

24 Sep 01

Subj: CDR DON BRASWELL RECOUNT OF EVENTS, 11 SEP 2001

1. Per your request, I have written my account of the events of 11 Sep.

2. (5D453 faces both the E ring and C ring offices. It's located between the fourth and fifth corridor, on the fifth floor. The aircraft went directly under our spaces.) Like most of the 5D453 staff, I was watching the footage from the WTC and trying to get a little office work done (the CNO was going to visit the Boeing St. Louis F/A-18E/F plant and wanted some background information.) Things had started to settle down when suddenly the building jumped 2-3 inches. Everyone instinctively looked out. We saw nothing but fireball towards the E-ring. Those looking to the C-ring saw nothing but fireball. Our building was completely enveloped in flames. None of the exterior glasses broke, the lights stayed on, and the computers ran for a few more seconds. In the corner, some of the acoustic roofing fell down, but that was all the damage. Others remember the lights going out.

We processed the information and decided to leave. Everyone seemed to come to the same conclusion at the same time and we began to exit. About 100 of us left our spaces. I could see the smoke starting to filter in from the E-ring and begin to wonder why we didn't see anyone leaving from there.

The last two officers I remember leaving the ranch were the senior captains. One of the Captains did a last sweep of the spaces and locked the door. The other Captain and I began to watch some folks exit from the E-ring. They continued to come as the smoke thickened. In 1-2 minutes you could barely see through the smoke and we began to yell for any other survivors to come towards us. A few stragglers continued to filter down the corridor.

As we were about to leave, we heard another answering voice from the E-ring. It became clear that they were disoriented and that the smoke was now too thick for them to see. (The E-ring didn't have any external lights past our space, and the corridor was now pitch black with smoke.) We stayed for approximately another 45-60 seconds yelling for them to walk towards us. We used several calls to keep them coming, "Hold hands and stay together," "Find a wall and guide down it," "Keep low below the smoke," "Keep coming," etc. Mostly they seemed to just need our voices to keep coming. They came out, holding hands and crouched low to the ground. After the last group of 5-6 went past, Capt Rush called for us to exit and we did. We kept yelling back, but no one else answered our calls.

We exited into the center court. We saw several minor injuries, but they were well tended by EMT and others. The OPNAV security personnel were securing each corridor and clearing everyone out.

D. H. B. BRASWELL