

Pentagon Attack

Interview with Robert Candido
December 12, 2001

Hunt: This interview with Robert Candido is taking place on December 12, 2001 at the Pentagon. The interviewer is Richard Hunt of the OSD Historical Office. Would you please state for the record your name and position?

Candido: Robert H. Candido, acting assistant building manager.

Hunt: How long have you been in this post?

Candido: Since August 26, 2001.

Hunt: What were you doing prior to the attack? And then after the attack?

Candido: I was standing just where you met me, outside my office, probably doing something unimportant. As soon as the plane hit I went down to the BOCC, the Building Operations Command Center, on the first floor 2nd Corridor, where we operate the Building systems and have radio communications and phone communications with all the elements we have to talk to in order to keep the Building running.

Hunt: Did you feel the impact, or hear it?

Candido: I did see something fall from the ceiling. There is an air handler right under my office, and I thought it had stopped suddenly, with a slight shake. Then a piece of dust or something fell from the ceiling. That was evidently when the plane hit, because immediately afterward someone looked in the office door and said a plane had hit the Building on the heliport side.

Hunt: When you got to the BOCC what did you do?

Candido: The former assistant building manager, Steve Carter, was still here, so I shadowed him to help him. I had very little knowledge of how to get around the Building without getting lost so I just stayed by him to help relay instructions on my radio. At that time, we still had a telephone and hand-held radios within the BOCC itself. There was a base station in the BOCC, so we had more strength in the signal.

Hunt: Were these radios adequate for the situation?

Candido: It appears the base station is able to get most people most of the time, but the hand-held radios were problematic. Once you go to hand-held, it's a function of where the person is, whether you can get them or not.

Hunt: What specific things were you doing?

Candido: We tried to get the status from the screens of the management control systems that were in place, such as the energy management control system that gives the status of air handlers and elevators, fire alarm system, but this was only in the new areas. We were trying to get the status of the rest of the Building. Based on what we knew about what happened, we were turning on and off blowers and fans in order to pressurize the Building. I believe that at that time the requirement was to shut all the fans off until the fire department told us which ones to turn on. So we turned off all the fans in the Building until we were told what they wanted us to do.

Hunt: Were you in contact with the fire department?

Candido: In the BOCC, no. When the BOCC lost power we went out to the courtyard and co-located with two incident control centers, or command centers, for the fire department. One was outside and one was inside the courtyard. Steve and I stayed mostly by the fire chief. They would relay information to us about turning things on or

off, if they found live wires where they thought the power was cold or wanted some steam pipes or water pipes shut off. We relayed that information.

Hunt: These control systems were operational so you could shut them off?

Candido: Up until the BOCC lost power. They were, initially, but about a half-hour into the incident the main electrical vault that provided power to the BOCC was shut down. We lost power. That's when we moved out to the courtyard. Then most of the work had to be done by hand. Some could not be done automatically no matter what, but in any case almost everything had to be shut down or turned on or off by hand. The workmen had to go back into the Building and go to the appropriate rooms to do that. In theory, we could do it automatically by taking a laptop to any mechanical room, plug it in, and do it from there. But in this crisis we did not have our laptops on hand to react to this attack readily.

Hunt: These people who were doing this work manually were putting themselves at risk because of the smoke?

Candido: Yes, in many cases. I couldn't navigate alone all through the Building, but I came back here often after we were told to evacuate. The smoke was in this area, but not dense. I could sit across the hall in the alternate BOCC and use another base station. The smoke in there was not particularly bad. In the hallway itself and the apex here it was getting pretty hazy. The only reason we evacuated so many times was because of the threat of other planes. We were warned of planes coming in several times, but of course none did.

Hunt: Were you aware that the planes had hit the World Trade Center?

Candido: We were aware of it, yes.

Hunt: Was there any thought given to evacuating this Building before the plane hit here?

Candido: No. As a matter fact, when the e-mail came across that said the Trade Center had been hit, the Military District of Washington did not raise the threatcon. There was no thought of evacuating the Building.

Hunt: It was up to MDW to raise the threatcon?

Candido: I think the Pentagon can raise it, but normally I think we would follow MDW. I would have to look at the actual instructions for that. They had said they were not going to raise the threatcon, and I'm not sure anyone had the thought that a plane would hit the Pentagon.

Hunt: When the plane hit, were you aware of what it was?

Candido: Yes, the person who looked in told me. We assumed that person was correct.

Hunt: Was the order then given to evacuate the whole Building?

Candido: I was in the BOCC. I'm not sure how that order was given out. The fire alarm systems in the Building were not designed to evacuate the whole Building at one time. It was not envisioned that a fire in one location would necessarily mean that the whole Building would have to evacuate. The fire alarm systems do not normally engage the whole Building, to evacuate everybody. So I'm not sure when the order was given, and if it was given because the plane had hit or because of other planes inbound. The other factor would be the Arlington Fire Chief's decision as to whether we had to evacuate the Building, based on the smoke or whether the incident he was

involved in at that moment was so dangerous that he wanted everyone to evacuate, even though they were not directly in the area of the fire.

Hunt: With the threat of other airplanes coming in, did people then move further away from the Building?

Candido: Again, I was in the center courtyard or the BOCC. I think I heard that people were told to go to Pentagon City. Originally they were sitting on the hillside and the parking lot, and then they were told to go to Pentagon City to get them out of the parking lot. Generally, people are told to meet for a normal Building emergency; again, that would concern fires or other normal catastrophes we deal with, not a terrorist threat where the parking lot might not be the best place to be.

Hunt: Was there ever an official order telling people to go home?

Candido: I can't speak to that. I know that we in PBMO made the decision that those on the second and third shifts should not come in, because we didn't know how they would even get in. It was chaotic as to who was going to be able to get past the police lines. If someone left home in Maryland and tried to get to the Pentagon, it was problematic. I think by then the Metro station was also shut down. So we said that we would do the best we could, and the people on the second and third shifts did not have to come in. We sent home the admin staff, the people who would not be involved in keeping the Building running, who had no direct Building maintenance function. We kept the rest of the workforce, all the electricians, mechanics, and so forth.

Hunt: That was a long day for those people. When did you get home?

Candido: I got home about 11:00 or 12:00 that night.

Hunt: How long did it take for your schedule to get back to normal?

Candido: Some of it was self-imposed. I guess I stopped working 7 days a week the middle of October.

Hunt: What kind of lessons has your office learned from this attack to better handle a situation like this?

Candido: I'm on a team now for emergency response for RE&F. One thing we knew was a problem was communication with the DPS. The new BOCC was built next to a space that was supposed to be for DPS so they would be co-located during an emergency and we could more easily communicate face-to-face, as well as improve the radio communications. Even if we can't speak on the same radios, we could at least be talking directly in the room. There is and has been a move to get a new radio system in that would allow us to talk better throughout the Building than we can now on the current radio system and would also allow some of us to talk directly to DPS on the radio and also our own people. Communication is critical. They had just had a fire before I arrived in the Aramark loading dock area, where the laundry room caught on fire. It was a fairly large event because of the smoke. It was a lint fire in the ductwork and it created quite a bit of smoke and a lot of excitement in the Building. They started another evacuation of the whole Building because of the smoke. That brought up a lot of concerns by the occupants in terms of how do we know when to evacuate. The alarm system was not meant to evacuate the whole Building, but you may hear the alarm adjacent to your area and not in your area and think it is just not working. It is a big education issue for the Building population as a whole as to what emergency procedures should be, and why everyone shouldn't all run out of the Building because they hear an alarm in another place. And yet, the reason they may not be hearing the

alarm may be that someone didn't get there in time to pull the alarm that should have been pulled.

Hunt: These alarms have to be pulled manually?

Candido: Yes. The current system cannot be controlled from one console in the Building. Only the new alarm systems being put in as part of the renovation can be controlled from one location by computer. The rest of them either have to be pulled manually from the space itself or by someone going to the apexes in the center courtyard, opening up the doors that go into the main panels, and setting off the alarm. This is really a DPS function, because they have the authority to evacuate the Building other than when there is a fire chief or incident commander on site already. They have to figure out how they are going to manage Building evacuations, in terms of where to put officers, what to tell them to do. There is an override that allows you talk on the system, but you can't do it from one place to all places, you have to go to three different locations to talk to everybody. There are issues about microphone interface, how often you say things, what you say, how you get people to move from one location to another if you are talking to them rather than just letting them go by the normal evacuation routes. So there is a lot of training in evacuation that we see that has to be done in response to emergencies. There have been several other groups whose briefings I'm not privy to that have other lessons learned that I'm not aware of yet.

Hunt: How about the fire doors, did those work the way they were supposed to?

Candido: The smoke doors in the renovated area worked the way they were supposed to. I've not read factual documentation, but I've heard rumors that people were trapped behind the smoke doors because people didn't know how to operate them. There's a

smoke door right outside the BOCC that separates the BOCC from the apex where the atrium was, where the escalators are. I went out of the BOCC and went to leave, and again, not knowing the Building well, only knew about the door, and it was closed. I then saw the green plate on the door and hit it, and the smoke door opened. I was worried that it wouldn't reclose, but as I looked back I saw it automatically close. I realized that the smoke door worked well, but I had not been trained in its use. If the stories are true, I can see how it could happen that people crawling on the floor to get out and getting to the smoke door may not have looked up to see the green panel to open the door. It's about a yard off the ground. It's conceivable that may have happened.

Hunt: I talked to one man, John Brady, who talked about holding the doors open so people could get out.

Candido: This may be another education issue, showing people how to open the doors. I'm not sure we want to eliminate the doors, although I understand that because of this they may do so. It's one of those two-edged swords. There are a lot of good ideas people have. They want more fire extinguishers, and other things, but the job of the occupants is not to fight fires or rescue people, but to get out of the Building and let the firefighters come in and do those things. I think it might give them a false sense of capabilities and we might wind up with more dead people. They want more respirators, more axes, firefighting tools in their space, and I think it all is counter to good building management and firefighting practice. The firefighters really want to see everyone leave the Building and let them do their job unhindered by a bunch of heroes endangering themselves.

Hunt: One person suggested having those little lights like those on airplane aisles, to use in the hallways when the electricity goes out.

Candido: There have been a lot of suggestions. There is stuff that is luminescent. The ones in airplanes are low-level lights, and putting those in the floor would be problematic because they would have to be maintained. We have to evaluate whether we want to put those luminescent things in—how well would they work, how to put them in the floor, how to maintain them and keep them visible. It would give perhaps a false sense of security. I think the best answer is to practice evacuation more often. When you get in the cubicle farms, it may not be intuitively obvious how to get out. I walked through some not affected by the fire but closed down because of loss of utilities in the new sector, and when I started to walk out, without smoke, fire, panic, or anything else, I started taking what I thought were logical turns and ended up in dead ends, conference rooms, coffee bars, and did not get out. We are actively trying to insure that when they put up more cubicle farms they leave obvious routes for exit from a main aisle that will lead you to an exit from either left or right.

Hunt: So a person can sense what is the right way to go.

Candido: If it's a wide aisle, going from a side street to a boulevard, which will lead them out. It's difficult, because control over what happens in the spaces as they are built up is problematic.

Hunt: Could people keep flashlights in their spaces or desks that would help to illuminate their way out?

Candido: I carry one with me all the time now, because I tend to wander around the mechanical rooms and places where there is not a lot of light anyway, and I need one.

I don't carry it specifically for a life safety issue. Maybe people could do that; it would be a good idea, low cost and no risk. Those little mag-lights wouldn't hurt, either. I tend to wind up in low light areas anyway, but hadn't thought of it as a life safety issue, except that I also carry with me at night and in the morning my hard hat, respirator, and radio, so I have all my gear with me in my car and can get back into the Pentagon quickly to help in case of emergency.

Hunt: After the 11th, what assignments did you have?

Candido: Mainly to manage and plan how to get all the Building systems back in operation. We had to insure that our fans didn't pull smoke, debris, asbestos, lead, or any contaminants back into the part of the Building that was not damaged. We had to plan how and what we were going to do. We had to block off the ductwork so that we wouldn't pull that air from the bad side of the Building. We had to get electric power back into areas of the Building that were unaffected otherwise but had lost power because the vault was out of commission from the fire. There was a lot of coordination with the FBI, the Arlington fire department, PenRen, and other contractors to get full utilities back in the Building, repair the roof, and protect the Building beneath it from further water damage, and the normal day-to-day running of the Building that we do every day.

Hunt: Were you involved in finding new offices for people who were displaced?

Candido: I'm not directly involved in that. Another agency, RE&F, finds or redistributes space within the Building. We get involved in what types of services the people then need when moving into a new area. We do day-to-day Building operations; we can't do a lot of alterations. If something is breaking somewhere else we can't all be fixing new

areas. If it is minor, we can do it, but a major overhaul would be turned over to another group within FFD and they would do it. We just would make final hookups for them or coordinate outages, shut off power, that kind of thing.

Hunt: Is your office the ultimate coordinating authority for all of this kind of work?

Candido: For outages we are, yes.

Hunt: For all the other things done after the attack, inventorying the damage, etc?

Candido: Yes, except for in the actual area itself, which was under Pentagon renovation control. We were working with them to assess damage there, but my men assess the damage elsewhere in the Building. We came up with ideas of how to jury-rig the power that was supposed to come from there but had to come some other way.

Hunt: It sounds like a complicated effort that you were going through.

Candido: It's hard to remember everything we did, and I probably should have kept a journal, but I didn't. Everything happened at once, and had to be fixed at once. We were in operation the next day. We were operational pretty much the same day. The reason the Building was evacuated in the first place was the threat of more aircraft. The fire marshal, the Arlington Fire Chief, who was the incident commander, wanted the people out. Once he figured out how far the fire was going and gave instructions for smoke purging and overpressuring and everything, the Building was pretty much operational, other than soot, the smell, and things like that that people might not like. I don't think the phones in this area ever went down. During the height of the fire, my one claim to fame was calling for the port-a-potties to put in center courtyard. I had to call my old office at Fairfax County, because we couldn't find a phone book here. I called my former deputy and got the number for Don's Johns in Chantilly, and called

them. It so happened that Arlington was on the phone at the same time getting the port-a-potties laid on for outside, so we got them for the inner courtyard at the same time.

Hunt: That was an obvious need.

Candido: We could see that we would be there for a while, and people needed them.

With the water off in a lot of places in the Building, it was a necessity. We had to make sure there was no flooding in areas where the firemen were going and that there was sufficient water in the stand pipes they were using for firefighting.

Hunt: How about food and water?

Candido: That was another thing, getting water in for people. All the Coke machines were broken into by firemen and people needed to get something to drink. Arlington ordered a water truck, and we had to get it through the police line and into the Building. I'm not sure how food was coordinated, but that was secondary.

Hunt: I talked to some men from the Navy Annex, who loaded up their van with their water. They then went up to the Safeway on Columbia Pike with a government credit card and got as much water as they could.

Candido: It's probably where we got it from initially. That all eventually gets handled by the incident commander, Arlington, they are responsible for bringing in food, and so on.

Hunt: Is there anything else I should ask you about?

Candido: There has to be a balance in the Building between giving the people what they want and keeping control of the Building. The Building is 50 plus years old and even if we had good control, it's difficult to do anything because we don't know where anything really comes from. Some agencies have had the ability to do things here that

they shouldn't have done--taking taps off of electrical closets and dragging them across places where you wouldn't think there would be power--taps off the water lines, off the chilled water lines, and so on. When we get into a disaster like this, we try to get the Building back up and get into all these issues about logical placement of electricity. Some offices consider a mission so important that they take power from anywhere they can find it. There's a real balance between being mission-oriented and getting the job done to the more bureaucratic and stylized method of following a process that keeps things in a logical sequence so that you can know where things are coming from.

Hunt: You have more control over the renovated section, don't you?

Candido: The day we get it, perhaps. An hour after that, the agencies will be giving money to someone who will start alterations. It will start to fall apart again.

Hunt: That's a long way off.

Candido: We are occupying areas right now, so I am sure they are modifying areas right now. Configuration control is a major issue in the Building. Control implies bureaucracy, slowness in getting things done, and the people who have to do that are the same people who have to work 8 hours on the floor to keep things running. Trying to get the time to review all the plans and great ideas to see what makes sense and where to get power and chilled water from, doesn't always fit the agency's plan of where they want things. If we do it, we may find out later we have screwed up the system because we put something where it was not meant to be. This happens all the time. I think, given the degree of chaos of the day and all, things worked relatively well. The only major shortfall was coordinating security, perhaps, particularly because we had an outside and inside incident command, which made it even more challenging

because of the size of the Building and the size of the inner courtyard. Perhaps even in other buildings there will be the same issue on two sides of the building. It's important for the police and security to be well tied in. That was probably the hardest thing to coordinate. There was not always a DPS guy next to us. There was a firefighter, Steve Carter, and myself there, but when we had to find who was in charge of the DPS guys or who was in charge of whatever security we had to get, it was sometimes hard, perhaps more so outside than inside. The coordination between the three entities, Building security, firefighters, and Building operators, is necessary. Also, outside the Building our chain of command, Mr. Haselbush and so on, who was probably outside or somewhere else thinking about bigger issues like where to get space, where to move, who to bring in, we need better contact with them. We did notice that shortfall, and we put a team together to work on that to be sure we have a more seamless operation.

Hunt: Anything else?

Candido: Some people think only federal workers can do things, but the contractors who were working with us stayed just like the federal workers did. The man from Johnson Controls, that run the Building, was running in to turn things on and off and get to work centers. They were using other centers in the Building that control the system.

Hunt: These were the contractors with the renovation effort?

Candido: Partly renovation. It's all renovation-related, but in some cases they are not working directly for the renovation.

Hunt: In terms of the contractors who came in to fix the roof and that sort of thing, did your comment apply to them as well?

Candido: I'm thinking particularly of the people here on site at the time reacting to the attack. You couldn't tell who were the federal workers and who were the contractors who supported us.

Hunt: Thank you very much for your time; it's been very informative.