

**Naval Historical Center
Oral Interview Summary Form**

Interviewers:

CAPT Michael McDaniel

Interviewer's Organization:

Navy Historical Center

Interviewee:

CAPT(sel) James "Mike" Spence

Current Address:

██████████
██████████

Work – OPNAV N31X (Future Ops)

Date of Interview:

29 Nov 01

Place of Interview:

Pentagon

Number of Cassettes:

Two

Security Classification:

Unclassified

Name of Project: Pentagon Terrorist Attack Incident

Subject Terms/Key Words: Pentagon; Terrorist Attack; 11 September 2001; triage; evacuation; lessons learned; Defense Protective Service; FBI; carnage; Navy Command Center; renovation

Abstract of Interview:

Interviewee Information:

CAPT(sel) Spence was born in ██████████, TN while his father, an Avionics Technician, was stationed at NAS Millington as an instructor at the Naval Training Center. They moved all over, including Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and Japan. Received an appointment to the Naval Academy, class of 1980. He majored in engineering and picked up his call sign "Trapper" for champion mouse catching. Attended flight school in Pensacola. Went to Kingsville, TX to continue flight training and received his wings. He was selected for A-7's and reported to VA-174 in Jacksonville, FL, then VA-66. Was stationed in Fallon, NE at the Naval Strike Warfare Center. From there he went to a Battle Group Staff in Norfolk, VA. After this tour he transitioned to the FA-18. Was stationed on the USS Saratoga in the Red Sea during Desert Shield/Desert Storm. From there he went to VF-41 as Admin/Operations/Maintenance Officer. Went to the Naval War College and then to SACLANT Headquarters in Belgium. After this tour he went to VFA-22 as the Executive Officer and later Commanding Officer. From there he received orders to the Pentagon. Received a fellowship to go to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a defense and security think tank in Washington, D.C. to start in Sept 01. He was getting ready to move to that new job. They had just moved into their new spaces in the Pentagon in the renovated section.

Topics Discussed:

On 11 Sep they had been in their new spaces, space 4D470, for about one month. About 0830 people started calling the people in his office telling them about what was happening in New York. They didn't have any TV's in their spaces so they didn't know anything about it. Suddenly there was a large boom and the building physically shook. The people who had

cubicles facing the E ring saw the smoke cloud. They assumed it was a bomb. The lights went out but there was light coming in the windows to help them see. The prerecorded message calling for evacuation came on as well as the warning sirens.

He followed people into the hallway, which was dark, with no lights. At the end of the passageway there were windows that provided some light. Looking up towards the E ring he saw smoke up there. His damage control training took over and he went left (instead of right with the evacuees) towards the E ring. He wanted to make sure no one was injured or to see if he could help anyone. The smoke was thick so he got down on his hands and knees. This is where many of the flag officers for the Navy and Marine Corps had their offices. Most of the doors there are generally locked because of classified material. The only door open was the Marine general counsel's office. There were a few other people there with him. They were yelling down the passageway trying to let people know they were there to help and then listening for any response. He couldn't find anyone in the Marine general counsel's office and the smoke was getting thicker. He crawled back to the fourth corridor and then towards the center courtyard of the Pentagon.

In the center courtyard there were a number of people coming out who were very badly burned. He tried to help the medical people with the injured people, treating for shock. He then tried to go back into the building to help get people out of the building, but was stopped by security people.

They followed some other people back into the building into the alleyway between the B and C rings of the Pentagon. The plane basically crashed between the fourth and fifth corridor going all the way through the E and D ring with the cockpit fuselage area stopping in the C ring. It was an inferno there because the airplane had come to rest with its nose up against the back wall of the C ring. That was the back wall of the Navy Command Center. When they got there a dozen Navy officers as well of some Army officers and civilians were there trying to fight the fire with CO2 fire extinguishers. There was a big hole seven or eight feet wide that had been blown out with a raging fire inside it. It was clear there was fire above this area in the second and third deck. They were trying to fight their way back into the building with hand held fire extinguishers. There were people running off to bring fire extinguishers back. There were no fire hoses, no fire stations as would have been on a ship. There was water everywhere from water pipes bursting. Every once in awhile things would fall down. On top of that the security folks kept telling them that there were rumors of another plane coming towards them and everyone needed to get out. So they'd leave and as soon as the security folks left they would go back into the building. Everyone was pitching in as much as they could, but there was little they could do. There were people doing some superhuman things to get people out of the Navy Command Center but by they time CAPT(SEL) Spence got there everyone who could be gotten out was out of that space. The insides of the building were totally enveloped in fire. This is now 35-40minutes after the attack.

When the civilian firefighters showed up they moved them back into the courtyard and organized them into stretcher teams. They picked up stretchers and followed the firefighters back into the alleyway as they brought their hoses up. They had to lay hoses from outside the Pentagon, through the center courtyard and into the damaged spaces. They were fighting the fire on the inside while the firefighters waited for their hoses to be ready. While they waited they went into the building with their respirators looking for injured people. They couldn't find anyone so they secured the area to allow the hose teams to come in and moved the stretcher teams out into the

center courtyard. It was now about 1030 or 1100. The stretcher teams waited in the center courtyard for another hour or so. The FBI team came by and collected pieces of the airplane that had blown into the center courtyard, and they helped them pick up some of that. About 1300 they wanted to move stretcher teams outside from the center courtyard. They went to the South Parking area and walked around to the side where the impact had occurred. This was the first time he had been outside the Pentagon since he arrived that morning. It was full of rescue teams and firefighters. By this time the E and D rings had collapsed and he realized that was where he had been crawling around trying to find people. They held them there until 1600 and then let them go, as there was nothing for them to do.

He got in contact with his wife who works at the Washington Medical Center in downtown Washington, D.C. He was unable reach her earlier. He had called a friend's wife, since his wife was in a new job and he didn't have her work phone number, and asked her to hunt down his wife to let her know he was okay. He gave a few people a ride home.

The rest of his division had mustered on the outside of the building. Since a few of them had stayed in the building to help no one in the division had seen them since the incident so they were concerned about their being unaccounted for. There were messages when he got home to call his boss to let him know all was all right.

He then was told they would all get together at the Navy Annex the next morning to see what they could do. The Secretary of Defense and the President wanted to show that it was business as usual and life was going to go on. Even though the Navy staff had been decimated they were still getting taskers from the Office of the Secretary of Defense the next morning that needed to be answered in terms of what they would do next, what they needed and what known shortfalls could be addressed in terms of procurement and money.

On 26 Sep, his transfer date to go to his fellowship, he checked in with VADM Keating's staff to see what he could do to help. The whole N5 organization and the Navy Command Center had been at ground zero and basically decimated. CAPT(SEL) Spence and Capt Lee Johnson were picking up those responsibilities for the N5 organization that needed to be done. In N5 many of the people were either lost in the attack or performing CACO duties and going to memorial services and funerals. As those people came back and could pick up their functions CAPT(SEL) Spence went to work for ADM Crowder in what would become Future OPS and what was needed in the new situation they found themselves in.

Here he discusses some stories he was told by various people who survived. This includes people comparing notes about how they escaped from the Command Center as well as the story of a flight surgeon (LCDR Tarantino) who moved ceiling beams to free people who were caught.

It is very gratifying to see the impromptu memorial that was set up at the foot of the hill by the Navy Annex overlooking the Pentagon to memorialize the Pentagon victims. Also churches, schools and other organizations have been sending cards, letters and posters of support in to the Pentagon, a place many of these people have never even been.

Abstracted by:
CAPT(SEL) Carol O'Hagan
4 Dec 01

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Topics Discussed:

Q. (44:19) Before we go into the events of 11 September tell me what you're doing now and how that focus changed from -

A. Well, after 11 September, obviously all or most of the Navy staff spaces were destroyed either by the impact or the resultant fire and water and all that. We moved up to the Navy Annex to do our job up there. As with most of the other divisions that had been in the area, I saw in, well let me go back, when the Federal Executive Fellows for the Navy—there was about a dozen selected each year and parceled out to various different organizations, they report to N51, the Strategy Division of the Navy staff. So they are the reporting senior for the Federal Executive Fellows.

Q. (45:11) I didn't realize that. OK.

A. So I was due, because of its, because of the linkage to the strategy people up at, I mean we have guys out working for Harvard and the Rand Corporation, and Atlantic Counsel and all these places, and your job there is basically as a Federal Executive Fellow is to absorb as much of the civilian side of policy making as you can. Then you have a responsibility to write policy (the transcription sound level drops off) and strategy related events that might be of interest to the Navy in hopes that you can bring that experience back to the Navy in their strategy and policy shops, either at the Pentagon level or out in the fleets, or whatever. So it's kind of on-the-job training. It's kind of an educational experience. Also as a fleet aviator or as a Navy guy, you were over there with the civilians trying to impart to them, you know, what it's like being on a carrier. What a carrier can and can't do. What ships do and submarines and all, all the rest of that. So it's pretty much a two-way street.

Anyway, my reporting senior was N51, and working also for N3/5, Admiral, VICE-ADMIRAL KEATING. Well we were all over in the same, all been put basically in the same spaces up in the Navy Annex, because we had all been pushed out of the, out of the Pentagon. I knew ADMIRAL KEATING because he was an ex-A-7, ex-F-18 guy. I knew him. I told him, "Hey, I'm coming to work for you in a couple of weeks anyway." N52 and the Navy Command Center took the largest hits and had the most casualties so I knew that they needed people, and I said, "I'm going to be working for you anyway, if you need somebody to come over here and help out," you know, "I'm here."

He said, "Roger that." I was selected to come to N31 and join in a ad-hoc group to parallel some things that were going on down in the Joint Staff in what we now call "Future Operations," as a bridge between the current operations group that works basically the Navy Command Center and works issues on-going with deploying ships and deploying personnel, and the strategy guys on the Navy staff who are really looking you know, way out into the future. There was a gap in the service staffs having to do with operational planning, you know, operations that we might want to conduct anywhere from six weeks to two or three or five years down the road. Because of Title 10 restrictions and other things going on, the service chiefs here in the Pentagon aren't really tasked to get involved in operational planning. That's the job of the Theater CINCs, the Theater Commander in Chiefs. Whether it be CINCCENT or CINCEUR, those are the guys that do operational planning

Well, now because of the world-wide global war on terrorism and the world-wide war on terrorism, there was a need to have representatives on the service staffs who looked at those operational planning issues, along with the Joint Staff, because we were going to be coordinating cross areas of responsibilities or cross-CINC issues. You know there may be in this war against

terrorism, a number of operations that are going on all the way around the globe. You know, you have an anti-terrorism operations going on in South America while at the same time you're trying to clean up Afghanistan, while at the same time something is happening out in the Pacific. Well, all of those CINCs are going to be vying for the same, the same resources and there are going to be issues that go between the CINCs that need to be coordinated. So that got picked up by both the Joint Staff and the service staffs, under the heading of Future Ops.

I was asked to join CAPTAIN LEE JOHNSON who was the senior uniform Navy member at the Center for Naval Analysis. He was brought in as well, and we became the nucleus of what is now called N31X or the Future Ops cell working for ADMIRAL CROWDER in the N31, in the N31 shop.

We have picked up other folks along the way, some in-house to N3/5. We also have some folks TAD from the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center and we got some folks who are normally attached to the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, as well as some Intel guys and some reservists. So we're now up to about eight folks that are working emergent issues related to the global war on terrorism.

Currently one of my collateral duties is as the Navy staff liaison to the Joint Staff Future Operations Group and we're working those kinds of issues, imparting to them a naval perspective on those cross-CINC coordination issues that are going to be necessary to fight terrorism really around the globe.

So, I was asked to do that and I've been doing that since the first of October, end of September and I will, I may be doing that for the rest of my time in Washington, or after the first of the year, if they get some more people involved and some more manpower I may be released to go complete the second half of my fellowship.

I was selected for Captain back in the spring and then I just screened for an air wing command, air wing major command a couple of weeks ago.

Q. (51:26) That's great.

A. So I'm waiting to hear, waiting to hear where I'm going to go and what the timing for all that is going to be, but here, you know, doing what's necessary and what's required as we pretty much go into this new phase of warfare that we're, that we've been thrust into.

Q. (51:51) Obviously historical in nature. History is being written right before your very eyes.

A. Yes.

Q. (51:54) And you're actually a big part of that so it's exciting to hear that. Let's go to the day of 11 September.

A. OK.

Q. (52:02) Let's walk through some of that and then if we have some time we'll talk more about some of the focus now, but we may want to come back at some later time. We'll maybe come up with some air, a perspective of that aspect as well.

A. Sure.

Q. (52:14) Kind of continue your part of all this. Take me through 11 September, where you were that day, and just kind of walk me through the whole day, even from your commute on it.

A. Right. As I said, I'd been extended on duty with N801 and we had just moved, we'd been in our new spaces just off the 4th corridor in the Pentagon. Been there about a month, sitting at my desk doing my normal, you know, eight to nine o'clock morning things. Getting involved re email and getting ready for the day's activities. It was a nice day, you know, early September, started to cool off and really life was good.

About, I guess 8:30, nine o'clock the phones started ringing on people's desks and it was essentially loved ones calling to ask if they had heard what had happened in New York. I guess that was just after nine o'clock. We didn't have any TVs or anything in the large workspace. Basically we worked in cubicles inside a large space. Everybody had a computer on their desk and all the rest of that, but we didn't have any TVs. People started calling from the outside to ask if we knew what was happening. If we knew what had happened. And I think there was a sense, probably from a loved-ones perspective and a spouse's perspective that the Pentagon might be a target as all this was going on.

It didn't even dawn on me, or I didn't even realize, you know, it didn't even cross my mind that the Pentagon might be a likely target. In fact we weren't even sure at that point what had really happened in New York. The first we had heard was that an airplane had crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center and everybody, I think, assumed that it was an accident. That it was some kind of air traffic control thing. We heard that it was actually a small airplane that had crashed, a commuter type airplane or possibly a private airplane. I was sitting at my desk basically going over the internet reading the news reports on the internet trying to find out what had happened. A lot of other people were doing the same thing. There were conversations going back and forth about what had happened. I think about that time the word came in that the second tower had been hit and it was pretty obvious that this was not a coincidence, that this was

not simply an accident, and I think at that point some of the news organizations coming over the internet started reporting that as well. So we all in the shop knew something was going on but we weren't really sure you know, how large it was, or I don't think really realized that we might be in harm's way.

All of a sudden there was a large boom and the building you know, physically shook. The guys who had their pukas, or their cubicles that faced out toward the E ring, looked out and could see, basically a large smoke cloud that had arisen from the point of impact, which as I faced the front of the building would have been to our right.

Q. (55:31) What room were you in?

A. We were on the, we were on, our office was 4D470, I think was basically the office space. So it was just outboard of the 4th corridor on the fourth deck on the D ring, which is the next ring in the Pentagon, in from the E ring which is the outside ring.

So in terms of direct distance we were above, three floors above and probably about fifty to a hundred feet off set to one side of where the airplane actually impacted. For reference if you remember looking at the Pentagon after the attack, when they unfurled the big American flag that was hanging on the outside of the Pentagon, my office was just behind that American flag. And the 4th corridor which was just inboard of our office and was basically our entry in and out of our space, was sort of the demarcation of where most of the major damage and the major fire damage occurred to the Pentagon and where actually the building actually collapsed. So we were just outboard of where all that happened.

I remember somebody said something to the effect of, "Well, you know, that's us," or "That was our turn," as the impact occurred. I don't think anybody knew at that time that it was an airplane.

In fact I remember assuming that it was a, you know, a bomb, not knowing exactly what had happened up in New York. But I didn't assume at the time that we'd been hit by an airplane. Just knew that there was damage. The lights went out, but from the windows and stuff you had enough light to see what was going on. The warning claxons and the, and stuff started going off, and basically a pre-recorded message or whatever telling people to evacuate.

Our office space, we're about probably about sixty people all told, sixty or seventy people worked, emptied out onto the fourth deck into the 4th corridor, which as I said was a demarcation for a major amount of the damage.

I followed people out into the hallway and when we got out into, out in the passageway, it was dark, because the lights had gone out, but down at the inner courtyard end of that, of that passageway there were windows down there so that provided light. If you looked up towards the E ring it was dark up there. There had been ceiling tiles that had fallen down and there was already smoke in the passageway. Most of the people went left, or right, excuse me, down towards the inner courtyard which is obviously our evacuation route. I think I was pretty much on auto-pilot at that time and I think for the, most of the Navy guys, as well as myself all of our damage control training, damage control fire fighting experience took over and, like I said, I was pretty much on auto pilot at that time.

Instead of going right, I went left toward the E ring, where it was pretty much pitch black up there. I remember thinking at the time that I had a responsibility to see if anybody was injured up there. If I could help anybody. The smoke was starting to get, was pretty thick. I went down on my hands and knees and kind of scooted along the floor on all fours toward the E ring. The E ring on the fourth deck is where the three-star flag officers for the Navy and the Marine staff have their offices. Obviously offices that face out to the outside of the Pentagon.

At the end of the 4th corridor on the E ring, the Navy staff offices N7, N8, and some of those offices are to the left, and to the right where obviously the impact had occurred and the major part of the damage, those are Marine Corps, headquarters of Marine Corps staff offices.

The first set of offices up there was the Commandant Counsel, and then pass that was, I knew was the Deputy Chief of Staff for Aviation, which I knew some guys in that office, because I was in the aviation program development business. So I worked with a lot of those guys. I knew JOE NYLAND, who was the, who had just become the Deputy Chief of Staff Air. So I crawled you know, over the downed ceiling tiles and all that and underneath the smoke up into that pitch black passageway to try and see if there was anybody up there that I could help.

Most of those doors are generally locked because of classification stuff going on, and it was dark up there and the only office that was open was I think one of the Marine General Counsel office. His door was open and there was light filtering through the large windows on the outside of the building that gave some light. There were a couple of people with me. I think CDR MACK BALLMAN (phonetic) may have followed me up there. And there were a couple of other people up there as well that may have had the same idea that I had, and we were yelling down that passageway trying to let people know that we were up there to help them if somebody needed help and then listening trying to get some, you know, in case anybody was having problems.

Crawled into the Marine Counsel office and made a sweep of the offices in there. I think the door was open, probably because they had all gotten out. Tried a couple of other doors off of the E ring passageway up there, but they were all locked and I couldn't hear anybody calling out for help or any problems, and it was starting to get very smoky up there at the time. I remember, after scrambling up in there, I remember being very concerned, starting to get concerned for my own safety, because I had a sort of a loft of dizziness hit me from smoke ingestion and I thought,

“Man, this is, this is getting not good.” And at that time it looked like there was very little that we could do past where we had the light streaming in from the one office, because it was just, it was just pitch, pitch dark. I mean I think the one, you know, at-sea kind of lesson learned that you always take with you when you’re on a ship is to carry a flashlight with you. You know, and I was, I was sorry at that point that I didn’t have a flashlight, or I didn’t have anything to cover my nose and mouth so I could do some more, some more work up there.

But I think, as I said, for most of the Navy guys, you know, the inside of the Pentagon has a lot of, looks a lot like the interior of a ship and a lot of that damage control type training and stuff, kind of took over.

So when it became apparent that there was not really anybody to be helped or not much that I could do and I kind of felt like I was putting myself into danger the longer I stayed out there. I crawled back out and by this time the smoke had really started to roll into the passageways, and I pretty much did a low crawl back through the E ring into the 4th corridor and then made it into the 4th corridor headed down toward the center courtyard of the Pentagon.

By that time, most of the people I think who under their own power had been cleared out, and there were even some security folks who had come up to try and get people moving out toward the center courtyard. Which I followed people down through the A ring and into the center courtyard.

When we got out there, I was with CAPTAIN LAUREN HECKELMAN, and some of the other folks from the office. At that point they had started moving people back to the center courtyard and then on passed, trying to get people out of the Pentagon, but as I came down, I guess because I’d been delayed up where I was looking for people, some of the injured folks from the Army staff who were down on the second and third deck below us, below where my office was and a

lot closer to ground zero, they started coming out, and there were a number of people who came out, either being carried or came out under their own power who were very badly, very badly burned.

So those of us who were there, again some first aide training, damage control training, we tried to get those people, get them set down. Tried to help some of the medical people that showed up to try and treat people, start treating people for shock, because it was, there was some folks, especially some of the civilians who were obviously really shook up by, badly, badly injured and entering into shock just from having been that close to the, that close to the experience.

So we did that. We helped out with some of those people, got them set up on the benches and in the grass and stuff and there were starting to be medical folks who showed up from the, from the clinic downstairs. We were trying to help them position medical gear and do what we could. Did that for a few minutes and helped out there where we could. I think we sort of helped move medical equipment back and forth for probably ten or fifteen minutes and then word came down that they needed some help because there were some people who were trapped in a special, basically a vault, a special access space. Were locked in and there were some people still in the building trying to help them out. JEFF STRATTON, who I had been out in Fallon with, we were out there as Lieutenants, he was a Navy SEAL, we kind of got together and we had tried to go back into the building a couple of times. After we had helped injured people out, we were going to go back up onto the second and third decks into the Army spaces and see if we could help out to get people out of there, and we were stopped from entering the building by security folks. Quite rightly so. They didn't want people who were ill prepared essentially—we were in, you know our regular Navy uniforms and without respirators or any of that—at that point to go back into the building and possibly become casualties. So we were prevented from going in, but we

heard and followed some other folks down on the first deck, back into the building into the alleyway that runs between the B and C rings of the Pentagon.

In most of the rings on the first deck, it's covered by a building in there on the first deck, but between the B and the C rings, there's a maintenance access road or alleyway that runs all the way around. Well, between the 4, or the 5th and the 6th corridor was essentially where the airplane crashed and it went all the way through the E ring, the D ring and the cockpit fuselage area ended up inside the C ring. So between the B and the C rings, if you can image that was basically ground zero. I mean on the other side of that wall, on the back side of the wall in the C ring, I mean it was an inferno in there because the airplane had essentially come to a rest with its nose up against the back wall of the C ring. And I didn't find out 'til later, but that was also the back wall, that was the back wall of the Navy Command Center, and where the Navy N3/5 offices and stuff were.

When we got back there there was about a dozen people already there who had been there. A number of naval officers as well as Army and Air Force and some civilians back there and they were attempting to fight the fires that were coming through the wall there with handheld CO₂ fire extinguishes. I mean it was, it was an inferno. There were two access points. There was a mechanical room, you know with doors that was open there where you could get into the C ring at the first level, and then there was a big hole, probably seven or eight feet wide that had been just blown out, you know, all the brick work and stuff was laying in the alleyway there and the fire was raging in there, and there's all this mechanical stuff and you know all the innards of the building are hanging out there, and it was clear that above there that there was fire up in the second and third deck as well, because the windows were bulging out from the heat and the pressure from the explosion and all.

So we're back there (chuckle) with hand held fire extinguishers trying to fight our way back into the building essentially, and in reality with the equipment that we had there was very little that we could do.

DENNY WEATHERALL, CDR WEATHERALL, who worked with me over there had actually gotten there before I did and had actually fought his way with handheld fire extinguishes in, you know, ten or twenty feet inside the building. Which as I looked at the inferno that was going on there, I just don't, I don't see how they even managed it. But we had some folks who were running off, basically breaking into fire extinguisher lockers trying to bring fire extinguishers back. There were no fire hoses, or anything, no fire stations as we would think of on ship, internal to the Pentagon.

I mean, I think, most of us, especially Navy guys from a hose team training experience would have given anything to have a couple of fire hoses at our disposal, because we could have organized hose teams and we could have, you know, fought our way, basically into the building. But it was a losing battle from the beginning back there. There was water from the sprinkler systems and probably busted fire mains and stuff. We were back there standing in about two or three inches of water, you know, wearing basically a polyester uniform in the face of this fire that's going on, with the possibility, looking up at these large windows that are above us that are bulging out, you know, and every once in a while something would fall down and stuff, and I mean it was, it was a fairly ugly situation.

On top of that, we kept having people come back, security folks telling us there's rumor of another airplane coming toward DC and we want everybody, you know, out of, to move out and we were kind of like, "Well, where are we going to go? What place is going to be safer than where we are right now?"

So we came out and then as soon as the security guys would walk off, we'd go back in, you know. That happened a couple of times. But everybody was back there, everybody was pitching in as much as we can, as much as we could and unfortunately there was very little that could be done. I don't think, except for the guys who got there, which there were some, there were some real heroics from some people who were at the scene, I mean instantly. While I was crawling around up on the E ring there were some guys who were back there helping people out of the Navy Command Center doing really some super human things back there. By the time I got down there, those people who were readily, you know, ambulatory or could be gotten out, had gotten out, and it was really totally, the insides of the building were totally enveloped in fire. About that time, you know, this had all been, this was probably thirty, or forty-five minutes after the attack, at that point, and when the, they moved us back into the courtyard about the time that the civilian firefighters showed up, and they were rigging hoses. More medical people had shown up, so we organized ourselves, and were organized into stretcher teams, at that point, to assist the medical folks who had shown up. So we picked up stretchers and followed the firefighters back into that alleyway as they brought their hoses up and from outside the Pentagon. They had to lay hoses all the way through the center courtyard into the place where we were and they were beginning to try and fight the fire on the inside while we stood by with stretchers to help out for whoever those guys might find. Actually they didn't have hoses at the time, they just went in with their respirators and their air tanks, into the building where we had tried to get in, trying to find people who might be injured or casualties who might need help.

So we stood by in that alleyway probably for another fifteen or twenty minutes while the firefighters tried to go and try and find people, and again unfortunately, they were not able to find anybody who could be helped. So at that point once they secured as much of the area as they

could and also to allow the hose teams and stuff to come in, from the fire departments here in Arlington, they moved us back out into the center courtyard. That was probably, I don't know, probably about ten thirty or eleven o'clock by that time, and we stood around out in the center courtyard, basically organized as stretcher teams, litter teams for another hour and a half or so. Somebody broke into the ground zero café out there and we basically looted it of any sandwich stuff and bags of potato chips and all that kind of stuff, and we stayed out there. The FBI teams came by, because there were pieces of airplane that were out in the courtyard that had been blown out over the top of the roof into the courtyard. Bits and pieces of flaps and stuff that was fairly lightweight, you know, aluminum and aluminum composite stuff. So we picked up some of that stuff with the FBI, and then about 1300 they said that they needed, they wanted to divide resources and they wanted to move stretcher teams and stuff that were in the center courtyard they wanted to move them outside. So about half of us, there was probably about six or eight stretcher teams, you know, four to six people and some others, so all told there was about forty or fifty people. We came out of the Pentagon into the South Parking area and walked around to the area on the side where the impact had actually occurred. And that was the first time since I had arrived that morning that I had been outside of the confines of the Pentagon. And we walked around and obviously there was, you know, all the rescue teams and all the firefighters and a lot of people out on South Parking and then around to the side of the impact building. We just carried our stretchers out there, which was basically our pass to get around to where the impact had actually occurred and that was the first time that I saw what had actually happened. I was, you know, just flabbergasted at what had occurred. By that time, the E and the D rings, you know, between the 4th and the 5th corridor where the impact had actually occurred had already collapsed. And at that point I realized that that's actually where I'd been crawling around, I and

some others had been crawling around trying to find anybody up there. That whole portion of the building had collapsed about forty-five, thirty or forty-five minutes after the impact, after the jet fuel and stuff, some of the interior structural members had melted or collapsed, then that whole part of the building, you know, came down. And that was a pretty sobering experience to see that part of the building that had collapsed.

We stood by with the stretchers just watching the firefighters and watching the devastation and they held us there. And they were going to bring down Army guys from the old guard, up at Fort Meyer, they were going to bring those guys down to take over, you know our duties. So they held us down there until about, until about sixteen hundred and then they let us go.

And again, there wasn't any, any duty or anything for the stretcher-bearers and there were a lot of us out there essentially to do, or any of the professional EMT or EMS folks, because there essentially wasn't anybody to bring out of the building, and that was probably the most disturbing or disheartening thing in the whole day, is that we were out there for almost, you know, six, seven hours and there was just, there just wasn't you know, just wasn't anything that we could do.

I went home that day. I finally got a hold of my wife. She works over at the Washington Medical Center doing bio-medical research in downtown DC and I had been unable to get a hold of her earlier in the day. You know, people who had cell phones were in high demand because that was essentially the only way that people were getting out to call loved ones. I actually called a friend of mine's wife and asked him, actually it was a new job and I didn't have her new phone number on me, at her work place, so I had to call a neighbor, a friend of ours, and ask her to hunt down my wife to let her know that I was OK.

So about 1600 or so, 1630, they let us go and we pretty much dispersed. I had a couple of other guys who were with me that I knew from the Navy staff who, basically, they couldn't get cars and stuff out of the parking lot and stuff, didn't have a way home, so I gave them a ride home out to the Vienna, Chantilly area on my way home and that was, that was essentially the end of the day.

Little known to me, the rest of my division had basically mustered on the outside of the division, outside of the building and there were a couple of us who had stayed in to try and help out, that they, you know, nobody had laid eyes on since we had left the office, so there was some concern that myself and CAPTAIN HECKELMAN and a couple of others were essentially unaccounted for. So there were messages from my boss, you know, waiting for me when I got home, to basically call to let them know that we were OK, and that everything was all right.

So, and at that point we found out that, well we're all going to get together up Navy Annex essentially the next morning and so we went up there as the bullpen and muster to see essentially what could be done or what needed to be done.

It was an interesting time, because obviously the Secretary of Defense and the President in the face of what had just happened to the nation wanted to show that, you know, "Hey, we've been hit hard, but you know, it's kind of business as usual, and life is going to continue."

So even though the Navy staff had essentially almost been disseminated to some extent and had been decimated from a standpoint of being able to actually function as a staff, we were actually getting taskers from the office of Secretary of Defense the next morning that needed to be answered in terms of OK, here's what we're going to do next and what do you need? And obviously there was a sense of you knows, what does the Navy need in terms of funding and all of the rest of the stuff? What known shortfalls, you know, can be addressed in terms of

procurement and money and all that? Which is right down, our, you know, right down the pipe of the job and within the responsibilities of the job that I worked at.

A number of divisions in the Navy staff, basically told all their folks, you know, go home. Be with your loved ones. You know, get a hold of yourself, because we didn't even had office spaces, mainly, you know, basically to work in. And quite rightfully so, you know, a lot of people were just "go home. We'll call you when we need you." But there was still a sense of life goes on and there's still some decisions and the CNO and the Vice-CNO still need, still need support and the bullpen, N801, basically stood the watch for the Navy staff up in the Navy Annex on all those questions that were coming in the aftermath. I think that's something that ADMIRAL ROUT (phonetic) and his staff can be extremely proud of, is in those days between that Tuesday and when everybody started coming back to work, once everything, we'd kind of figured out who we were and what we're going to do and who was there and who was not coming back, the bullpen N801 stood that watch up there and did, I think a great service to the Navy and to the Navy staff in support of the CNO in those very demanding days after the, after the attack.

Again I stayed up there for another couple weeks until the 26th which was my transfer date to go to my fellowship and I basically just walked down the hall and checked in with VICE ADMIRAL KEATING's staff of N3/5 just to see what I could do. And as I said, at that point a couple of weeks after the event, I mean, we still had not accounted for or recovered all the bodies of our shipmates. And the N3/5 staff, in fact, ironically the shop that controls or oversees the Federal Executive Fellowships was one of the hardest hit organizations on the Navy staff. They lost a captain and a couple of commanders and a number of people out of that staff. In fact I had just gone through, at the first of September I had gone through indoctrination with all the other

Federal Executive Fellowships, with PAT DUNN and all the guys who were in that shop and now they were all, they were all essentially unaccounted for and presumed to be killed in action in the Pentagon. So there was –

Q. (01:23:54) What was this shop again?

A. N513, was that shop, and the whole N5 organization as well as the Navy Command Center, like I said, and the CNO's intelligence plot had been at ground zero and had just been disseminated. So myself and CAPTAIN LEE JOHNSON, we basically were there picking up, before we found out what was going to be known as the Future Ops cell, we were there just picking up those responsibilities that would normally have been picked up for those guys, not only the guys who were lost, but also the rest of the N5 organization because they were all performing CACO duties and going to all the memorial services and the funerals. I mean it was, you know, they essentially almost ceased to function for four or five weeks as they were dealing with, you know, taking care of shipmates and shipmates families and the ones who had, not to mention the guys who weren't there, because they had been lost. So there were a couple of us who showed up and were just there to pick up those responsibilities and those taskers to take the burden off of the guys who were dealing with the more personal side of the tragedy. And then as those guys sort of came back and started to pick up their functions, then we went down and started working for ADMIRAL CROWDER as he came in in this what has become the Future Ops, and our role of what was needed in the new situation we found ourselves in, as that became obvious, then we started performing the functions that we have now.

One anecdote that I want to include, I was standing, we were still up to the Navy Annex and I was standing listening to a conversation between one of the guys from the Navy Ops staff and a

civilian who was also on the Navy Ops staff and I was listening to their conversation. This was fully a month after the event I guess, and it was the first time they had seen each other since the day of the attack and they were talking about how they had gotten out of the building. You know, “What happened to you? Where were you” And was pretty amazing to listen to them because you know depending on what side of the room you were on, or even what side of the desk you were on could have determined whether you lived or died in that inferno and the concussion when that airplane hit the building. And they were talking and what got my interest was one guy said, “Yes, there was a hole blown in the wall and I crawled through there and it ended up being kind of an air condition or a mechanical room and I crawled out through this door into this alleyway” you know, and this that and the other.

And the other guy said, “Yes, I was in the same situation, but where I was there was actually this big whole in the wall and I crawled through there,” out there and all this stuff and I was interested because I realized that’s where we had been JEFF STRATTON, DENNY WEATHERALL, and SAM PEREZ, we’d all been down there fighting the fires trying to get back in because we’d heard that people were trapped.

And they were talking about it and the one guy said “Yes, I came out of there, and I guess I was in shock, because I walked out, you know, kind of brushed myself off and just walked home.”

And it was like five miles, I mean he lived out in Mt. Vernon or something and he just came out of the Pentagon, essentially in shock and walked home.

And the other guy said, “Yes, I was pretty much the same way.” They started talking and they said, “You know I’ve been beating myself up, since that, especially finding out, you know people who didn’t make it because I’ve been really hard on myself for not having the

wherewithal to turn around and go back in and try and help other people out and rescue people and stuff. “

And I said, I stepped in at that point and I said, “Hey I was there just after you guys came out and we fought those fires and there was, there was nothing, you know, that essentially you could have done.” I said, “The thing that you did was probably the best thing that you could have done for yourself or anybody which was just to get up in the state of mind and just walk home, just leave, just get yourself out of harm's way, because those of us who were there right after that occurred, you know, there was essentially with what we had on hand, there was very little that we could actually do, pragmatically to get back in there and help anybody.”

And it was interesting because the next day the civilian who was there, came up and actually thanked me for making that comment because he said, it had essentially lifted a burden that had been on his shoulders since the day of the attack, that he was not able to get in and help people. So it just, it's very interesting listening to the stories of the people who were there, because as I said it was a matter of feet and probably in some cases inches, and I've talked to people on the Army staff who've had the same experience. That there was no real sense of what, of why some people survived and why others, others did not. You know, pure luck or fate or whatever you want to call it allowed some people to get out of there, but it was a very interesting experience. But those guys especially the guys who had been pretty much at ground zero, there were some real stories that I heard about what people did to get back in and help shipmates get out of that environment that are clearly on the order of anything you've ever heard, heroism-wise in terms of actually combat. And I mean it was combat in a sense but not something that we have every experienced.

Q. (01:30:13) Who are some of those people you talked with?

A. Well I think, I tried I think to mention, there is a guy in a story about a Navy flight surgeon and I remember seeing him because he was down there, a LCDR and I'm sorry, tall lanky guy, I'm sorry I don't have his name.

Q. (01:30:32) Tarantino?

A. Maybe so, I remember him because his flight surgeon wings were hanging off of his shirt and I believe, if it's the same guy, I heard that there was a flight surgeon involved that he was one of the guys who was down there in the area at the time that things happened and actually went into the building and basically through one of those super human events that happen in that kind of situation, you hear about people picking up cars and stuff, that he went in there and basically moved ceiling beams off of people who were trapped and pulled people out of the wreckage. I don't know exactly who it was. I assume that maybe that guy, I heard that he's a , was a Navy flight surgeon and he there was a guy (a break in transcription) (01:31;!8) –

Q. (Speaks when transcript breaks)

A. Fire extinguisher. CAPTAIN HECKELMAN JEFF STRATTON, as I said, DENNY WEATHER –

Q. Where does Jeff work now?

A. He works, he works in N512. He is the Navy special Warfare officer in N512.

Q. (01:31:36) Commander?

A. Yes, and he was down there at the same time that I was. DENNY WEATHERLL, I don't know if you've talked to him.

Q. (01:31:46) Yes, talked to him.

A. And I said, he was, again, he fought his way, actually through the fire into the building with some, and some very scary stories about trying to make that happen and doing basically just whatever we could try to do.

I think that's, other than just the guys in the N5 and the N3 organization who were working down in the space at the time, there's probably a bunch of stories over there about people who managed, you know where they were and what they had to do to try and get out that, get out of that building. I think that's all the –

Q. (01:32:28) You keep your ears, you keep your ears to the ground on that, that brought them to us, we want to make sure them being in the middle of fighting the war as well, but we want to get that plus the other aspect of it.

A. Sure.

Q. (01:32:38) Your wife, what time did you talk with her?

A. I guess I talked to [REDACTED], it was probably about three or four o'clock in the afternoon. I got through to KATHLEEN SALIZAR. GABBE SALIZAR is over at N78, and there were a number of those guys. GABBE SALIZAR, MOBY CRAIG, SCOTT CRAIG who is the F8 team requirements officer over in N78, they were, they were on the other side of the 4th corridor, one deck above us, basically on the D ring so when the jet, when the impact occurred and it went

through the building they all looked up and it was a huge fireball that went up just outside their windows between the D and the E ring in N78. So there's a bunch of N78 guys who probably have a, who had probably stories as well, but GABBE was in the bullpen with me before we went up to N78.

Q. (01:33:38) GABBE?

A. SALIZAR.

Q. (01:33:39) SALIZAR.

A. And I had his phone number and called his wife and she was the one who actually I think got in touch with my wife. I also talked to JEFF STRATTON's wife because he was there with me, and we called and they were out in Fallon with us, so she, it was either KATHLEEN or JEFF STRATTON's, wife who actually tracked down ██████████ to call her and let know that I was OK.

Q. Obviously, she had heard about the event.

A. Yes, they were kind or, they had heard that something had happened. I don't know that they -

Q. (01:34:12) Did she knew where your office was or anything at all.

A. No, I don't think so, and also my sons who were in 7th and 9th grade -

Q. (01:34:22) How old are they. They're -

A. They're █████ and █████. Seventh and ninth grades. █████ is my youngest and █████ is my oldest and I think they let them know -

Q. (01:34:35) Where are they in school?

A. They're in school in Fairfax, Woodson High School and Frost Middle School. Had a week, had an interesting event over Halloween. We went to a neighborhood party of a woman who is associated with the school district and I saw my youngest son's sixth grade teacher at this Halloween party, and I had, I knew her because I went in last spring in all my flight gear and stuff and gave a talk to my son's sixth grade class and we were talking and she heard, she had heard that my youngest son really got agitated or had a tough time when they mentioned that the Pentagon had been attacked. What was interesting about that, that nothing had come through from him or anybody from the school directly, but another teacher had heard that he was quite upset on the day that the event happened. So that's kind of an interesting sort of vignette of something that you get even weeks and months and later about the impact of it happening. Of course, you know my mom down in Biloxi, she had, she had friends, Navy associates, folks who were, who had served with my dad, were chiefs, we invited, and a number of chiefs who I knew growing up came to my change of command from all over the country.

Q. (01:36:09) Wow!

A. Who knew my dad and they called, you know, my mom to find out what she knew and what had happened and all the rest, And I got calls from Naval Academy company mates and classmates from all over the country that knew I was in the Pentagon, because we'd just seen them at the 20th reunion last fall. You know we got a lot of calls and a lot of people called and tried to email us, you know trying to find out what had happened and to make sure that I was, that I was OK. So that was you know that was gratifying as well.

Q. (01:36:46) Have you been able to talk to your boys about your experiences?

A. Not really, I haven't gone into any depth with them. I mean I think that it was OK for them at the time to know that I was all right and you know, their experience, they saw a lot of what happened on TV and all. I wish now looking back that I had brought them down to the Pentagon, when the, when the impromptu memorial was out there on the, just down from the Navy Annex, I hope that somebody has collected all of the –

Q. (01:37:25) Yes, they are going to put that –

A. It was a huge covering of wreaths and flowers and memorial notes and all the rest of it that was up there on the hillside of the Navy Annex that faced the Pentagon. And obviously if you walk around the Pentagon now, you see all the messages of encouragement and support that have come in from schools and from churches and stuff all over the, all over the country.

Again, it's very gratifying, very uplifting to see that kind of reaction from people all around the country, you know, who have never been to the Pentagon, you know, have seen it only displayed in a way that, you know, on the nightly news or whatever, to see that kind of a reaction from the people who work here is quite gratifying

And then you know I feel like I sort of have a linkage because *Vinson* is back out on the line, and a bunch of my JOs are out there, in fact with VFA22 and CAG 11 on *Vinson* who are paying those folks back. In fact, LT Beth CRAYTON (phonetic) who was the, in my squadron and was one of my, I talked earlier about my JSALE subject matter expert, she is the first person, first pilot to drop a JSALE, she is now back out on *Vinson* as the CAG, landing signal officer of the CAG, LSO for CAG 11. So she was there and had a very big place at Desert Fox, and Operations

Southern Watch when *Vinson* was over there last time and now she's back out there with CAG 11. She was the subject of a ABC, or NBC news story here a couple of weeks ago for some reporters who were on *Vinson* before they got over there and did their combat. I don't think, I don't think—she's a very humble person. I think generally because of the limelight that has been shed on women naval aviators in general, she always kind of, kind of scorned and avoided those opportunities to be in that sort of limelight and I don't think she mentioned to the reporter that she was with—the place in Naval Aviation history that she had already made for herself in being in combat operations before, you know, the place that she already had in that history with a new weapons system and all the rest and now being out there again. I doubt that she let on, you know, they kind of treated her like, “Oh isn't this unique that you're a woman naval aviator out there.” When in fact you know she's already earned her spurs in combat already, you know, so it's becoming a sort of a, and I think when they get back you'll have a very interesting oral history to get from someone like her.

Q. 01:40:42) I'll make sure we do that.

A. Yes, CRAYTON.

Q. (01:40:47) Let's stay in touch and make sure we do. That would be excellent.

A. Yes, that will be, that will be very interesting.

Q. Normally I ask if there is anything else you want to add, but I really feel we're going to do something else down the road, so –

A. OK.

Q. (01:40:55) As you do your role in the next coming weeks and months, just kind of tuck things away you think might be a good part of the story that needs to be told.

A. Sure.

Q. (01:41:04) And pass on to your boys, too that your story is part of the naval archives and that-

A. Yes.

Q. (01:31:08. It will be great for them to hear all that you've done.

A. Yes, well I should find out hopefully at the end of this coming week, what CAG at least potentially I'm going to and hopefully we'll get a chance to get out and make a little bit more history at the pointy end of the spear.

Q. (01:41:25) Pointy end of the spear, that's right.

A. And be on the giving end instead of the receiving end in this.

Q. (01:41:30) Well, with your track record I'm sure you'll -

A. War on terrorism

Q. (01:41:31) You'll be right where the action is.

A. Yes, and be back for the 25th.

Q. (01:41:37) There you go.

A. 25th reunion.

Q. Well, you have my number so you know how to reach me.

A. Yes OK, good. Yes, awesome. Thanks, thanks for the opportunity.

Thank you.

Transcribed by:
Ethel Geary
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