

Narrative of Events, September 11, 2001

I am a contractor working for the Navy's Air Warfare Division (OPNAV N78), specifically supporting the Head, Aircraft Carrier and Air Traffic Control Branch (N785).

On the morning of 11 September, I arrived in our spaces (Pentagon Rm 5D453) shortly after 8:00 a.m. This space is top floor, just off the 4th Corridor in the newly renovated spaces of the Pentagon, and the office space consisted of a large, open bay of cubicles that extended all the way to the boundary between Wedge 1 (newly renovated) and Wedge 2, (unrenovated), where we had been previously located. N785's desks within this space were located in the first three rows of cubicles within the open bay style office of this newly renovated space, which we had occupied since June 2001. The spaces were furnished with cubicles in rows of four to five desks abreast, with one passageway along the interior wall of the "D" ring and another running parallel to it just beyond the first set of desks, about midway in the large open space.

By shortly after 9:00 a.m., I was in a meeting with our flag officer, N785, and one other officer, in the flag's office on the outer edge of the "C" ring. The flag officer had a TV on in the office, and during the course of the meeting, he looked at the screen, which was showing the initial reports of the first airplane crash into the World Trade Center, and remarked, "That can't be good!" Despite our momentary distraction, we all continued the meeting until N785's Deputy knocked on the door and directed our attention again to the TV, which now showed the second plane crashing into the second World Trade Center Tower. At this point we quickly concluded the meeting, and the other officer and I returned to our area in the "D" ring of the Pentagon.

By this time, most of the occupants of the space were aware of the events going on in NYC. Some were making phone calls to determine which flights were involved, and others (myself included) were standing near our desks discussing how vulnerable the Pentagon could be to such an attack due to its proximity to the flight paths for National Airport. I never had any premonition as to what would happen next, and we did not receive any warning or alarm.

At the moment of impact, I was standing with my back to my desk (facing towards the back of the office space in the direction of Corridor 5), and could see to the end of our spaces. There was simultaneously a concussion and noise like I have never experienced, and can only describe as deeply felt as well as heard, a huge, and seemingly very close explosion. Within a second or two, I witnessed a ball of fire that seemed to come from above, and came down on both sides of the "D" ring. I could see out the windows on both sides of the ring, and there was the sound of things hitting the roof.

Within our space, the lights went out, but there was still plenty of sunlight. Ceiling tiles fell, but not all, only a few, actually. The windows in our space remained intact as far as I could see. There was almost immediately a smell of fuel and I could see white smoke, (and then darker smoke) coming from the end of the space that bordered the unrenovated wedge.

I immediately knew that we had to evacuate the space. There was no warning or alarm, but we all sensed a need to get out quickly. I remember telling my colleague, "I think it's time to go home."

We were all stunned, and just stood for a few seconds, perhaps as long as 10 seconds. As some personnel started to file out, someone shouted from the corridor (4), "GET OUT, NOW," and that seemed to hurry people up. There was no panic, although there were some people crying and shrieking. Overall, evacuation of the space was very calm and orderly. I even hesitated for a moment to get my briefcase and cell phone, and remember considering for another moment whether I should log off my computers. I did not.

As the space was being evacuated, some personnel attempted to go down the stairwell located immediately across the corridor from the entrance to our space, but there was already thick,

black smoke coming up the stairwell, and those people came back up. Everyone I saw left the spaces by entering Corridor 4, turning left, and proceeding to the "A" ring, where they used either the stairs or escalators to descend. As we walked towards the "A" ring, the smoke was getting thicker and the smell of it and the fuel was persistent. It was following us as we moved, and catching up.

I descended the stairs to the second floor at the junction of Corridors 3 & 4. Many personnel were filing out into the Pentagon Courtyard. Having seen the video of a second plane hitting the World Trade Center, I decided not to go into the courtyard, but instead walked to Corridor 2 and out of the building.

Once outside, my thoughts turned to my family, and I decided to get home as soon as possible, because I thought they might close the schools. I started walking towards Crystal City Metro. I also tried using my cell phone to call my company's office to tell them our 4 employees were safe, to call my wife who was in North Carolina, and to call my parents. It was very difficult to get through, the phone lines being overloaded. I reached my wife first (I think, because it was not a local call) within 20 minutes, and then reached another person located out of town and requested him to call my company.

I reached the Metro station, and caught the first train, a Blue Line, headed south. I got off at National Airport to try to continue phone calls while waiting for the Yellow Line train. Just as the Yellow Line arrived, I reached my parents by phone and was informed that the World Trade Center Tower had just collapsed. I boarded the train, reached Huntington, picked up my vehicle, and drove home. I was home before 11 a.m. Parents of other children were calling our home to tell me that my children were concerned and that I could pick them up, so I went to pick up my son. My daughter remained in her high school. While my son spent the rest of the day riding his bike and playing outside, my daughter and I watched the horrible reality unfold on TV. I also called and left voice messages for my office coworkers to tell them where I was and who else I knew had escaped safely.

I believe that the N78 Staff was lucky that the plane did not strike the Pentagon higher, or hit the roof, or we would have suffered more, as so many others in offices below us did.

I also believe that the situation in our office space benefited greatly from the fact that our windows did not shatter with the initial explosion. It provided time for over 100 persons to evacuate in a relatively calm manner. However, I have also spoken with a firefighter who was in the Pentagon for days after the event. He told me that the same windows on other floors may have trapped people inside because they could not break them to escape.

While I did not personally witness this, I was told that automatic fire doors in the 4th corridor started to close during the evacuation, and had to be physically re-opened and held open to allow people to escape. If they had been allowed to close and seal, they might have trapped persons on the fire side of the barrier and cost additional lives lost due to smoke inhalation.

I would be glad to provide any further information if I can, but this is just as I remember it.

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