

September 11 2001

This was to be the capstone of PMC XIII, we arrived at the pentagon slightly behind schedule, 30 employees of Crane Naval Weapons including Mr. Duane Embree, Crane's Technical Director, Mr. Dave Reese(IUPUI), and Mr. Jim Buher(IUPUI). We were all very excited to have the privilege to hear the views/opinions and to interact with the United States Undersecretary of the Navy, the Honorable Susan Livingston as well as the speakers that would have followed.

She opened with the announcement that the New York Twin towers had just been hit by two commercial planes and at that time they was unsure if it was terrorist activity or not. Then she continued to give her vision of what she believed the armed services needed to be prepared for in the coming years, specifically the department of the Navy, and some of the obstacles the Navy would have to overcome to reach those goals.

After about a half an hour overview she was prompted that she needed to end her talk in time to be able to make her next appointment. She knew that she was running short on time, apologized to everyone, but insisted that she give us an opportunity to ask a couple of questions.

Then it happened, right when she was about to exit it hit, the room shook, the ceiling tiles fell from the ceiling followed immediately by thick gray smoke which also gushed from the ceiling. Mrs. Livingston asks everyone to stay calm while she ran out to assess the situation. Come this way she calmly yelled back in the room, we need to exit the building, we've are under terrorist attack.

I was sitting toward the back of the room, most everyone had already exited the room. I step down out of the room; the floor outside of the door had fallen about 8 inches. I turn to follow the others down the smoke filled hallway when someone shouted " turn back we need to go out the fire exit". To my right was the fire exit door, I tried to push it open but it only opened half way. I looked inside, it was filled with dark gray smoke and the concrete stairs had fallen. I replied back "we're not going out this way the stairs are gone." As I proceeded down the hall the smoke got thicker, I put my jacket over my mouth to filter the smoke, I was close to the floor trying not to get overtaken by the smoke, I was unsure if we was going the right way, the smoke and heat seemed to be getting worse. Then someone yelled " there's a fire exit lets go out that door " without thinking I put my hand on the bottom of the door, "Its hot, I don't think we should open it" I replied. For a moment I thought that I may not find the way out and was scared for my family. Then from nowhere I heard a voice, someone was yelling "come this way, this is the way out, keep moving until you see the light". I looked down at the floor, it was cracked along the walls and had fallen several inches, I was concerned that it may fall through with all the weight but knew it was our only route to the promise of safety. As I moved forward I began to see light, there were people holding a fire barrier door open so that we could exit. The smoke begin to clear, we could see the escalator that we had come up earlier and it looked as if everyone in our group had safely gotten through the blinding smoke filled hallway.

At last we were in the parking lot in front of the building, someone ask if everyone had made it, Mr Jim Buher spoke up, everyone find the people that are

on you teams. The group was divided into several teams consisting 4 to 5 people. After confirming the whole group was safe we proceeded to move further away from the building.

Outside the building several of us that had cell phones tried to call home and back to Crane to let everyone know that everyone in this group had made it out ok. But, the cell phone circuits was busy as many from the area flooded the system also trying to contact love ones and anyone concerned to assuring them they had made it out and to report on what had happened.

After we were a safe distance from the pentagon Mr. Dave Reece, IUPUI SPEA coordinator who had set up the appointments for us to meet with each of the speakers that week, ask if we could handle a two and a half mile walk back to the hotel where we would meet and review our options for the remainder of the week. Most agreed to walk but some was not up for the hike for various reasons.

So he led the group to the Crystal city hotel where those people caught a cab. Then after a short break, Mr. Reece lead us to what he believed the most direct path back to the hotel but, after walking a short distance we were turn back by the police because the path would have take use closer to the National Airport which local authorities was directing people away from concerned that another high jacked plan may be approaching. We would have to take an alternate route, again Mr. Reece lead us to reach the hotel.

I'm not exactly sure how long the hike out was but it was a steady walk and ended up taking about 2.5 hours. All the way back the traffic was backed up as people were trying to exit the city. Because of the traffic, it would be ten minutes later before those that took a taxi arrived at the hotel.

Once back at the hotel Mr. Buher made arrangements for a bus from the Star of Indiana to come and pick it us so we could safely return home to Indiana. It wouldn't be until Wednesday before the bus arrived in D.C. but we was all very relieved that we would not have to fly back to Indiana. On Wednesday morning the bus arrived around 10:30 am, I believe this is the only 13 hour bus ride that I can actually say I was looking forward to.

We arrived back in Indiana about 10:30 that night and would be stopping at the Holiday Inn airport for a press conference.

It's been a few days now since we safely returned home, as unbelievable as it may seem.

During the first few hours after the event I don't believe that any of us really realized how close we were to the location were the highjacked airplane entered the building. From what I understand at this point we were only about 50' away from were it hit and the path that led us to safety collapsed about 25 minutes after we had exited the building. When I tell people about the voice in the hall telling us to keep moving and that we would see light ahead they say it was

an Angel.

I truly appreciate everyone's hopes and prayers during this trying time. I only wish that everyone impacted by this event had been as fortunate. I would like to especially thank: Mrs. Susan Livingston, The United States Undersecretary of the Navy, for her calm reaction to the event and her phone call that evening verifying that we all made it to safety; Mr. Dave Reece, IUPUI, for leading us through the maze from the Pentagon back to the hotel; Mr. Jim Buher, IUPUI, for making arrangements with the Star of Indiana to get us back home; everyone in the group for their calm quick reaction allowing us all to get out safely; and a special thanks to the voice in the hall that assured myself and others we were headed in the right direction. - John Vaupel