

Office: OPNAV N812F3, Pentagon 4C449

My Experience:

CDR Tom Ransom (also N812F) and I had a meeting scheduled with Mr. Bob Biegalski of Johns Hopkins, Applied Physics Lab in the N812 main office space in the Pentagon. We were meeting in a small conference 'area' about halfway between the two doors into the N812 office space, 4C449 and 4C355. The meeting began at 0900. After meeting Mr. Biegalski at the entrance to our spaces, CDR Ransom and I walked back with him to the conference table. On the way we overheard someone say "A plane just hit the World Trade Center". Before reaching the conference table we saw on a television monitor the flaming tower first struck. It was not in my mind at that point that it was anything but an accident.

As we were getting our meeting underway, we overheard comments indicating a second plane had struck the remaining WTC tower. It was then clear that an attack was underway. Our meeting was only about 20 minutes into the actual intended topic when the floor gave a very sharp jump lifting my chair off the floor slightly, followed by two, perhaps three, rapidly dissipating rolling heaves. The duration of the perceived physical motion was less than a second, but not much. The motion was of course accompanied by a fairly loud, 'explosion' sound, also of two apparent peaks. The perceived delay between floor motion and initial sound was very short, well under a quarter second.

Aside: I've been an explosive systems design, test and evaluation engineer most of my entire 30+ year career, and am very familiar with large explosive events and impact events of similar energy density. I immediately thought it was a bomb because of the two peaks in both the floor heave and the sound, these being fairly characteristic of shock waves in structures, which in my experience had always been caused by detonation of explosives. A moments thought though put it in context with the events at the WTC and raised the possibility that it was a large passenger aircraft crashing into the building. However, I still believed it was likely a large bomb, just because of the intensity of the shock.

Lights flickered but stayed on, as did the air conditioning, computers remained running, everything looked normal, nobody was screaming or running, no smoke or flames were visible from our single row of windows (which open onto the open space between the C and B rings), or through the 4C449 door which was open as people began leaving. Somebody (Capt. Hansen (N812), I think) moved through the office not quite shouting, ordering everybody to evacuate the building. This was perhaps 20 to 30 seconds after the impact.

We adjourned the meeting, grabbed our classified materials and in route to the doors stashed them in our safes, barely breaking pace to do so. I, along with others around me, left everything and proceeded to evacuate the building. As soon as I went through the door (4C449) into the corridor (30 to 60 seconds after the impact) I could smell burning jet fuel (which pretty much destroyed the bomb hypothesis) and see the faint beginnings

of smoke which appeared to be coming up from the lower decks through the escalator well at the juncture of the second corridor and the A ring. I turned right, toward the A ring and the escalator as the air was still pretty clear, that was the shortest path to get to any exit, and it was away from the direction I thought the sound and shock had come from.

The escalators were still running, lights were still on and while the smell and smoke were beginning to be more than just noticeable, the air was still quite clear. The corridor was moderately crowded, people were walking briskly but not running toward the A ring. At the escalator the crowd density went up to pretty close to the maximum that could be accommodated, everybody in frequent contact with one to three other folks, but all walked down, not just rode, the escalator. Not to Tokyo subway at rush hours levels, but close.

As I neared the foot of the second/third deck escalator, smoke density reached levels that made breathing difficult and a few people began coughing. I turned right again through the ANZUS corridor toward the ramp down to the Metro/lobby level. About 2/3's of the people on the escalator did the same. At the far end (closest to the lobby) of the ANZUS corridor I chose to head toward the South Parking Lot exit corridor as I was not sure the Metro would be working and I didn't want to go below ground with 20,000 people trying to exit the building and possibly have to walk up the long escalator out of the Metro lobby as more tried to get down it.

As soon as I was just a few yards into the corridor leading directly to the South Parking Lot exits, the press of people became really dense and progress toward the exits began to slow. This was a potentially major mistake on my part as if the exits had been blocked, by this time there was no possibility of moving backwards up the corridor to try another exit against the flow of people. The smoke thankfully got only a little worse, and though the press of people was pretty intense by the time we made the turn into the security 'lobby' at the exits, we kept moving on through the exits.

Once outside, we could see the huge smoke column and flames from around the corner where the strike took place. Bob Biegalski and I continued south through the tunnel under Interstate 395 to where he'd parked his car and parted there, Bob headed back to APL, I walked the mile to my apartment building.

Observations: These are my observations based on what I witnessed during and immediately after the event.

- (a) If there is an evacuation plan for the Pentagon, I'm still unaware of it. I'd only been a full-time worker there for six weeks though.
- (b) The total lack of any self-contained emergency breathing apparatus for each occupant now seems criminally negligent.
- (c) There appeared to be no damage control stations or damage control plan, much less battle stations. With any other population of a building this size, we'd have lost more people, perhaps a lot more.

- (d) There appeared to be no re-constitution plan, at least no effective one, pre-existing in our organization.
- (e) 20,000 plus people with less than a dozen workable high-volume exits demands a PA system of deafening power but extreme clarity if injuries or deaths are to be avoided in the event of a blocked or hazardous exit. At several points in my trip through the building I could hear the PA system, but never understood a single word. Even with almost no people screaming or crying, the background noise of a full corridor of people talking to their neighbors about what was going on just totally swamped the PA system. Perhaps centrally or locally controlled LARGE flashing signs as seen on freeways prone to gridlock are needed. Both ends of each corridor would seem logical locations.
- (f) The HVAC system continued to work well in the parts of the building I transited. It's compartmentalization was probably an important factor in getting the building evacuated without further losses.
- (g) Ditto the lights.
- (h) Water-only sprinkler system logic needs to be revisited. AFFF, and in selected conditions Halon, should be considered.

Very Respectfully,

Pat