the attack on the Pentagon. I heard a very large crump-thump noise. It was just a single noise. It wasn't a sliding-type impact or a succession of events or anything. It was just one loud, sharp report and at the same time, the lights went out. There is a large volume of acrid black smoke and everything in the room concussed from the--the plane actually came, I guess, right across the Command Center. Part of the plane--the rescue team that came in said when they shined the light up into the overhead, they saw portions of the plane cockpit from the landing gear. From my perspective, I am sitting in my chair. I am immediately struck. At the same time I heard the noise, felt the smoke, it's a complete sensation that I'm hit. All this stuff falls on top of me. I'm sitting upright in the seat and my head was pinned against my left shoulder with a massive weight on top of my head and I can't move in any direction. Smoke is coming and getting thicker. I'm trying to--I called for help. PETTY OFFICER LEWIS and PETTY OFFICER WILLIAMS hear me, but they are also under debris and they can't move. So, I'm sitting there, probably, for about 15 minutes. I don't know at this time that JACK PUNCHES has--PETTY OFFICER LEWIS subsequently told me that while I'm on the phone, JACK got up and walked out of my office to take care of some business in the Command Center and that was at the exact

instant of the attack so he was killed, I think, instantly. I don't know this so I'm still calling out to him to see if he is injured, or if he can assist me, or if I can get any kind of recognition out of him. Of course, I never heard anything from him, but I continued this for the entire portion that I was in there, trying to converse with him, talking to the two petty officers there. We were all just calling for help continuously. While I'm doing this, I'm kind of working the debris that's on my left side that's holding--my head was against this, but it was in between another large segment. I think probably about 15 minutes of this position, I managed to pull some objects loose from the left hand side which gave me enough room to get my head out from whatever was pinning my head down. So, then I'm just pinned at the waist. I had freedom below my waist. I could move my legs. I kept trying to exercise them because I didn't want them to go to sleep and if I had any opportunity to get out I wanted to be able to be mobile. I guess I left out one portion, my wife had called just before I called Norfolk. She called and told me that they knew about the Twin Towers and had we gotten any advice to vacate or to get out of the building. I said, "No, everything is being reacted to here, but we haven't had any guidance yet."

Q. (818) Had it ever occurred to you that the Pentagon might be a potential target at the time?

A. It hadn't occurred to me. I hadn't even thought about it, but I knew instantly what it was. I didn't think it was a bomb. I knew instinctively it was another airplane that had hit us. I guess the black smoke was a clue to me subconsciously because I knew it was burning fuel and airplane stuff and things were still falling out. My guess is that took about 15 minutes.

Q. (826) What is going through your mind while you're there trying to work your way out?

A. The first thing that was going through my mind was that the pain was absolutely incredible with all the stuff on top of me. I could feel blood running down my arm so I knew I was wounded, but I didn't know where or how much. I knew that I couldn't stay conscious a long period of time with the position I was in and the pain I was in, so I was trying to get some relief any way I could; trying to get help from anybody. Unbeknownst to me--because you could not see--it was totally black, absolutely zero light available except that there were fires burning all around so you had a kind of illumination effect, but you can't see anything because of the density of the smoke, so I couldn't even see what was pinning me down. I could feel that it was a very heavy structure and that I was not going to move it myself. A comment about that, I guess you look at fortuitous things kind of strangely, but fortunately, this massive thing (they think it was my desk) shifted aft and the top portion of it came across into my lap. It was lying across the chair arms, so it never actually crushed my body. It was so heavy I couldn't shake it or move it or anything, but it was sitting on top of this government chair resting on these two little round wheels underneath there. I can't do anything to get out of that and it's so confining that I can't move my body or get any push to move out of it, so I'm just stuck here.

Q. (853) How is breathing?

A. Breathing was hard to begin with and got more difficult as the time went on so that at one point after I'd freed my head and we were still calling for help it struck me that I

probably had about five more minutes alive because I didn't think I could--I was coughing so much. As you breathe this stuff in it displaces the air in your lungs and the smoke remains there, but the air pockets are not there so that each breath becomes harder and shorter and so you are choked and strangling. I'd been calling for help for so long; that the smoke was quite toxic so your throat is burning and all. You can imagine you are trying to be as loud as you can to get somebody's attention, so your voice is getting weaker and scratchier. I could just barely talk by the time this is over. So about that time was the really heavy boiling black smoke. It had been heavy before, but you could almost reach out and grab a handful of smoke it is so heavy. I can't move to see what was behind me, but I could feel the flames at my back. Again, I'm in this government chair and I guess it was fire retardant because I didn't sustain any burns from the flames. While this part is going on, as I said, I think I've got about five more minutes of life left and then I'm all through. I just didn't think I could breathe any longer. I was out of resources. The two people beside me, Petty Officer LEWIS and Petty Officer WILLIAMS were no longer talking to me. I couldn't even hear them coughing now. We'd all been coughing all this time. It was totally silent in the room there. While this is happening, there is a small working party of people who have been going up and down who have been trying to find people they could help. My room is completely sealed. The entrance to my room was at the back so it caught the brunt of everything that came out of the overhead and all the things in the room that shifted aft, so there is no more exit/entryway and nobody would have ever gotten through to me that way.

Q. (894) You could hear them going around?

A. I didn't hear anybody. I couldn't tell that anybody had heard us call. I never heard another voice during this, other than the two people that are here with me.

Q. (897) When you think, I might have five minutes left, what is going through your mind?

A. I guess people expect you to say I'm thinking of my God or my family, but really, I was putting all my energy into trying to get out of there and I never really went into a phase where I was just reflecting on, "Well, this is it." I'm trying to do something that's going to benefit me and get me out of there. I just didn't spend any time philosophizing. I just accepted that you got to continue to call out because you don't have any other recourse. You are stuck here. If somebody doesn't get you out, you're not getting out. So I'm still hollering, "Help!" Again, that was my good fortune because there's a group outside the command center. This is a cinderblock wall and they are on the other side of it. I guess one of the main mounts of the airplane had hit right outside my office so it made a hole in the office. There is a small hole that went all the way through into my office. The guy said the tire was lying there by the side so they knew what made the hole. They could hear someone calling for help. Two guys took a pole or something and enlarged the hole enough to where they could get through it. They are going through an electrical compartment that still has hot wires and the fire main for the command center's water system had ruptured. The airplane went through that, so they are standing in water going through these loose electrical cables. So it's hot and they are getting kind of shocked. It is amazing that people would go through that to begin with, but they did. They had to go through fire. A couple of them got fire extinguishers and put the fire out.

As they came into the office, somehow they acquired these little penlights and that's the first light I had seen. I can see the little pen light moving and they are illuminating saying, "Is anybody in here?" And I said, "Yeah, I am." So one of these guys comes across —across—the room is just a pile of rubble. It is still falling from the overhead. The flames are melting the solder in the overhead so all this stuff is falling down and guys are getting little holes burned in them as they are coming in. One of them crawls through this little tunnel across to where I am, shines this light on me and says, "There's a guy alive here," and I was still saying, "Help." He says, "I'm a doctor and I'm here to get you out." Boy, those are the best words I've ever heard in my life. I mean, at this point I felt like I'm going to get out of this. Still, I can barely converse. I'm choking, strangling.

Doctor DAVID TARANTINO, the flight surgeon that was at my side there looked at my situation. He tried the wood that was in my lap--couldn't move it. He lay on his back beside my chair, put his feet up against it and did a leg press on it. At the same time, Captain DAVE THOMAS, who had come in behind him, and who I never saw--

Tarantino was the only guy I saw. I vividly remember his feet up against these and his skinny little legs going up there. DAVE THOMAS puts his back against the same structure on the other side and together they lifted this thing about maybe--it felt it moved maybe an inch or so which was enough for me to get pressure on my chair arm and pull myself over the side to the point where they could drag me out.

As we start out, my leg catches on the cables to my printer, I think, big, heavy cables, so we had to disengage that part. On the outside the Air Force Surgeon General, Lieutenant General CARLTON was with his rescue party. The two guys that saved me weren't part of any organized party. They just happened to come together. They didn't know each

other and had never seen each other. Captain DAVE THOMAS, in fact, as they got out, reached over to TARANTINO and ripped his nametag off and said, "I want to remember you." He still has the nametag today. There's a SEAL Commander by the name CRAIG POWELL who has been at the entranceway holding up a portion of the roof, I guess, or whatever he can so that we would have a safe exit. He continued to hold this structure up until I got out; THOMAS got out behind me. I'd told TARANTINO that I thought JACK PUNCHES was still in there, so TARANTINO was trying to find another body in there. The two petty officers that were with me were able to--the light probably at the same time I did. They managed to crawl across the debris while TARANTINO was coming across this way. They exited and went across the same hole, so they were safe. They took me out the hole. They had a litter out there, put me on the litter and took me out to the center courtyard. There was a triage team there. That's when I learned I had holes in my head and face. They thought, with all the blood that was down my arm, that there were injuries there. I couldn't sit up my neck was so strained from all the trauma. They thought my neck or back was broken so they put me in a splint. They sent me in an ambulance to the emergency care center at Pentagon City. I really got good treatment there. They sewed me up and took x-rays of me. The x-rays looked like I had some neck injuries. They sent me to Arlington Hospital. I went into the emergency room. It was just like you see on ER. There must have been 50 people there taking X-rays, CAT scans, blood, giving me oxygen. So I was cared for very well there for about four days. The worst part was the smoke getting my lungs, being able to breathe right, and getting my voice back, and all that. I was there about four days.

Q. (20) How many stitches did you get?

A. I don't know. You can hardly tell. I've got a dermatology thing going on right now. This is nothing to do with the incident. The stitches were mostly in the back of the head and behind the ear and across the chin. They did such a great job that hardly any of it shows anymore. When I first looked at myself in the mirror I thought, "My God, you are never going to be normal again," because the cheekbone had been compressed against some object so my eye was swollen and closed on the left side and I had a big gouge out of my chin which they sewed up. My right ear looked like it was deformed. It was completely black and it stayed black for a couple of weeks. It took all the trauma from whatever it was that fell on top of me. I was completely black except for the bloody parts. I looked like I'd been swimming in the smoke. Even as long as four months, I still get little pieces of carbon when I'm cleaning my ears, because I guess all the stuff went inside there I'll still get a little flecks of carbon that came out of my ear canal.

Q. (45) What about the lungs. How did they treat you for that?

A. They gave me medication and oxygen for a couple of days. The lungs repaired themselves. They kick all this stuff out. I was spitting big, black clumps of crude for two or three days. You're just coughing and constantly bringing this stuff up. I had an evaluation at Walter Reed a few weeks after I was released home and I've got 100% lung capacity. I am able to golf and run, and do all those things, so I'm recovering pretty well.

Q. (60) Are there any long-range implications from the smoke and debris?

A.: I don't know. I guess a lot of this stuff we're going to just have to wait and see. I think psychologically, that's another issue, too. I have had one dream, but I was really concerned that I would have recurring nightmares and live through this over and over, and I haven't done that. You think about this. It just comes back to you spontaneously; not that you try to think about it, but it keeps coming back. I think there were 45 people lost in the command center there and those were people you work with every day and you miss them. Different things come up to make you think about them and think about the event. Walter Reed was very good. They visited me in the hospital with a team from their Psychology Department. They wanted to spend time with me and try to help me through this. I didn't feel the need for it then. They periodically call me at home and ask me how I'm doing. I think I'm doing okay. I ask my family and the people I work with to let me know if I start acting strange, because a lot of times you aren't the best judge of your mental stability. I was very anxious to get back to work. I felt like I needed to get back to a regimen in the things that I deal with. It's what I do. I wanted to be back in the Pentagon because the work I do wouldn't be effective working from the Annex or the Navy Yard or someplace like that, so we worked very hard. The guys on my staff were literally without homes for about three weeks while I was in the hospital and recovering at home. We stayed in touch with each other. The budget guys managed to go to work at the Annex, working with our counterparts in the Marine Corp, so they had a workstation and a telephone and they could continue to try and build back the files. Other members were floaters. They just worked out of the Pentagon, or the Annex; out of a suitcase or briefcase. We all linked with cell phones and stayed in touch with each other. The people that we work with in OSD fundamentally were also displaced and were moved over to

Crystal City. It took them awhile to set up, so it took us probably six weeks to find our place back in the building, get our workstations, put everything back together where we could interact with all the people in the field that we deal with. I guess one other thing I would comment on, was maybe--I feel that I've come back pretty easily. I think a lot of it was due to the support structure I had. My family is very close and they've been with me constantly. I got calls from virtually everybody I've ever known or worked with; kids I went to high school with, went to college with, played football with, people in my early squadrons, throughout the various deployments and squadrons, interagency people I work with or have worked with over the years. I was so busy from the time I got well, even in the hospital, and that support was important, too. I got Governor GILMORE--I got a big bouquet from the President. I know it came from his protocol people but he must have told somebody to send it. The Secretary of the Army, the Chief of Staff of the Army, the Commanding General at Walter Reed; just layers of people came to express support and ask how I was doing. It kept me busy. It made me appreciate that somebody cared out there. I was never by myself from the instant I was pulled out. While I was in the emergency care center, there was a Sergeant off the Marine Corps staff that had made his way to the emergency center. It had nothing to do with them. He just came in and asked how he could help. He was kind of holding my hand and just standing there while the other doctors were treating other people. That was very important to me, that I was never left alone and I had somebody to talk to and somebody that cared that I was still alive. The staff at each of these places was superb and has been throughout. It was very important for me to interact with all these people and for them to tell me that they were glad that I survived and they were thinking about me.

Q. (176) How did your wife hear about what had happened?

A. That was another important thing. Of course, as soon as she heard the Pentagon had been attacked, everybody heard about it the same time.

Q. (181) Did she know where your office was?

A.: She knew exactly where my office was and the fact that she was unable to call. She had already talked to me once. I keep my cell phone on so people can always get me if my line is busy. She wasn't getting an answer to anything, so she was concerned but didn't know what to do or who to talk to. From the time I got out to the center courtyard to being on the ambulance to being cared for by the triage team probably wasn't more than 15 minutes. It happened—carried out and the ambulance immediately went over there. So it happened pretty fast. As soon as I was able to articulate to them who my next of kin was, they called her and told her I was there and I was being treated and they were taking care of me and that I was coherent. By the next time they called her, I was cleaned up a little and sewed up and they let me talk to her. I told her I was going to be okay. They told her they were taking me to Arlington (hospital), but they were aware of what the traffic situation was like and they told her to stay at home and they would keep her advised. When I got to Arlington after they had stabilized things and figured I wasn't going to die--my wife and son and daughter and daughter-in-law were there as I was being taken out of the ER up to the room where I was going to spend the rest of the week. That was very comforting to me and to all of us to be together. They could see I was going to make it.

Q. (Side 2; 225) Can you describe those moments for us?

A. They were actually in the ER itself. My son was the first one I could see. He is 6'4". In fact, he works for DEA. DEA is right across the street from the Pentagon and the whole time I was being treated in the emergency clinic he was on the street right across the street from me, not knowing because the cell phones weren't working at that point. He had to make his way home and link up with my wife and put all this stuff together. It actually happened pretty fast when you think of all the stuff that was going on. I guess they got to me about five o'clock in the afternoon, so we're talking about seven hours. Throughout this whole thing, the pain wasn't all that important anymore. I knew I was in good hands and that I was going to come through all this so I was in kind of an elated feeling category. I was very happy to be alive and really aware of all the good fortune I had. There were so many angles to this that could have gone either way that I am just extremely blessed to be here. If the debris had struck me in the front instead of at the back, or if it had been such a situation where I couldn't get relief for my head, if the piece across my lap had actually fallen before it got to the chair arms, it would have crushed my legs, pinned me in and nobody would ever have gotten me out. If it had gone a little bit further, it would have crushed my torso. I am a really lucky guy. That's about all I can think of unless you have more for me.

Q. (251) Had you been in any close calls in Vietnam or during our flights?

A. I think just regular flight operations day and night. The airplanes I flew were kind of unforgiving. The come aboard weight was 50,000 pounds, so you couldn't exceed that or

you would overstress the airplane. The equipment that we loaded on the airplane was such that sometimes we only had one pass at the deck. When you get an airplane in front of you that hangs up in the gear, you automatically have to go up and tank. So, just in daily and nightly flying ops you're living with a potential catastrophe each time. Every time you go up to take gas, if the tanker doesn't work or if the hose fouls, or something like that and you can't take gas and remember, you've only got one more pass--so you go to all this trouble to join the tanker and take enough gas to come back, but you still only have one more pass. If you miss the wire, you have to go up and do it again. That's a kind of stressful life. I flew a lot of missions at night in Laos where you're trying to survey the Ho Chi Minh trail through all these course ridges. We took infrared photography but the sensors were only effective under 1,000 feet, so you are usually flying about 800 feet and the course ridges are 2,000 feet and you are in the dark making your way up. That will get your heart pounding. The strikes that we flew against truck parks and things like that were usually pretty heavily defended. We were the first--we would go in and take pictures of the--pre-strike photography, so they always knew that there was going to be an unarmed group coming through and they would just have at you. You would see all the flak coming up and you'd think, it's going to be a real thrill getting through that. And it seems impossible sometimes when the stuff is so thick and you can see it coming up. It looks like water out of a fire hose because you can see the tracers, the things that gunners use to aim with. So, the recce (reconnaissance) plane goes through and takes pictures and goes up while the attack group goes in and thumps them. They put their head down and they know when the bombs quit falling that the recce guys are going to come through

again so if they got anything left they give it back to you then. It was kind of the everyday facts of missions.

Q. (285) Well, surviving all that and surviving this event, you must think you have a new lease on life.

A. Yes, exactly. You don't worry so much about the kind of things you worried about before. You realize that most of that stuff just isn't important. Family and friends and being together with people is much more important to me than I had realized before.

Q. (291) You said it took several weeks to get yourselves back up and functioning as an organization. You lead your organization. How has that impacted your approach to your work? You lost people out of your office. You have a different office now.

A. Yes, a different office. My deputy and I worked together six years. He actually came to the Pentagon as my boss. He was the head of the branch. Subsequently, we reorganized and created a new division and he became the deputy to the admiral for that position. So I worked for him as a branch head, then I worked for him as the deputy director and we kept that relationship until he retired last June or July. I hired him then as my deputy, so we had this working relationship that was a partnership. There was never really any boss/employee relationship. The main thing is that aside from missing him as a friend I had a guy that had been trained for six years and who knew everything I knew. We worked together as a team, so I don't have that anymore. The things that I do are not traditional warfare type stuff. It takes a long time to learn the different law enforcement organizations and government structures and funding lines and things like that. When I

bring a new action officer in it usually takes me about a year to train him to be self-sufficient and I can give him an assignment and he can do it. Usually you have to work through them. That part of the job is a lot more arduous now because I have to do more things for myself that I used to split up between the two of us. It is important for us to travel because we interface with lots of different organizations and we have to be on the road a lot. With two of us, I could always depend on him to look after the store while I was on the road, or I could send him on the road and he could do the same things I could do. That part of the job is a lot different now than it was before.

Q. (325) Will you be getting a replacement?

A. I have deliberately not hired anybody because I've been waiting to see how the new administration and new Homeland Defense would go; maybe I would want a different type guy. While I procrastinated, the budget cycle caught me and they took 27 billets away, probably to use for Home Defense. His billet was one of the billets I lost there, so I won't be hiring anyone in. I had brought another guy on as an ADSW billet that I am kind of using in the same capacity and he's coming up to speed and learning the system. Other than that, we are pretty much the same group we were before. I'm a packrat. I'd saved virtually every document that I've ever received for the last 23-years. When we were in the old command center, I had two big, times two, cabinets that were completely filled with archives, which really served me well because over the years some of the events you don't have a clear recollection of it. You know there was a document that was signed by CAP WEINBERGER that established certain things and frequently you are called upon to answer, "Why are we doing this?" well, we're doing this because

Secretary LEHMAN said we would do it. We spent about four months before we moved out of the Command Center going through every file and pulling out all those documents that we considered critical and we scanned each one of them and put them all on CD-ROMS thinking that we've always got a copy of these things. Sure enough, they burned with everything else. We'd gotten rid of the big cabinets because of space confines in the new Command Center, we just didn't have the luxury of all the big cabinets and everything like that, so we'd cut all the files down. I still had a whole room full of files that I considered important documents. All that was burned, so we've spent the last four months recreating files from things we had e-mailed to people in the fleet so we've had them e-mail us back and we are rebuilding the archives to the extent that we can.

Q. (360) What was it like getting back and seeing DAVE TARANTINO, DICK THOMAS?

A. I guess one thing I didn't think of. While I was in the hospital--you know I'd never seen these people, I'm carried out on my back. As soon as I got out in the courtyard, all I could see was the sky because they've got me pinned to this litter, and the sky was absolutely crystal blue and I'd just come from this horrible environment so nothing ever looked so good to me as just being outside and having the sun reflect like that. That was big. I didn't know who pulled me out. I didn't know how I got out. I didn't know these guys. I should have made more of the incredible bravery of these guys. I've been on ships for 20 years and I understand damage control and fire parties and things like that, but I know those guys have got the equipment to deal with it and all. These guys didn't have anything. They didn't have any breathing apparatus: They had some wet t-shirts they

slung over their head. They had a fire extinguisher that they pulled off the wall, but they had nothing but courage coming in there and I guess you had to be in the environment to appreciate how brave that was. Stuff was still falling. Fire is all over. The rubble that they crawled across was unsound. Things are burning them and with all that they kept coming because they knew there was a guy in there who was still breathing...just an incredible act of bravery. I thought their awards were well below what they deserved. I thought it was enemy action and they should have had the Navy Cross for what they did. Anyway, I'm in the hospital and somehow NBC learned of my story and I'm not sure how they did, but they came and interviewed me and did a little piece that they put on MSNBC. It was on local channels. I did that not because I wanted everybody to see my picture, but I wanted to see if I could find out who rescued me. Sure enough from that interview and the publicity we learned who the saviors were. Then MSNBC did the follow-on where they came to our house and showed us rendezvousing there. That was a wonderful time for me because I really wanted to meet those guys again and I wanted my family to meet them. I've had them over for dinner and we talk. I'd like to adopt them, but I see them all I can. I'll be forever grateful to them. I was definitely a dead guy if they hadn't come in after me. There was no way I was getting out of there. By the way, as we cleared the room and Commander POWELL stepped aside, I understand the whole structure collapsed and I think I was the last guy who came out of that particular area. If you haven't talked to PAUL BRADY and TRIPP LLOYD, then you'll appreciate their part of the story, because they were on the other side of my wall. The airplane knocked holes in their structure so they just stepped out of the Command Center into the passageway. They weren't pinned under anything. Again, God was looking after a bunch of us that day.

Q. (417) Have you stayed in touch with Ms. PUNCHES?

A. I have, but it's a little bit awkward. I'm alive, JACK isn't. So I try not to have a whole lot of direct involvement because I think she'll always have that perception. I talk to people who are close to her and keep up with what the family is doing and whether anybody can help. Jack was kind of a special guy. He was the backbone of the family. They depended on him for everything. They called about three or four times a day—"my computer died," or, "the boss is giving me crap, what do I say to him?" He'd just kind of pulled the strings and did the family planning and financing, so it's a huge transition for them without him. They were a very close family. He golfed with his son, went to ballgames as a family and things like that. It's a huge void. I think they came from the VP community. Jack flew P-3s. You don't have a whole lot of accidents in the VP community. You don't lose shipmates and you don't think a whole lot about loss of family. My community—we lost people just continuously, and it's not that you get calloused with those kinds of things, but you understand that they happen and that life has to go on. My wife accepted my situation. She is a very strong person and accepted things just the way I would have expected her to. She, consequently, was a big help to me in making the transition back to life.

Q. (449) Jerry, anything else you would like to add for the historical record?

A. I can't think of anything.

Q. We appreciate you taking the time to be with us today. You passed a very important part of the story and made it very real.

A. I was told by the first team from Walter Reed that it's good to talk this out and to tell your story to people. I've told it several times. I hope I tell it the same way every time. I think that was good advice. It's not something you need to sit and ponder and think about yourself. You need to talk to other people about it.

Thank you, Jerry.

Transcribed by:
Carol Barfield for Tim Ayoub
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