

[Trent J. Frady]

The following is my journal entry from 12 September 2001 in response to the terrorist hijacking of United States commercial airliners on 11 September 2001.

Where to start? Where to end? Praising God that I am alive is the best place for me to start. Although everyday this is true, today this idea takes on a changed meaning for me. Exactly what changes probably remains to be seen. Yesterday terrorists hijacked four U.S. commercial planes and flew them on a suicide mission into the two World Trade Center towers, the Pentagon, and one crashed in western Pennsylvania. Words do not do justice by saying it was a suicide mission as the disaster of the buildings fall into the unbelievable and indescribable categories by themselves. When placed in context with the human lives that were taken this act becomes unbearable and intolerable.

Anyway, I digress. Yesterday, at 9:36, I was in the Pentagon with twenty-seven other PMC-XIII classmates listening to Under Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Susan Livingstone, when one of the hijacked terrorists planes [we would later find out it was a plane] struck the Pentagon. We would also later find out that the room we were in at the time was probably only 50 feet from ground zero of the plane crash. I heard a loud boom and the floor shook. My first thought was this was an earthquake; my second thought after processing the boom was that a bomb had gone off in the Pentagon. I quickly gathered my papers. [Why I gathered my papers I still don't know.] Our class proceeded to leave the meeting room quickly and as a group. The first classmates out of the room tried taking the exit to the right but said they could not see anything but smoke and that the stairs were missing. Our class then went left. I was fifth or sixth to the last out of the meeting room. By the time I had reached the hallway, smoke was already lingering from my head to the ceiling. Ducking lower and using my suit jacket as a filter to help breathe I followed our group. In a single line we headed approximately forty feet down the hallway. Halfway down the hallway we took a step down about a foot and a half. The floor had dropped because on the way in to the meeting room there was not a step to be found. Near this point I entered one of the main corridors of the Pentagon. By this time the smoke had grown thicker and in fact covered everything from ceiling to floor. Elapsed time since the loud boom could have only been one or two minutes. I was amazed at the amount of smoke that had filled the hallway in such a short time and that the smoke was getting thicker the further we went from the meeting room. I could not see through the smoke to the person in front of me. It was pitch black and the emergency lighting was not working. I soon heard voices from what turned out to be three men in uniform standing in the corridors telling us to form a chain by holding hands or grabbing the person in front of you and to continue to go forward because there was light up ahead. Looking back this was the closest I came to getting panicked. Most of my energy to this point was solely focused on getting out as quickly as possible. If not for these voices and their presence I believe it probably would have been difficult if not impossible to get out alive. I was quickly reaching a decision point of going further into the unknown completely dark smoke or trying to find an alternate route out of a completely unfamiliar building. As thick as the smoke was at the time there was probably very little time, if any, to find an alternate route out of an unknown building. I believe our class owes our lives to

these three gentlemen in the hallway. I will definitely send email to these men thanking them for staying around and helping. [Our class later found out that the names of the three officers in the hallway that led us to safety were Captain Frank Rush (N-785A), Captain Philip Grandfield (N-78A), and Commander Don Braswell (N-780). I look forward to meeting these men that saved my life, knowing that there is nothing I could ever do to repay them for their assistance while being in harm's way themselves.]

Once hearing the voice to move forward I believe I grab the suit coat of Greg Hays and that Craig Taylor grabbed my jacket. The corridor was filled with smoke. The only thing that I had was the chain of classmates in front of me and behind me and the three men in uniform imploring us to come forward because there was light at the end of the tunnel. Once we made it through this corridor they were getting ready to close off the corridor with some type of curtain. Past the curtain was the escalator where it was smoke free and stable. I felt safe from that point on.

On our way out of the Pentagon our group merged at a central location with a lot of other Pentagon employees trying to evacuate. I believed at the time that a lot of the people were not in a real big hurry to evacuate. I think most people thought it was just a fire drill and were taking their time to leave the building. (On the way into the meeting I had noticed posters announcing weekend testing of the fire alarm for this newly renovated wing of the Pentagon.) I later heard reports from Pentagon employees who were on other sides of the Pentagon that did not know that the Pentagon had been hit by a plane until they got outside and saw the black smoke rising from the building. Even the security guards were checking bags and making us turn in our visitor badges on our way out. As I left the building I found this somewhat amusing when I considered how close to death I had been a few minutes ago. I suppose, I have a weird sense of humor.

My emotions as I left the building were all over the place as the previous paragraph suggests. The other evacuation event that I remember most clearly is walking with a couple of officers as we left the building. One said to the other that they had had enough of this and they were ready to "Strap It On" and go fight. I remember being angry enough at the time to silently agree with them and was ready to enlist and join the service.

Not until about a half an hour later did I believe it was a plane that hit the Pentagon. People outside the building were saying that a plane had hit the Pentagon. I did not believe them and thought they were only making a logical association after knowing what had already happen at the World Trade Centers. Everything to this point made me think that a bomb had gone off and I was concerned that there might be more bombs in the building. The boom, the smoke, the isolation of the events made me think a bomb and not a plane. Once outside we took a head count. All classmates were miraculously accounted for and OK. I do not use the word "miraculously" lightly. Smoke was in our eyes and on our clothes. [Looking back I think what helped us a lot was not knowing how close we were to imminent danger. Yes, we knew we were in danger, but we did not

know it was a plane, how close the plane had hit, or how much time we had before the section of the building we were in would collapse. I truly believe that not knowing these things helped us keep calm, stay focused, and to get us out unharmed and alive.]

We were then told to evacuate the Pentagon area. Before leaving we took a couple of pictures in front of the Pentagon. We came in a NAVY bus but realized that was not an option for getting back to our hotel. We then walked about five blocks to a Marriott Hotel. At the Marriott some of the classmates took a cab back to our hotel. [Turned out the cab got back to our hotel in the same amount of time it took us to walk. To say traffic was congested in Washington D.C. would be an understatement.] Most decided to walk the estimated 2.5 miles back to our hotel. On our journey back about ten people in the group repeatedly tried to phone home on their cellular phones. Very few got through. Those that did get through seemed to take a long time to get through because all the cell towers and the phone network could not handle the overwhelming call load. About an hour and half later I finally got to talk to my wife, Brandy, to see if she was OK and to tell her that I was OK. By this time I was at the Lincoln Memorial with about another half mile to one mile left to hike to the hotel. We got back to the hotel at about 12:30 local time. Once at the hotel I called Brandy again and turned on CNN for the first time. It was only then I got to see for the first time and let sink in what had just happened. I realized I was a part of history, extremely close to death, extremely glad to be alive, and thankful for so many things.

After a quick shower I packed up on my clothes and prepared to leave Washington D.C. Prior to leaving the class had a lunch meeting to determine how we were going to get home. Roger Clark had rented a rental car on Sunday and I had volunteered to ride with him from the airport to the hotel. Although I questioned Roger prior to the class on why he wanted a rental car in Washington D.C. I was now thankful that he had gone ahead and rented the car. Roger Clark and I left Washington D.C. about three o'clock local time and stayed at a Holiday Inn in Dayton, OH that night. After stopping by the Indianapolis airport on the way home to pick up our vehicles I made it back home to Bloomfield around noon the next day. During our trip Roger and I constantly listened to the radio for updates. For a trip this long in a compact rental car very little conversation was shared. Solemn consideration of the day's events and reflection was how I spent most of the trip.

May God bless our nation and grant wisdom to our President and other leaders during the next days.



Photo courtesy of Doug Hackman



Washington D.C.

Steve M. Ote
Dusty
Enoch
Andrew Mandaly
Mark Silbert
Carl R. Fox
Doris Richardson
"Enjoy your 2nd life!"
John S. Vangel
Donald W. ...
Joe

THE DISTINGUISHED COLLECTION
 by Silberne

Walt Mc
Ty M
Jim D. Wood
Frank Mitchell
Bill Mc Garrison
John Murray
Steve
Duane
Don Heer
Jim Burke

Trent Frady
 S. Kumar

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Postcard some members of the class picked up at the hotel lobby.