

**Naval Historical Center  
Oral Interview Summary Form**

**Interviewers:**

CDR Carol O'Hagan  
CDR Karen Loftus

**Interviewee:**

Mr. Stephen R. Hoerst

**Date of Interview:**

29 JAN 02

**Number of Cassettes:**

1

**Name of Project:** Pentagon Terrorist Attack Incident

**Interviewer's Organization:**

Naval Historical Center  
Naval Historical Center

**Current Address:**

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██████████  
██████████

**Place of Interview:**

NC2

**Security Classification:**

UNCLAS

**Subject Terms/Key Words:** Pentagon; Terrorist Attack; 11 September 2001; evacuation; lessons learned; carnage; Navy Command Center; awards; Pentagon-Rescue (civilian); Emergency Preparedness

**Abstract of Interview:**

**Interviewee Information:** Mr. Hoerst was born in ██████████, OH in 1964. His father was a Korean War veteran. He attended college at Miami University affiliating with the ROTC program. He graduated with a degree in aeronautics and was commissioned an Ensign in 1986. He spent 11 years on active duty on four ships, *USS Iowa*, FFG 24- *USS Jack Williams*, *USS Mississippi*, and the *USS Saipan*. After 11 years of active duty he got off active duty and moved to Washington, D.C. to work for a defense-consulting agency, GRC International, supporting Naval Sea Systems Command. In January 2000 he switched jobs to work for the OPNAV office Code N764. He maintained his affiliation with the Navy by participating in the U.S. Naval Reserves, currently a LCDR serving as the Commanding Officer of Atlantic Ordnance Command Explosive Ordnance Team ONE. His whole unit aside from himself and his XO were all recalled. He currently works as an action officer in the Force Air Defense Branch in N764.

**Topics Discussed:**

Prior to 11 Sep Mr. Hoerst was working on the DD21 Destroyer program, specifically his radar programs that are in development.

His office on 11 Sep was located in 5B452. This was the newly renovated section of the Pentagon, and they had only moved there in the previous March or April. They were pleased with their new spaces. His office was a cubicle in the second row of cubicles in a large space holding 70 or 80 cubicles. The two Admirals had their offices in small conferences but everyone else was in the bay in a cubicle.

It was a normal day. He was walking around talking to various people and never saw any of the emails about the World Trade Center. He felt a rumbling blast and saw smoke and debris

coming up outside the window. He thought first it was an electrical substation blowing, and then he thought of a bomb going off. There were loud voices telling people to hit the deck.

He got up and they started towards the exit. There were two exits. The front door led to the corridor, the back door was never used and had a dead bolt lock. They walked deliberately towards the front door exit. When they got to the front doors the first person, Capt Phillips told them there was structural damage that wasn't allowing them to open the door and the corridor was full of smoke. They turned around and started moving towards the back door. People were still calm but there was more a sense of urgency.

It took a long time for the alarms to come on and the sprinkler system did not activate. Eventually the alarms came up telling them there was a fire and to evacuate.

At the back door they had to figure out how to unlock the door. They finally got the door open and went down the stairwell. As they transited down the stairwell and through the passageways he heard people talking about the World Trade Center being hit by a plane. He thought they meant a small single-engine plane. He helped a lady who was upset out of the building.

When they came out in the courtyard he stopped while the others went out to the outside of the Pentagon. As they came into the courtyard he saw and smelled smoke and looked towards the damaged area of the Pentagon. He realized this was a catastrophe and there weren't enough first responders.

He started back into the ground level corridor entrance (either corridor 3 or 4). There was a burn victim coming out. More injured and burned people started coming out and they began to set up a triage area. They had a few medical people come to help them, a doctor and EMT.

As more medical people arrived he went back to the corridors where there was fire. There was a group of twenty or so people trying to access spaces and get people out. They tried to get into a space that was fully engulfed in flames using fire extinguishers to beat back the flames. Mr. Hoerst went around the Pentagon looking for fire extinguishers. He got frustrated because there were fire hose hookups, but no fire hoses. He gathered fire extinguishers and they cycled into the spaces.

At some point security people came and told them another plane was coming. This stopped them for a while as they went over to the C ring wall to take cover. He saw a piece of a plane. He saw the fire on his side but didn't realize the other side of the building was fully engulfed.

He was exhausted from running around. There was an older civilian man who had been standing outside the space they were trying to access telling people one of his guy's was in there. He was holding his chest and told Mr. Hoerst he was a heart patient and was having a lot of trouble. Mr. Hoerst and another man started walking him out and supporting him. They found a maintenance cart in the corridor, sat him on it and drove the man out the Eighth Corridor entrance to North Parking where there were medical people.

Mr. Hoerst started looking for supplies out there they might need. He was planning to take the supplies back into the building. He got back on the maintenance cart and people were yelling at him that he couldn't go there; they were supposed to be evacuating. He told them he was on a mission. There was a DPS security person who made an attempt to stop him, but failed.

When he got back in there were no more people to take out because an ambulance had gotten into the courtyard and evacuated people. Security had pulled the teams that were fighting fire in the C ring because of another false alarm concerning inbound aircraft. The fire department had gotten into an upper floor in the C ring and was breaking out windows that were falling on their heads. The security people started to move them out.

He moved into the courtyard and there was a period of time when fire trucks and firemen from different locations were coming out of the Pentagon. When they would come out their buzzers were going off indicating expired air. The rescue workers were drenched and exhausted so he helped get them bottles of water.

Smaller groups of people started to form up into teams. They passed around cell phones to call people to tell them they were okay. No one could get out on the cell phones. Eventually one person got through to his wife and they all took turns asking her to call their family members. He kept receiving page after page on his pager from everyone. Later on he was able to reach his father long distance and told him he was okay just before the battery died on his phone.

A general had everyone who wanted to still help line up into rows to go back in. They were buddied up; it was a mix of Navy, Army and Air Force. Then they were told they had to move out of the courtyard to North Parking again. At some point they said they were going back in. They went back into the courtyard, and started going back into the Pentagon. There were now fire department personnel there so they went back to the courtyard for directions. Some people started leaving and Mr. Hoerst's adrenaline high had evaporated and he was starting to feel the effects of his efforts. He walked back out to North Parking and told the person he had been buddied up with he was leaving. This was around 1600.

Everything was being guarded so he had to walk along Route 110. There were people with guns and barricades. All the buildings were locked and secured and he couldn't find a telephone. He finally found a hotel that would let him in to make a phone call. He called his wife to tell her he was going to try to find a way home.

He tried to figure out how to get home. He had "slugged" in from Prince William County that morning, which put him without a car. He went over towards the Pentagon City Mall to try to find a bus. There were none there but a Metro worker told him he could take Metro to Springfield and catch a bus from there. This is what he did.

He was recognized for trying to help that day at the awards ceremony at the Pentagon. He received the Navy's Superior Public Service Award.

#### Lessons Learned:

There are the required number of fire extinguishers located throughout the Pentagon, but they are too small to fight a real hose. They needed fire hoses. They needed first aid stations set up around the Pentagon.

They learned lessons about establishing where people were. There wasn't a good evacuation plan in place. Those lessons have been taken to heart and practiced.

At their office spaces in NC2 they have put crash bags, with bolt cutters, flashlights and other tools to help people get out of the office in an emergency. Evacuation plans are posted. He thinks there is some kind of public building code against putting fire hoses in public buildings. Some offices even have ropes to throw out the window for escape purposes. These are the things that have been done in his code, and his code purchased these items. He doesn't know what other codes are doing.

It would be good, if the Navy could afford it, to provide emergency escape hoods to put over your head in order to escape from smoke-filled spaces.

Abstracted by:  
CDR Carol O'Hagan  
4 FEB 02

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**Transcript of Interview:**

**Interviewee Information:**

Mr. Hoerst was born in ██████████, OH in 1964. His father was a Korean War veteran. He attended college at Miami University affiliating with the ROTC program. He graduated with a degree in aeronautics and was commissioned an Ensign in 1986. He spent 11 years on active duty on four ships, *USS Iowa*, FFG 24- *USS Jack Williams*, *USS Mississippi*, and the *USS Saipan*. After 11 years of active duty he got off active duty and moved to Washington, D.C. to work for a defense-consulting agency, GRC International, supporting Naval Sea Systems Command. In January 2000 he switched jobs to work for the OPNAV office Code N764. He maintained his affiliation with the Navy by participating in the U.S. Naval Reserves, currently a LCDR serving as the Commanding Officer of Atlantic Ordnance Command Explosive Ordnance Team ONE. His whole unit aside from himself and his XO were all recalled. He currently works as an action officer in the Force Air Defense Branch in N764.

**Topics Discussed:**

Q. (03:51) What were the issues that you were working on prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>. What were some of the high prime issues?

A. Some of the things included one of the development programs in the Navy is the DD21 Destroyer at that time. It was my radar systems that are in development are tied to the competition ongoing between the two prime contractors trying to get awarded that ship class. But the radars are being developed in preparation for that and the award to one or the other contractor kept getting delayed and delayed, and it was getting pushed back so far that the same radars that were planned to be used on that ship were being used or planned for use on the CVN77, in new construction aircraft carrier. Because DD21 keeps getting delayed then we were going to be able to meet schedule with CVN 77 or we were going to add significant cost and N7, ADMIRAL MCGINN (phonetic) had had us doing a study panel and team to look at cost schedule issues and alternatives. Then there's the daily fluctuations in the budget and then we were looking at what impacts we're going to be having on the FY02 budget, since it was early September and we were trying to plan for physical year 02.

Q. (05:43) OK. Could you start out with telling us where your office is located and then tell us about September 11<sup>th</sup>, that actual day.

A. Our office used to be located on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor in the B ring Room 452—I forget. It's been a while since we've been in that space, but the 5th floor B ring, and I think it was 452. It was in the newly renovated section of the Pentagon. We had moved over there, I think it was March or April. So we hadn't been there that long, but everybody was really pleased with how the office was set up and with the facilities that we had available to us in the new spaces. It was much better than the old section of the Pentagon.

My little world consisted of a cubicle that was in the second row from the entrance of cubicles and toward the outer windows facing the C ring.

Q. (06:59) How many cubicles were in that space?

A. I think that there were probably seventy or eighty cubicles. There was a lot.

Q. (07:10) In one large –

A. One large open bay type thing, yes. The Admiral and, the two admirals each had their office and there was a small conference room that, nearly everyone else was out in the bay in a cubicle of one size or another.

Q. (07:32) OK, what happened that morning when you came in?

A. From what I do remember it was kind of a normal workday. I know that I was up walking around and talking to different people instead of sitting at my desk for a long time, because I never saw any of the emails or anything come over that talked about the World Trade Center getting hit. I know that some other people had received something, but I never heard about that. So I'd been over talking to the DD-21 ship people and talking to LCDR JIM MALLOY, I think that morning, but –

Q. (08:23) And they hadn't heard of it either?

A. No. I don't know if they found out about it after I talked to them or not, but I know that I had no idea about the previous attacks prior to us getting hit and even for a time after that.

Q. (08:43) So that does make your story unique, because most people had the news on, so then you must have really been—what did you think it was?

A. I've been through an explosion once before, an unplanned explosion on the *Iowa*. So it was kind of similar to that, but I felt a distinct rumbling blast and I was walking back to my cubicle facing the windows that look out to C ring, and saw smoke and debris coming up and so a couple of thoughts ran through my mind. First was some kind of an electrical substation or something blew. Some kind of an industrial type failure or explosion. Then simultaneously I thought of a bomb going off, because it was so, it wasn't as small. It was a big explosion and you felt it, and felt like you got raised up some. So, I wasn't sure, but those were basically the two different things that I thought it could be at that instant, and basically hit the deck to keep from, in case something was going to break and fly through the air or something.

Q. (10:25) Do you remember what was going on around you, if you were hearing sounds of other people and if the lights were still on?

A. Yes, I don't know about the lights, but I know that I heard folks, some folks were going "What was that?" Some folks, there was some loud voices saying, "Hit the deck! Hit the deck!" That's all I can really remember about, you know, what other folks were doing during that first couple of seconds and then I got up and we all started toward the exits pretty quickly.

Q. (11:21) How many people would you say, seventy or - ?

A. There's at least seventy, yes.

Q. (11:24) You were all going toward the exit out into the corridor?

A. Yes, there are two exits called the front door and the back door. The back door is alarmed, has a deadbolt lock. Never used for routine entry and leaving. Front door is a double set of doors that

use a card to unlock, and are easily accessible and lead you right out into the corridor. But I know CAPT PHILLIPS was at the head of the line at the doors and there were several people between him and me already proceeding toward the exit, and everybody was really just not panicking or running or anything. They were just walking deliberately to the exit, and we have some folks that work in the office that we kind of looked around and trying to take care of, some ladies that you wonder how they're going to handle things and things like that. So we're kind of looking around to make sure that they're not just, nobodies just like sitting back in their cubicle stunned or anything as you're going out.

But I know that when we went to the front doors and CAPTAIN PHILLIPS was up there he turned and said, "We can't go out this way." And there was some structural damage that made it, I don't know if it was impossible, but it was hard to get the door open and he observed that that corridor was filled with smoke and he didn't think it was safe to go that way, so –

Q. (13:26) What was the reaction?

A. Everybody turned around and started going to the back door.

Q. (13:28) Were they still as calm, moving as calmly after hearing that?

A. There was still a very deliberate, there was more a sense of urgency to get the heck out of there. I do remember that it took a long time for the, it seemed like a long time and I have no concept of how long, what period of time things took, but it seemed like a very long time before any of the alarms went off. The sprinkler system did not activate, but the alarm that, the fire alarm that comes on did eventually comes on and make announcements about there is a fire in this section and evacuate or whatever the words were.

Q. (14:24) And you could clearly hear it, and understand it? We've had other people tell us that they heard the loud speakers, but it was unintelligible.

A. Yes, well, I've heard it during tests and the little announcement always says the same thing, so you kind of assume that you hear it, but it's a very distinct siren type sound that comes out over it, and we got back to the back doors. I think there was a short delay while they tried to figure out how to get it unlocked and, because having that door locked had been an issue prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>. Somebody had been able to access our space from the back door, so it was very securely locked.

But went out in that way and that, it was like following other mice through a maze. You're just assuming that the person that's in front knows where he or she's going, so we walked through several corridors and down a set of, at least one set of stairs, and I was kind of amazed that I saw people like Air Force. I remember seeing an Air Force guy kind of standing outside of his office and not moving. You know he was watching, but not on his way out. And it was during the transit through these passageways and corridors out to the courtyard that people were saying that the World Trade Center had been hit and that a plane had come to the Pentagon. My images that I had in my mind were of the most likely scenario that I thought, which was like a single or twin engine small plane had been used for these things, because nobody really explained that these were Boeings that had hit the World Trade Center. So I still didn't have a picture about what was really going on in the world.

I was making sure that some of the ladies were getting out. There was one who was obviously upset and I was kind of leading her along and making sure she got out all right. She looked like she was –

Q. (16:57) Was she in your office?

A. Yes, well not, she's from our office, but not from my little branch, but I know her from working with her. There was shock and disbelief on a lot of people's faces and I just wanted to make sure everybody got out OK without getting run over or getting pushed aside or, or not being able to find their way, so—got out into, when I came out I went into the courtyard and then I stopped and other people kept going outside the boundaries of the Pentagon.

Q. (17:46) And you stopped in the courtyard.

A. Yes, I did. A lot, some people actually took off running through the courtyard and there wasn't any cohesiveness to the crowd. Other people were pouring out, too. But as we were coming into the courtyard, I smelled smoke. I saw smoke and I looked back at, toward that section of the Pentagon and I saw everything going on and looked around and I just stopped and—got a lot of training in the active Navy from shipboard emergencies—I just looked back and this is one of those times where you just say, "This is a disaster that," and I said out loud, "I'm going in," and went back because it was obvious that it was a catastrophe and that we couldn't just depend on the small group of paramedics and first responders that are located in the Pentagon.

Q. (19:07) Where did you actually go back in the building?

A. At first I just started back into the ground level corridor entrance that I guess it's corridor 4, 4 at that corner and there was a burn victim who was coming out, and she was a lady who was really mostly just covered with dust and debris and stuff, but I thought she might be burned and

she was sweating and having a hard time breathing. But I brought her out and tried to establish like a triage area right at that apex, and there was a, some kind of a person, young female on with a radio trying to get help to come in. 'Cause there was several people that were being, either being brought out or came out that we were trying to look at, and we got some people who were, really had non-life threatening, but shock, or minor injuries, to lay down. The second real victim started coming out and it was a fella who was being helped by one other guy and so a couple of us ran over into the area and helped bring him out and lay him down, and he had burned skin hanging off of him, of his third degree burns. You know, tried to get his legs elevated and things like that.

Q. (21:16) Did you have any medical people with you that at this point?

A. They started showing up a little bit at a time. First there was just that one with the radio. Then another guy said he was a doctor, and then a fella that was, had actually worked in our office showed up and he was an EMT, and so slowly people started showing up that had a lot more medical experience than I do and they would kind of, they were really looking after the most severe ones. Some of the less severe ones just, had a guy that I'll get to later that was a heart patient that got out to an ambulance.

But as the medical people started arriving and helping with that triage scene then I went back all the way into the Pentagon between the, in the open areas between the corridors to the C ring where there was fire, and there was a group of people probably twenty, I don't know how many who were trying to access spaces to get people out and I joined in that effort. Ripped my t-shirt off and we were trying to access this space where we thought somebody was located that was fully engulfed in flames and to get to, to try to get into the space. We're using fire extinguishers

to try to beat back the flames and access the space. It was very frustrating at one point because I ran into the Pentagon and went up and around a couple of floors looking for more fire extinguishers and there are, there are the fire hydrant, or the hose hook ups and it's obvious at one point, you know there had been one of the little fire hoses attached to it, but those had been removed, as they have been from all public buildings for some reason, and it just would have been great to have any kind of capability to get some water in a hose to try to help access.

But we got some more fire extinguishers, went down then, were cycling into that space, cycle in and go in low and try to make progress to the space with your fire extinguisher until it—it lasted, you know five, ten seconds—move forward about two feet and then you'd exit and the next person would come up right behind you. But there was stuff coming down and at some point, and I don't know where it fits in the timeline, but there was the security people running around saying another plane is coming, "Take cover! Take cover!" And we stopped trying to run around and get further into the fire and we kind of went to the wall being, just kind of putting C ring between us and the outside, because we weren't sure, we didn't think that it would be any use to run to the courtyard either, because it might as well, out there.

I remember seeing a piece of a plane. A semi-circular piece that was about a foot wide that was obviously aircraft aluminum, kind of a primer yellow color that looked to me like a piece of a plane that was riveted together.

Q. (25:43) At the time did you, were you able to identify it as a piece of a plane or was that afterwards, when you were reflecting on what you had seen?

A. No that was at the point, because someone, and I still assumed it had been a small, smaller plane, and that piece kind of reinforced that because it was so small. I just didn't realize how

much things got torn up and propelled through. And I really had no idea how bad it was on the other side, near the A and B ring, or the E and D rings, because I kind of thought that this might be the worst of it. That we were trying to, there was fire here and it was fully engulfed, but not that the whole structure had failed on the other side of it.

While we were in there doing, I was kind of getting hot and almost exhausted from running around, but there was a fella who was a civilian. He was older, probably in his sixties, who had been standing outside of this space that we were trying to access and saying that one of his, “One of my guys is in there.” And that, he told me that he had assigned someone to go into this area to repair a Xerox machine and then he was like holding his chest and he said, “I’m a heart patient and I’m having a lot of trouble right now.”

I said, “We’ve got to get you out of here.” So myself and one other guy who I don’t know, just started walking with him and supporting him. One of us on each arm and as we went into the corridor, there was one of those little carts that the maintenance guys drive around, and we sat him on that and the other guy drove out to—drove that out the 8<sup>th</sup> corridor entrance to the North Parking area where there were doctors and medical people and ambulances and things. So we got him out there and then I was trying to get some supplies from there and really looking for things we might need, like a bag mouth mask and any kind of gauze or bandages or things like that that I could take back in, but they really didn’t have the things that I thought we would want to use.

Q. (28:40) At this point were you thinking, “I’m going to go back into the building,” or had you kind of given up on that seeing how bad the fire was?

A. No, I was going back in. I got back on that cart and started back up toward the Pentagon, up the little hill there and people were yelling at me, “You can’t go up there! Everybody’s supposed to be evacuating!”

Q. (29:06) Do you know who the people were. If they were just anybody or were they any -?

A. I know there was one Navy Captain. I said, “I’m on a mission. I’m”, you know, we needed to get people from the courtyard back out to North Parking where they could be put on stretchers and things like that. So there was one DPS security type person, and he kind of held his hand up to stop me, but I didn’t stop so he didn’t do anything. So went back in with the cart to see if there were other people that we could take back out.

But when I got back in there really wasn’t anybody in particular that we needed to take out, because an ambulance had come in for the burns and was actually in the courtyard and they had pulled the teams from the C ring that were fighting the fires and trying to get more people back out, because of I think, I don’t know, but security had done it for another inbound aircraft or something.

There were several of those that occurred, were false alarms that aircraft, another aircraft is inbound and they were trying to get people out.

Just prior to all the people being, us kind of giving up on finding anybody else in the C ring the fire department had also made some progress in some of the upper floors in the C ring, because they were punching out windows and they were falling on us. So the sequence of it is a little mixed up because first we were—after I had come back from taking the heart patient out, the first thing that happened that caused us to kind of stop a rescue was the fire department activity and the stuff falling on our heads, and that kind of force us to move closer to the, the 4, 5

corridor apex in the middle. And around the same time was another “plane’s inbound” and “we’ve got to get you out of here,” and security people were actually starting to come through and move people out, and other folks who were, that had continuously been working on that, we ended up getting into that space and searching it, and there were two entrances and so people were able to go in and kind of meet in the middle and we pulled a lot of debris out, but, hadn’t found any additional, any additional people to those people who had been pulled out.

So then we kind of moved into the courtyard, at least I did. I don’t know what some of the other folks did, but moved into the courtyard and there was a period of time where fire trucks and mostly firemen from different locations, different uniforms and things like that were coming out of the Pentagon and when they would come out their buzzers would be going off meaning their air had expired and they were drenched and exhausted and so we were running around trying to get water for them. Somebody broke open a Gatorade machine. Somebody got into ground zero to, we were getting bottles of water and taking it over to them.

That went on for a little bit where there was a kind of a pause in the action and smaller groups started to form up, kind of multi-service, just kind of a group of people that were there getting formed into semi-teams, and we were passing around cell phones trying to call people to tell them we’re OK. And I knew my wife was going to kill me, because I hadn’t called her already. But we couldn’t get out, the cell phones, everybody just, we’d press re-dial, re-dial, re-dial. After you got tired of trying and hand it to the next person.

Eventually one guy got through to his wife and we all took turns telling her. “Call my wife. Her name is Marie, my name is Stephen, and tell her I’m OK.” And I just remember also getting page after page after page on my pager from my wife, my parents, my civilian boss at GRCI, and things like that all through the day, because they didn’t know where I was.

I was trying like heck, there wasn't hardly anything we could do to make contact and I just trusted that some of those messages would eventually get through.

A little bit later on in the day I was able, I figured well the local phone lines are so wrapped up, we're not getting through to anybody, I'll try my father. I called long distance to my dad and I was just able to say, "It's your son, I'm OK," before the battery died on that phone. That was very frustrating because I know how anguishing my wife and everybody else would be about trying to figure out where people were.

But after that pause then we, there was some kind of a general who had everybody line up into rows that were there, that were still there that wanted to volunteer to go back in.

Q. (35:53) What time do you think this was, then? Best guess.

A. Best guess, 1:00 or 2:00, maybe later. It's hard to tell.

Q. (36:06) Do you remember who the general was?

A. No, most people didn't have identification because they may have taken their stuff off to get their t-shirts or things like that, but someone called him general so that's the only reason I think he was. And so we kind of, the squads got numbered and we were trying to make buddies out of people so we'd go in as buddies and come out as buddies and there were a mixture of Navy, Army, Air Force people in our group and then we got told that we had to move out of the courtyard to North Parking, again. There were a couple of times in there where they told us to take cover and we'd go to the A ring wall and kind of stand close to it, so we were not in the middle of ground zero, but then told us we had to leave and we went up to North Parking. It was

very organized, but we kind of sat around for a while and didn't do much. I remember that really watching the skies a lot, but there was nothing flying except a couple of helicopters that came in. Then at some point they said, "OK, we're going back in," started going back up into the Pentagon, got into the courtyard and we got our t-shirts wet and things like that, and started going into the Pentagon again, but we stopped and they weren't sure what they were suppose to do and there was fire department personnel there and then they said, "Just go back out in the courtyard," and we got back out there and we were waiting to hear form somebody who was going to tell us where we should go, but I just kind of, some of the folks started leaving and I kind of thought we were getting to the point of diminishing returns and my adrenaline high was really evaporated. I was really starting to feel the effects of the efforts, and so I just basically walked out, back out to North Parking and then take off and the other guy, his name was Dave, we had, I don't remember what his name was, but he was an Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, said, "Yes, I don't think we're going to be able to do much, either." So just kind of went back out to North Parking and then I wanted to go home and so I think this was around four o'clock. Somewhere around there, four o'clock, four thirty, must have been around four because it took me a long time to get to Crystal City.

We couldn't walk back across any parking lots or anything. Everything was being guarded. Made you walk out on 110 and to get to Crystal City had to kind of like make the whole circumference way around the Pentagon, and got into Crystal City. Couldn't even walk on some of the sidewalks, because there were folks out with guns, and barricades, and I wanted to find a phone, but there are no phones on the streets in Crystal City and all of the buildings were locked and secured.

But I finally found a hotel that had its door open and went in and called my wife from there and that's the first time that she heard from me personally.

Q. (40:44) What was the phone call like?

A. Oh, it was, I just called her and said, "I'm OK". I don't really remember the words we used, but I said, "I've got to try and find a way home. I'm going to go and I'll see you in a little bit."

Q. (41:03) Had someone been able to reach her before that to let them know they'd heard from you?

A. Yes. But she wasn't going to put any faith in that until she heard from me personally, so. At least it was a little reassuring that my dad called her and another one of the guy's wives called her and passed the message to her. But she didn't hear from anybody until about 12:30 that I'd made it. So that was the first time that she heard something.

Q. (41:35) Did she know you were in the renovated spaces, of course, nobody knew that that was the part that was hit at that time, right?

A. Right. I mean I don't know what she knew as far as where the renovated spaces were located in relation to the crash. She knew that I was in the new section. She knew my office location kind of roughly. That it was on the fifth floor, that it was the 2<sup>nd</sup> ring, basically, but she didn't know what 5B453 was or things like that, so.

We got, I started trying to figure out how to get home, because I had ridden in in the morning as a "slug" from Prince William County, so I didn't have a car in this area.

Q. (42:39) Probably nobody was picking anybody up at the “slug line.”

(laugh)

A. No nobody was picking anybody up. So I’m trying to find the busses that run and I was told that they were over on whatever street, near the Pentagon City Mall, I guess it’s called. Went over there and tried to find one of the Omni like busses and there weren’t any there, but I talked to a Metro guy. He said if I took Metro down to Springfield that they were running some busses out of there. So I walked up and got a Metro and went down to Springfield and got off Metro and went up and sure enough there were busses waiting and loading up and rode the bus back down to the Horner (phonetic) Road lot and got my car, which is where I’d left my cell phone that day. So I called my wife and talked to her as I was going home.

I’m sure it’s not like a real accurate, totally sequential and lucid recollection of everything that happened but that’s basically what I can remember from it, because there was just a lot going on, a lot of running.

Q. (44:07) Now, you received an award?

A. Yes, myself and a lot of other really wonderful people were recognized for trying to help out and so I was real proud to see, especially CAPTAIN GEORGE CROY that I work for. I watched him. I witnessed some of the efforts that he made and things like that so I was real pleased that he was recognized, and you know, they had a real nice ceremony and I thought it was real important for my family to see some recognition out of that. I did it out of caring about the other people I’m trying to help. You know, I did it for a purpose, but you know, they went through a lot of grief and agony, because they didn’t know where I was. So it was kind of an award for them, too.

Q. (45:18) What was the name of the award that you received?

A. The Navy's Superior Public Service Award. So it was nice. The ceremony was real nice.

Q. (45:31) Was your wife supportive of your efforts? We actually have spoken to some people, to one man who said his wife was mad at him, because she was so concerned about him and –

A. Yes, I mean I'm sure that for some people angers a good defensive response but my wife basically assumed that I'd done what I done. She said, she had been talking to [REDACTED] who's my direct, the director of GRC International, and talking to him and she said this was "just like Stephen, I'm sure that he's there trying to do something. I just hope he wasn't killed." And things like that. So she at least knew that it's kind of my nature not to run from something and try to help if I can.

Q. (46:32) What about the SPRINT team did they come and talk to the group?

A. Yes, we had, the SPRINT team did and then the company had another crisis intervention team that was, that's real similar to—almost exactly the same thing the SPRINT team did for company employees. So we had two sessions and so those sessions were held. We made, I was really trying to make sure that some of the people that work for our company that are in the directorate and were there that day, that a couple of them I definitely wanted to make sure that they went to those sessions. There's—having been involved in some different things over the time, especially the explosion on the *Iowa*, I know some of the signals that people send out when they're kind of getting in trouble after, after something like this. It wasn't foreign to me, looking at people who just become emotionally dead or show other signs of trauma that, emotional trauma that I wanted

to make sure that we really didn't have anybody that looked like they were too bad off. But some of them were obviously nervous. This was the first time anything really bad had ever happened to them and things like that, so [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], wanted to make sure that they got into the SPRINT sessions, so we made it mandatory in the company that folks go and the military really pushed us very hard to make sure that we all attended the Navy sponsored SPRINT teams.

Q. (48:43) Has this incident changed you in itself? How?

A. Oh yes, There's kind of two extremes that it's affected me. One, I mean, I recognize there's a lot of kind of traumatic stress syndrome type things that happen to me that are fairly normal reactions, but you know nightmares and reactions to smells and planes and sounds sometimes, but you just get very concerned about your security and your situation. On the other hand it's really brought out a lot of brotherhood and esprit de corps, "take care of each other" kind of mentality and that hasn't died any. While on the other side the traumatic part kind of dies away a little bit and fades into the background, but you know you got to look out for each other and take care of each other. I've always felt that but even stronger, but other than that I'm still just me.

Q. (50:04) Can you think of any lessons learned from this experience.

A. Well I, I did send an email to the fellow who's in charge of the Pentagon renovations about a week later. Kind of offering at least from my limited views some observations about the Pentagon renovation. First I thanked him for saving my life, because I was very pleased that our windows didn't shatter. The place seemed to hold together pretty good and I learned about, you know, through the press about some of the things that they had done during the renovation to, for

blast kind of situations. So, I thanked him profusely for building a, the wedge that saved my life and then offering some things about needing some kind of gear to fight fires with, first responder type things. There are the required number of fire extinguishers located throughout the—can't actually fight a fire with those. Those are good for putting out trashcan fires. That we needed some kind of hose, somewhere accessible where we can put those up. Needed some kind of ability to get to some breathing apparatus, first aid kits, stations where we could get to them and things like so. But overall it was positive. I tried to learn some things.

And we all learned big lessons about establishing, trying to establish where people were. There were a lot of people unaccounted for for a long time. It wasn't a good evacuation plan in place, and those lessons have all been taken to heart and even practiced.

Q. (52:20) Have you notice whether or not there's now fire fighting equipment in the Pentagon at various locations. Have you seen any changes?

A. I don't know. I mean I've gone back several times, but that was all within the, basically the first month after September 11<sup>th</sup> to retrieve things out of the building, so all I really saw was our old office and so I haven't seen any improvements that they made since them, I've been to the building a couple of times, but not really into the office areas. Went back for the ceremony. I think it was the last time I was back there.

Q. (53:05) How about, you moved your spaces right? Now you're in NC2, how about in your spaces in NC2 have they done anything in these spaces to help?

A. A couple of things they've done included putting a crashbag up there that has some things that you could use for trying to get through an area that might be blocked. There's bolt cutters and

some other tools in there that you could try to use to, to get out. There are flashlights now. There weren't any flashlights in any of the spaces before. No emergency lighting system. We have evacuation plans posted and that's about it. I think, I'm certainly not an expert on it and I don't know what the codes are but I think there's some kind of a public building code that says that you don't put hoses in your buildings, but so there aren't any really fire hoses or anything. But, and then some offices even have like ropes that they use to throw out the window and let themselves down if they're like fourth floor below or something like that that they can reasonably do that. But we're on the eighth floor so it's not a realistic thing to do up there.

Q. (54:37) Is that just your code pretty much that you know that you've been doing that or have you heard of anyone else doing that kind of thing?

A. I don't know what other folks are doing. I know that the things that were bought and placed in our office were bought from our code.

Q. (54:52) Who made that decision to do that, do you know?

A. I think they had a team of people that, I'm certain that CDR CHASE was involved in that. The Admiral probably took close personal interest in, in what people are going to –

Q. (55:12) Admiral?

A. ADMIRAL BALISLE and what we're providing for the folks. It would be good at some point if the Navy can ever afford it, to do things like they do in some of the high rises in other parts of the country where they provide this little thing that you put over your head that provides you some oxygen so you can get through smoke filled spaces, but those really aren't, I don't know if

they're not available. I made that suggestion, but I didn't know how expensive they are and available they are since everybody is buying up everything.

Q. (56:05) Anything else that we should have asked you about you want to add?

A. No.

Q. (56:11) Thank you Mr. Hoerst.

A. Thank you.

Transcribed by:  
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April 7, 2002