

[REDACTED]

U.S.A. CENTER FOR MILITARY HISTORY

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Interview with [REDACTED]

Interviewer: [REDACTED]

Interview Date: 12 December 2001

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY WITHOUT THE APPROVAL OF THE
ORIGINATING AGENCY.

[BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE.]

[REDACTED]: My name is [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] of the 305th Military History Detachment. Spelling [REDACTED] And today I am at Arlington National Cemetery with [REDACTED] spelling [REDACTED] and spelling [REDACTED] He is the Facility Manager of Arlington National Cemetery and on the date of September 11th, 2001, [REDACTED] observed the commercial airliner crash into the Pentagon which was approximately one and a half miles away.

[REDACTED] where do you live?

[REDACTED] I live in Stafford, Virginia.

[REDACTED] Stafford, Virginia. And are you married and have a family?

[REDACTED] Yes, sir. I am married and I have a family.

[REDACTED] Could you give us a brief overview of your military and civilian career with the government?

[REDACTED] Let's see here. I was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1966. I went to basic training in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. I went from basic training to Vietnam, Southeast Asia, where I served as a construction surveyor for the 87th Engineers and I was in Vietnam, I believe, about 14 months and I came back to the states and I ETS'd out of the military and went back to my wife and child in Devil's Lake, North Dakota.

And from there, I went to work with the Soil Conservation Department in Devil's Lake, North Dakota. I worked approximately a year for them. And then I went to

work for Ottertail Power Company in Devil's Lake, North Dakota. I worked for approximately two years for them. I then moved to California and I worked for the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and, in most all cases, I worked in the capacity as a, either a land surveyor or a construction surveyor. My background is construction and that's basically what I have done, construction and maintenance, all of my life.

[REDACTED] Later you moved into the federal government employ. How did you end up here in Washington, D.C.

[REDACTED] Well, see I was working out in California, a land I dearly love, and my wife had two sisters that lived out here at Woodbridge, Virginia. So after a few years of a little bit of heckling, I said, well, my wife wanted to live by her sisters. So we moved out here to Woodbridge, Virginia. And from there I, first year we were out here I worked construction in the northern Virginia area. And then I had put in an application for the federal government and this is where I ended up at, at Arlington National Cemetery as a surveyor for Arlington Cemetery.

[REDACTED] So you've been here for approximately?

[REDACTED] I came to work in 1976.

[REDACTED] Approximately 26 years.

[REDACTED] Yes, sir.

[REDACTED] And what basically is your duties here?

[REDACTED] Well, as I say, I started out here as a surveyor and my basic duties for the first, I guess, seven years was laying out the new burial sections and laying out the burial sites and working with ceremonies and working with funerals. And from there, I went on to the maintenance department where I started out as a maintenance worker and then a maintenance foreman and now I'm the Facilities Manager and we keep up, maintain the facilities.

[REDACTED] Thank you. Prior to the attack on the Pentagon, were you aware of the attacks on the World Trade Center that day?

[REDACTED] Yes, I was. Well, at the time I didn't know they were attacks. When I first heard it, I think, was either on the radio, no, as you were. Someone told me that the trade tower had been hit with an airplane and they had asked me at that time, it was a co-worker, and he said do you think it was done on purpose or what? And I said geez, I don't know. I said, and then just off the top of my head I said, well, the only way we'd really know for sure was, you know, of some kind of terrorist, if the other one was to be, you know, then it wouldn't be a coincidence. And shortly thereafter, the same fellow came and told me they done hit the other tower. I said, good lord, you know.

And, well, I just went to my office, which is right down here and I was doing paperwork at my desk. And I don't know how much time evolved but then I, the little radio I've

got in here, I'm listening to the news at that time then. And never thinking that this would go any further. So anyway, I'm sitting at my desk working and not paying too much attention really to the radio, really and to the news or to really what happened and not understanding the severity and how big the catastrophe really was. You know, nothing was really sinking in. I was just like in a daze maybe.

And so I'm doing my paperwork and I'm sitting here at my desk. And I hear this like a jet engine. You know, the planes in this particular area here right across from the Pentagon, we aren't but 800 feet away from the Pentagon here across the road and they got helicopters flying over into the cemetery a lot of times as fly-overs. But I hear a jet noise coming and it keeps getting louder and louder and louder. I say god dang it, that sounds awful low for a fly-over or what. So I said, I'm sitting here at the desk, I open up my things here and I'm looking out and I see this big, large airplane and it looks like, I thought it was going to hit this building here. So I was just looking out, look out here and I see this airplane coming down here and I thought it was coming, going to hit this building. And I said good God Almighty. So I'm just petrified. I'm looking.

The plane flies right over the parking lot here, I could see the people sitting in the airplane, yes. I'm

saying good God. And just, it's just not registering, you know, it's so, it's weird. So then I'm seeing it, it's going by here and it sounds like he stepped on the gas and just really poured the coals to it. And I go from here over to this one here and I'm looking out and, as you can see, you can see right over there where it's at.

[REDACTED]: That's maybe 800 feet?

[REDACTED] Yes. And I'm just watching and I'm just amazed that it, it happened pretty quick, too. And it hit the thing and it was just the most god-awful loudest noise. I mean, you could hear it like in 3-D. You know, I could see, you could hear it hit, bam. And then just you could hear it crumbling, crushing like an accordion and then boom. Just like a smash, crunch, pow when all the fuel blew up.

I mean, it was, I'm just standing here and then my bud, the same guy I was talking to earlier about this stuff, he come running in and he hollered out, he says goddamn they done blowed up the Pentagon, the blowed up the Pentagon. I'm standing here. I don't know, I might even have wet myself. I don't even know but then my other buddy down the hall here, our Project Engineer, [REDACTED] his wife worked over there and he just jumped up screaming, oh my God, my wife's at work, my wife's at work. They'll kill my wife. And he tore off out of here and he tried to go over to the Pentagon. He couldn't get over there, of course, and then he left all of his cellphone here and we couldn't get

in touch with him or nothing. But later on during the day, after this thing has cooled down a bit, he did find his wife. His wife was on the other side of the Pentagon and thank God, she didn't get killed.

Well, then after that, I went outside as did everybody. I mean, and there was a lot of the guys, the field people out here, they ran and scattered. Everybody was going everywhere. It was unbelievable. I went outside and we were standing up here watching down here, watching it burn. And then we were out there and somebody hollered out, you know, there's a report of another plane coming this way. So that everybody just scattered and it was like ants on an anthill and everybody was going every which way and not knowing which way to go.

And I'm watching the sky, I'm watching the sky and I hear two sonic booms. And I said, oh, God, here they come. So I jumped in my pickup truck then and loaded up whoever was around here and we took off out of here and went up on the hillside over here on top of Section Eight and watched what was going on and looking out for, to see if other planes were coming in.

So in the meantime, another co-worker of mine comes out and he said over the radio, have you called your wife yet. I said, no, I haven't. I haven't called her. He said, well, you'd better get in touch with her, better call her because over the radio they reported that Arlington Cemetery

was bombed or an airplane landed in the cemetery. So I said, okay, Jesus, I'd better do that.

So I came back down here and by that time, there was all kinds of people just milling around and wandering around. Buildings were being evacuated. The Navy Annex up here and the Marine barracks and the people were evacuating and they were just, didn't know where to go, I guess, and they were coming through the cemetery by the thousands. And just, it was unbelievable. They were just in shock and just walking. They didn't know where they were going or how they were going to get anywhere.

But anyways, to make a long story short, I did get a, finally got a call through to my wife. The phones, everything was dead. Right after it happened, all the phones were dead. There was no signal or nothing. Cellphones were dead, couldn't get a line up. Finally there was one line over at the building complex 117 over here, Mechanics Shop, a phone line came open. So I called my wife or I got through to her, not to her, I didn't speak to her personally but her supervisor and let her know I was okay.

So other than that, oh, boy, that's about it. Well, then we heard that there was another plane but that it had gone down in Pennsylvania somewhere. And we were still, yet, there were still reports of another plane coming either into D.C. or somewhere so everybody was on the alert and everybody was looking. And finally we got word down from

our agency that, to evacuate the cemetery. So I think it was by about 2:00 or so that afternoon, we got all the employees out of here, got everybody sent home and I think I, myself, got out of here about 4:00 that day after we got everything secured up and the employees all accounted for and sent home.

[REDACTED] Do you mind if I ask a couple of questions?

[REDACTED] No, no, no.

[REDACTED] Thank you. You gave me a very good description here and your immediate actions. Describe how you saw others acting and the affects of the attack on them.

[REDACTED] They were in astonishment. I mean, like they knew something happened, that something happened and what happened but they not knowing what it was really, people were just in denial. I mean, I was. I said, man, this isn't happening. This, I spent 14 months in Vietnam and make it home to the good old USA and then get snuffed out here right in the capital city of the United States. It was unreal. And people were just in disbelief and just standing with their hands out like this, you know, what the hell can we do or what should we do.

[REDACTED] Okay. You gave a good description of the general area after the attack here. Now, how many people would you say took refuge in the cemetery maintenance area when you said a lot of people poured into this area?

[REDACTED] After the fact, there was countless, numerous. I mean --

[REDACTED]: Approximate.

[REDACTED] Thousands.

[REDACTED]: Thousands?

[REDACTED] Yes, just like walking through the cemetery, coming, you know, leaving from, like I say, from the Navy Annex, from the Marine Corps barracks up there, from the Pentagon. Everything was coming this way. There was no other where to go. They couldn't get out, you know, 95 was blocked off, the roads were all blocked off with the emergency vehicles, the fire trucks and what have you.

Oh, and that's another things, too. You know, whoever was on the scene first, God bless them, the Fire Department, they were at the Pentagon and, you know, the reports of another plane supposed to be coming so they shut down their fire fighting operations and everybody got the hell out of the way over there. That's when the fire really took off going, that thing blazed, my God, oh, it was unbelievable. A hell of a fire.

But, yes, so all these people and then came the media, right. And people looking for their husbands, their wives, I mean, this complex right here and over here was just overrun with people wanting to use the telephone and the media needing to call out there. And it was unbelievable. There was lots and lots of people.

[REDACTED]: In the smoke and everything?

[REDACTED] Yes, yes, yes. And everybody needing someplace to establish a base, you know, for whatever it was they were doing throughout, I'd say, the hour or two after the initial impact, they wanted to set up a command station in this building here, the military did, and all kinds of, you know, the media, it was just like a circus out here. I mean, vehicles going every which way, tires squealing, sirens blowing, you know, the emergency vehicles trying to get in, trying to get out. It was unreal. It was a classic zoo.

[REDACTED]: Overall the people were well-behaved?

[REDACTED] Oh, yes, yes, yes.

[REDACTED] I think then --

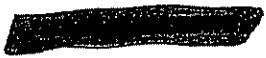
[REDACTED] No, and everybody was looking out for each other and trying to help each other as best as they could. And I did what I could. There was like people just wandering around in here crying and how am I going to get home, what should I do, it was unbelievable.

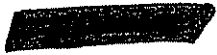
[REDACTED] Again, you've answered a big majority of the questions I have written here. A couple more, how about your own personnel. Were you able to get them together and account for them, how much after the attack if you know.

[REDACTED] Well, shortly after. The first thing I did, I got with my supervisors, my work leaders, and we rounded up all our people and made sure our group was all intact

still because some of the guys that were working on the fencelines down here and repairing a fence, I said, oh, lord, what a day for them guys to be down there. But they hadn't gone out to that point as of yet.

So thank God for that or they would have been right out there on the highway. Not to say they would have gotten hurt but they would have been right in the general vicinity. But we got all our group accounted for in Facility Maintenance and so did the other divisions in the cemetery and we were all accounted for and we were all here.

 Just after the plane hit, did you go back to your work tasks or it was pretty much immediately stopped.

 Well, yes and no. There was things we had to do. We had to rope off areas. We had to set up barricades, road blocks within the cemetery itself because the people and the tourists were just looking for an outlet or a way to go, just going wild in here. So we got that all done, my crew got that all done. And we had to secure a lot of areas because, like I say, they were all trying to get, you know, looking at what the damage at the Pentagon and they were all inside the cemetery. So people by the thousands were coming down here and trying to either crawl over the fence, get over the fence, to get over there to get closer. So we had to put up a security perimeter all around this whole southeast side of the cemetery. And which, you

can still see some of the rope lines are still up, up here by the Navy Annex up here, further up there. It was, I say it was maddening.

[REDACTED]: So all of the people from the Navy Annex poured into this as you said earlier?

[REDACTED] Yes, and other people from all around coming in, you know, from up north and from the top side and on in.

[REDACTED]: I want to apologize, I don't know the geographics but what's up north. I mean, what's up north?

[REDACTED] Oh, Fort Myer's side.

[REDACTED] Fort Myer's side.

[REDACTED] Here's a map, you can kind of orientate yourself. This is approximately how we lay out here. Okay, we are down here, right here. Yes, so up here, Fort Myer, Roslyn over here. D.C. down over here. So we're getting all this traffic, I mean, walking people, walking traffic. So all these people pouring out of the Navy Annex and the Marine Corps barracks, they're coming down through this way. The Pentagon people, they could jump the fence, crawl the fence, they were coming in through down here and either up this way and through here. Yes.

[REDACTED] Two thousand would be a conservative estimate?

[REDACTED] Oh, yes, yes, yes, there were thousands of people.

[REDACTED]: Maybe five, six, seven thousand,

actually. May I have this?

[REDACTED] Sure you can.

[REDACTED] I thank you.

[REDACTED] And if you needed some more, I can get some more.

[REDACTED] I appreciate that.

[REDACTED] And then the funerals were still going on and one of the funerals were going on right down in this area at the impact, when the plane hit. Funerals were going on right down here in Section 68 and down here in 64. So they continued on with the funerals. They kept on with the funerals until they were completed in whatever fashion they could get them completed with and, of course, the ground crews, they were out there and lowered the remains and backfilled the graves.

And then I don't know at what point it was when the superintendent finally curtailed all funerals, you know, for that day. It was probably I'd say within a half hour or so of the impact that all funerals were stopped. Because everything was blocked up downtown, you know, the people, you know, the funeral homes couldn't get in. It was a rat's nest.

[REDACTED]: So you had good orders from your higher?

[REDACTED] Oh, yes, yes, yes.

[REDACTED] Very competent.

[REDACTED] Yes. Well, we all got these two ways here,

cellphones, so oh, yes, yes, yes, right after the thing happened, we were all pretty much in touch and kept close contact.

[REDACTED] I know this is a cemetery, it's not a facility such as the Pentagon but in all of your approximately 26 years here, you never had evacuation drills or anything of this order, am I correct?

[REDACTED] That is correct because, you know, Arlington Cemetery, I guess my concept of it is, you know, if the terrorists were to hit anywhere, I mean, why not Arlington Cemetery. You know, especially like up at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. I mean, prime example when President is out here or there's some high-ranking individuals that come out to lay wreaths at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

But, no, even knowing the White House is, if something was to happen, why not the White House or, they tried to blow up the Washington Monument and stuff like that. It's highly unlikely. The possibility, yes, but just on the day of no greater significance other than being September 11th, who would think, who would have thought. It's, in my mind, it's unbelievable still to this day. It's unreal. I can't believe it happened. It's just crazy.

I don't know how to explain it but it, I don't know, the denial part about it is just, well, then after the fact though, too, I'll just let you know this that the cemetery, the superintendent and the chaplain's offices and within NDW

and Arlington Cemetery, they had, I guess you call them group conscious meetings with the employees, you know, to talk about the situation like we're talking about now. I mean, so I guess talking about things sometimes kind of helps you get over them or around them. But kind of hangs with you.

[REDACTED] How would you say the Army training enabled you to respond to this attack.

[REDACTED] Well, I'd say having been in combat before, I knew what to look for and I knew, you know, I guess It..you know..I could keep my calm and help the other employees stay calm and get regrouped and into position and..you know.. be ready for whatever we had to do that needed to be done. But I tell you, when these helicopters started flying over out here, I was freaking myself though.

[REDACTED] Like your prior Vietnam experience.

[REDACTED] Yes. It was an experience I'll tell you. I thought Vietnam was an experience but they were flying over, you know, they were guarding the perimeter and they were still waiting for that other plane to come in. It was something.

[REDACTED] Okay. Now, you were in a good vantage point, the civilian authorities, police, firemen, rescue workers, couple reflections on them. What you thought of whether they did a good job.

[REDACTED] They did an outstanding job. I don't know

how the fire departments and the rescue people got here as quick and as efficiently as they did being the way traffic was all snarled up and everything but within I'd say, within five or ten minutes there were hook and ladder trucks on the scene and, you know, and the fire suppression was taking place and rescue squads were all down in this area and in position and I think they set up a field hospital directly out in front of here in the green area out here on the cloverleaf, right out in front here and I think another one further on down. But this one out here was where they were bringing all the injured, right out in front here.

Now, this all happened within a matter of hours, minutes. I say the fire departments, whichever ones got there, I think it was Fort Myer might have been first on the scene right from up here and Arlington County but they were there. I say, I couldn't believe how fast they got there and how they got there through the snarl of traffic. It was outstanding.

[REDACTED]: What lessons were learned in your perspective from this day. From your own perspective, what lessons could be learned.

[REDACTED] Lessons, you know, I really never, I haven't given it any thought really as to, I guess, the probably the biggest lesson would be to always be on the alert. Don't take anything for granted. Anything can happen at any time, at any given place. Just, you know, you never know what's

going to happen or what could happen. And I don't know how a person could be prepared for a situation of this nature.

I mean, you know, at our work, our daily mission is we do risk assessments daily. I mean, it's an ongoing thing before you, but for a situation like this, and not being a daily occurrence, how in the heck do you prepare yourself or be ready for a situation such as this and I don't know but I guess my biggest lesson would be is the security issue. We can't never be lax on security, I don't care how insignificant you think your organization or your place of work is. I mean, security needs to be a primary factor that should be, I don't know, involved, evolved on a daily basis. I mean, it needs to be addressed daily, weekly and brought up to par, up to snuff with the changing times and the situations as they're happening around you.

[REDACTED]: Did your workday return to normal after how many days or when did things get back to normal?

[REDACTED] Well, probably don't, I'd say it was a good month or a month and a half. I'd say even to this day, people still come into the cemetery and still try to get out across the fence. And you know, tourists coming and they want to see the Pentagon but they can't get over there so they're in the cemetery here trying to. But we've taken down most of our barricades now except for one area still.

And my heart goes out to the people that did come here and pay their respects to the incident at the Pentagon

because they were out here all day long, all night long and they had emblems and banners and flags and all hung up on the fence along the cemetery here. It was a sight to behold. I mean, it was just, you know, you knew the meaning of it all. I mean, it was really, it got to you in the heart. ...you know.. It was a sad --

[REDACTED] It was a show of humanity.

[REDACTED] Yes, it was a sad situation.

[REDACTED]: I've got two more questions.

[REDACTED] Sure.

[REDACTED]: The time from the window to get over here, what would you say it was when you first saw through this window.

[REDACTED] I'd say five seconds, ten seconds. Just the noise, it keeps getting louder and louder and I said goddang it, awful low for a fly-over so I think, I actually did, I looked out this window first. I see nothing but I keep hearing the noise. I go look at that window and here it comes. And I said oh, shit.

[REDACTED] When you first saw it from here to there, how long did it take.

[REDACTED] From here to over there? Matter of seconds. When I seen he was kind of turning and gliding when he came across here, across the parking lot but when he got out right in front here, it sounded like he poured the coals to it. Yes, and that's when I looked over here and then when I

was looking over here and I seen things fly up in there, not knowing really what the hell they were but come to find out they were streetlights. So the plane was clipping the tops of the streetlights off. And I could see the people's faces in the plane.

[REDACTED]: What was the look.

[REDACTED]: Just despair. Just empty stares. You know, like, what can we do. It was terrible. That sound when it hit, boom, crunch, pow.

[REDACTED]: Did you feel the shake over here?

[REDACTED]: Oh, shit, it like to knock the windows out of the building. In fact, it did down at the lower end down here. Yes, the lights and the heating systems up in the roof came down. Oh, yes, it was a tremendous impact. Oh, lord, yes, like a bomb went off.

[REDACTED]: The kind of explosion you heard in Vietnam?


[REDACTED]: Oh, yes.

[REDACTED]: Is there anything you want to add, think that should be added?

[REDACTED]: No, all I can say is I just hope something like this never happens again, you know, here in the United States and they catch us off guard. We need to always be on alert for whatever harm might come our way. I don't know, I just hope my kids and my grandkids can, you know, live long enough to make it through their lives. And, you know, the

United States is the best place in the whole world to live as far as I'm concerned.

I enjoyed the military service. I liked the Army. In fact, I would have probably stayed in if I hadn't been married and had a small child that I hadn't seen, you know, while I was in the service but, in fact, I like the 87th Engineers, that was in construction combat. I was all over, all over Southeast Asia.

 Well, thank you for your time. Appreciate that. This interview concluded at approximately 11:20.

[END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE.]