

Narrative of the events September 11, 2001 (911) experienced by CDR Craig Powell

This is not a sworn statement or intended to be a literary masterpiece. It is just the events as I remembered them. There is more detail but hopefully this get the story across.

Before the chronology I must add some background and also an observation. I have heard all the comments and saber rattling, etc. What I am left with is an addition on top of all this; it is the loss of our innocence or virginity if you like. We have been raped in the most brutal and cruel way and the gentle kindness and naïve arrogance that was to me America is now gone. The brutality of life is pervasive overseas, even in other modern nations but not the US. Now it is and that is such a shame. Not for you and me but our children and for them, I wished 911 had never happened.

Prior to the crash, I had just checked into the Pentagon the previous Tuesday, after leaving a very high stress environment in Kingston, Jamaica, and it was only that day I had been able to get all my badges etc. I was taking an acquisition course ACQ – 201 and had just completed taking the online test and was rechecking it before submitting it for grading when one of the guys in the room turned on the TV to watch the Presidents' Address in FLA about the recent attack on the World Trade Center. He had just finished saying "God Bless the victims, their families and God Bless America and was walking off, when the building shock and a shockwave passed through the office RM 5C455. We were fortunately just on the outer edge of the impact area and hence were force out. Unlike those that who were on the ground floor of C ring, because they were forced into the ground and buried. The rest of my actions seemed to have been automatic actions because I did not realize the level of adrenaline until I woke in a sweat the next day.

The story goes as follows:

We left our office and exited the building with the rest of the crowd. It was a hurried and orderly exit. This was ensured by the Marine Officers who placed themselves at all the steps and told everyone to walk while they stood fast.

I had decide to take the stairs all the way to the bottom floor and when I arrived I saw walking wounded coming from a passage way. I decided I would go that way and see if I could help. I first a saw lady stumbling around saying she had been in the bathroom when the roof caved in. I asked if there was anyone else and where was the bathroom. She just continued outside and pointed back the way she came.

After I had proceeded down the hallway and unknowingly through the alleyway of B and C ring, I saw a female LTJG stumbling/staggering around. She was soaking wet and had come out of a hallway with smoke billowing out. She was saying the there were other people behind here. I asked where? She said the Navy Command Center Room 1C464. I started down the hallway alone, then thought that was not such a good idea, and went outside to get help or at least tell someone what I was doing. As I returned the way I had come I notice the light which was the alleyway I had missed earlier. I went outside to see

about a half a dozen people leaning out a window on what I guess was the second deck. Anyway the smoke was pouring thick and black out of the window with the people in it. People on the ground/alley were looking for ways to get a ladder to get them but I thought it would take too long and was able to round up enough people to form a human net. we told the individuals to jump, they were hesitant at first but between our yelling and the fire, one them jumped and the rest followed. I notice that each time the people dropped into the net it turned into me alone. I was catching them as you would an egg, squatting as I caught them. I caught 3-4 people that way pulling my quad on one particularly heavy catch. The last lady to jump actually fell/was dropped and I pushed her, hoping to minimize her fall since I was not prepared or in position to catch her. There were two remaining people in the room and being scared and not having someone to hold them until they dropped, they were stuck.

Fortunately someone arrive with a step ladder. It was to short however, I was able to move a dumpster with the help of other to under the window and the climb up on top of the dumpster. A LTC Victor Correa climbed up and placed the ladder on his shoulder. I then held the ladder and braced him. The ladder was now tall enough to reach is the people, who hung down the wall. We convinced them it was safe and then were able to get the last two out of the building. Right as this was happening CDR Jeff Stratton showed up driving an orange cart. I was not present but I sure this was used to help remove the injured

These people were not from the Navy Command Center and then someone said “they” were inside and went up into a hole in the wall to get them out. Basically all the people there tried to get to these people multiple times unsuccessfully. I attribute this to not having anyone really in charge. I was in civilian clothes having just arrived to work and starting to do the course I mentioned earlier. So I had no rank on and could not really gain command of the situation. I used several officers to give directions and help the situation, originally it was a Rear Admiral McNair USN and a LTC Giles Kaiser USMC, and he not only had the uniform but most importantly command presence. After about two futile attempts, basically due to the disorganization and everyone trying to help and jamming up the spaces, to enter the space where we knew/ we told people were trapped, Lt GEN Carlton USAF arrived with four EMT’s, a blue EMS vest and THREE big stars on his shoulder. I went over gave him a SITREP and then proceeded back into the hole, after rolling around in the water outside and wetting my handkerchief, to get the trapped people. About that times several people, Navy personnel came out. I guess they were able to make a hole. One female petty officer was saying Mr. Hansen was still in there and his head was trapped. I went up into the hole. I could not see anything and really could not get down low because I have hurt my leg earlier and could not squat down. I proceeded to move anything I could grab and pass it out. I never saw the actual rescue of Mr. Hansen. I just moved and lifted things I could reach and pushed them out. I know both General Carlton and an EMT’s were in there next/near to me because I felt the General’s vest and the EMT’s belt case. The fire by then had moved so close I could see the flames, vice an orange glow, through the smoke. As I was moving out others were looking for more people. I was clearing the room, I saw the mesh screen of the roof was sagging, so I held it up and I told the other to get out the roof was going to come down. As several people

passed me I followed them and exited the building. LT Olin Sells USN arrived some time during all this, but I do not remember when. I later asked why/how he ended back in the alley. He said he knew that was where he could help.

About this time the Fire Department arrived and we moved over to let them in. I talked with their on scene commander and gave him a SITREP. I then hung around trying to help. By this time both CDR Stratton and LTC Kaiser had returned, not that I knew they left, with litters and litter bearers. I stayed to help with the others until I was forced to leave because of the possibility of another aircraft. I then herded out the crowd with a couple Defense Protective Service personnel. I stayed with the flow as we headed out of the Pentagon to the North Parking lot. As we passed the clinic, I pretty sure it was LTC Kaiser, asked if they, the medical people in the clinic needed help. They said “yes, getting supplies out.” We all just turned into the clinic and at the direction of a lady in PT gear started pulling stuff out. Lt Olin Sells and myself realized grabbing bits and pieces of gear was a wastes so we just drug the entire medical cabinet and drug it out of the Pentagon and across the walkway, pass the POAC and then over to an ambulance.

The rest of the day was left to trying to help. I must say that General Carlton and LTC Kaiser were instrumental in organizing the teams that were formed to re-enter the Pentagon and trying to assist in the rescue of any other survivors.

The most memorable thing other than the shear magnitude of the horror of this act was the action of our military; LEAD, FOLLOWED OR GET THE HELL OUT OF THE WAY, sums it up best. EVERYONE did their part, even if it was getting out of the way. If I had not been in the room, finding or trying to catch people or trying to organize efforts somebody else would have been there.

GOD BLESS AMERICA(NS)