

EVENTS OF 11 SEPTEMBER 2001 PENTAGON

I have been a civilian employee for the Department of the Navy and stationed at Naval Surface Warfare Center, Crane, Indiana since December 1987. I am currently a Branch Manager in the Acquisition Department and have spent my entire career in the Acquisition Department. I have been associated with several programs the past 14 years including Navy small arms and ammunition, night vision, chemical / biological detection and ironically Pentagon security systems.

I am enrolled in Indiana / Purdue University Executive Education Program through the School of Public and Environmental Affairs with approximately 30 other Crane employees. The group traveled to Washington DC on Sunday, 09 September 2001 to attend a pre-course dinner at the Embassy Suites Hotel on NW 22nd Street. The dinner served as a "kick-off" for our final course in the certificate portion of this masters program. The week was to be filled with briefings from senior civilian leadership and members of Congress at various DC venues. I had looked forward to this portion of my education as I would see Government functioning at its highest levels.

As our flight descended over the Potomac River to land that evening, I could see the White House, Capitol Hill, the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial to my left and seconds later Arlington Cemetery and the Pentagon to my right. I thought to myself, as I had on previous DC trips, that this particular flight path to Reagan National Airport was too close to these landmarks, but quickly dismissed the thought of potential danger.

On 10 September 2001, our final briefing was from Charles Nemfakos, Deputy Undersecretary of the Navy (Emeritus). The final question asked of Mr. Nemfakos was what he felt would have to occur to cause America's defense policy to be clear and concise in the 21st century. Mr. Nemfakos stated that he felt an event equivalent to Pearl Harbor, either terrorist or military, would be the only event that would awaken the United States from the complacency and security they have had since the end of the Vietnam Era. Mr. Nemfakos also felt that if such an event occurred, ethnic Americans would be subject to discrimination and violence in our neighborhoods.

11 September 2001 began with our group traveling to the Pentagon via bus. Our group was scheduled to spend the entire day at the Pentagon to be briefed by civilian leaders as well as touring the Pentagon. We arrived late (0900 EDST) and rushed from the Mall Entrance on the north side of the Pentagon through the "A" ring, first floor to Corridor 4 where we took escalators to the fifth floor. On the fifth floor, we walked through Corridor 4 to the "E" ring and entered conference room 5E490.

Our first briefing was with the Honorable Susan Livingstone, Undersecretary of the Navy. Ms. Livingstone informed our group that a plane had struck one of the towers of the World Trade Center. Ms. Livingstone also reported that CNN believed other planes had possibly been hi-jacked and their locations were unknown. It occurred to me, and probably others, that Washington DC would also be a terrorist target, but we continued with the briefing.

At approximately 0935, I heard a tremendous thud, not deafening, but similar to thunder when directly overhead. At the same moment I heard the sound, the room shook and ceiling tiles and lights fell from the ceiling. As soon as the concussion from the blast ended, gray smoke began trickling in the room through the ventilation system. My initial thought was the smoke was a chemical agent released by a bomb from the basement of the Pentagon because the sound and the concussion of the blast came from below and behind my north wall location. I immediately covered nose and mouth with my handkerchief and watched the reaction of those closest to the ventilation system and smoke. I then realized that the smoke was from a fire and everyone began to exit the conference room.

I was in the back of the room and one of the last to exit into the hall. Approximately 20' to my right was a fire exit I noticed on the way into the conference room. Our group attempted to utilize this exit but when the door was forced open, smoke billowed in and a member of our group yelled that the stair well was

collapsed. We then turned to exit through the "E" ring to Corridor 4 as we had entered, but other members of the group who initially went that direction were returning saying Corridor 4 had too much smoke. For that moment, approximately 30 people were literally in a corner of the "E" ring with now thick black smoke filling the air. As a group without communicating, we started for Corridor 4.

At some point in Ring "E" someone said to watch the step; a step I did not recall on the way in. When I got to the step, I noticed that the floor had raised 12 - 18" and the walls were buckled. Presumably, we were in the area of what is now collapsed. As we got closer to Corridor 4, the black smoke intensified, now only 3-4' from the floor. Light fixtures were dangling from the ceiling and Corridor 4 appeared to be completely without electrical service. We reluctantly entered Corridor 4 not sure if it was in tact. In retrospect I do not know why we did not press on through Ring "E" to Corridor 3, except that it Ring "E" seemed to be filling with smoke from both directions. Suddenly we heard a voice telling us Corridor 4 was open and to hurry. Everyone grabbed the person in front of them and we went through the darkness to what I believe was Ring "C". There, the security guard who told us to proceed was holding a fire door open for us allowing to escape into the light of day.

From there, we ran to the escalators, which were now shut down, in Ring "A" and went down to floor 1. We still did not know what caused the carnage, but now security guards were directing hundreds of people around Ring "A" to Corridor 1 and the Metro exit. We went down into the Metro station and back outside near the South Parking Lot.

Incredibly, our entire group escaped the damage of floor 5, stayed together and were all unharmed. At this point everyone with cell phones tried calling home. Attached is a picture of our group exiting. I'm in the blue jacket, red tie and carrying my blue ISU notebook to the right of the photo behind the lady.

Most of us walked back to our hotel (2.5 hours) as all public and private transportation came to a standstill in the National Capitol Region except for emergency vehicles.

Based on information from full time Pentagon employees and reviews or Pentagon floor plans, our conference room is now either collapsed or in the area of collapse that did not separate completely. This would be the right side of the photographs which are now indelibly etched in at least my mind.

The message I would like to share is that life is precious and extremely fragile when faced with catastrophic natural or man-made events. Expect only the best of life but plan for the worst. Please live every day to the fullest!

