

## Pentagon Attack

Interview with Alton Cheaves  
October 31, 2001

Putney: This is an oral history interview with Alton Cheaves. He is a management analyst with the Information Technology Division. It is October 31, 2001, and we are in the Pentagon. [The interviewer is Diane T. Putney from the OSD Historical Office.]

Would you describe your key responsibilities here in the division?

Cheaves: The Real Estate and Facilities-Information Technology (RE&F-IT) Division is responsible for providing IT connectivity to over 1,000 RE&F employees throughout the national capitol region. We have customers located in the Pentagon to include the Federal Facilities Division (FFD), the Defense Protective Service (DPS), Support Services Division (SSD), the Real Estate and Facilities Contracting (RE&FC) Office, located in the Butler building, as well as the FFD Tech staff, located in the Butler building. We have other offices outside the Pentagon, to include the Leased Facilities Division, located at four different sites throughout the national capitol region. We are responsible for managing, monitoring and maintaining the RE&F and Washington Headquarters Services (WHS) networks and connectivity to stated buildings to accomplish RE&F's mission.

Putney: Information technology involves what?

Cheaves: Making sure that we provide IT services and support for all RE&F personnel. We insure that they have connectivity to the RE&F and WHS local area networks.

Putney: You keep the computer systems up and running.

Cheaves: Correct. We provide technical support as well as user support to RE&F and WHS personnel.

Putney: Had you been aware of efforts throughout the Building even before September 11 to prepare for possible terrorist attacks or major emergencies?

Cheaves: To be quite honest, no. I personally haven't, but perhaps my director has been informed. Of course, no one was thinking of anything of this magnitude.

Putney: What about preparing for emergency situations, such as snow storms knocking out power lines and losing portions of power in the Building?

Cheaves: My Director, Eric Shilling, would likely have more information on that. As far as emergency routes and things like that, Gloria Hazelgreen and Eric had just completed our emergency procedures for the office. They had not been distributed, but they had been completed.

Putney: People were aware of these evacuation plans?

Cheaves: Yes.

Putney: Were you here on September 11?

Cheaves: Yes.

Putney: When did you get to work and how did you learn of the incident?

Cheaves: I got to work early that morning, about 7:10 a.m. I was working to complete some tasks, made a few phone calls, and around 9:00 I was on the Internet and had the radio on. We heard that a plane crashed into the World Trade Center. I looked for it on the Internet and found pictures. People thought it was an accident, but having a military background, I believed it to be a terrorist attack from the beginning. Then the second plane hit, and my supervisor and I were talking about it. I said, "There is nothing keeping that from happening here. There are no restrictions for planes flying over the Pentagon." The planes fly right over head all the time. Lo and behold, about ten

minutes later I heard the boom, and I knew it was a plane. I was then looking for another plane to be coming soon. We looked out the window and saw the fireball and smoke coming over top of the Building. I ran out in the hallway, and people were running and screaming frantically. My next thought was for my wife in Personnel and Readiness. She works in the next corridor. I went back in the office and told everyone to get out, not that calmly, but loudly. Then everyone went towards our escape route. I remembered that my wife had a dentist appointment that morning, so I exited out of the 8th Corridor.

Putney: Where is your office?

Cheaves: My office is located at 3A669. As we were running out I looked up over the top of the Building and saw the black smoke. I was still expecting a second plane. It seemed to me that if they were going to hit the Pentagon, they would use more than one plane. I went towards my vehicle, and I saw people running into the Child Development Center. I ran there as well to see if they had gotten everyone out. They were just getting out the last of the children, and I helped them across the street with their cribs. They had three or four children in one crib, trying to roll them across the street. I got them up on the grass, and then I left in my car. I heard reports over the news. I couldn't get through to my wife, and no one could get to me because the cell phones were busy. It was like a movie, "Left Behind." I was trying to stay calm. I ran by some people who were asking whether someone actually did hit the Pentagon. I couldn't believe that people were asking that question. The whole Building just shook. That was about it. I got back home and called my supervisor, and he stated that everyone from RE&F evacuated safely. We even had some heroic police officers from

DPS who risked their lives, saved a few people especially officer Hoopii, who was very heroic. We were very fortunate. We did lose some rooms and equipment, but no lives, which is most important.

Putney: Those rooms were just filled with equipment?

Cheaves: One room was filled with equipment, 1D513, our storage room. Some equipment was scheduled to be excessed and was still workable, but we had new servers, printers, and network equipment that we were using for spares. We lost a total of about \$260,000 of equipment from just that one room alone.

Putney: Was that from fire or water?

Cheaves: The wing of the plane went through the room. It was immediate impact.

Putney: And none of your people happened to be in there.

Cheaves: No, but we did have one employee, Al Rasheed, scheduled to be in that room conducting an inventory check. He had been delayed in another room conducting user support and was not there yet. I thank God for that.

Putney: How long did it take your division to find out everyone was okay?

Cheaves: By the next morning we all knew. Our immediate concern was that we had just moved in the Safety and Environmental Management Division, about seven employees, and the Support Services Division, into a large room, consisting of about 25 employees. They were all in the new wedge, and we didn't know whether it was damaged in the attack. They were on the 5th floor. From what I understand there was only smoke and water damage. Everything turned out well for Real Estate and Facilities, I must say, the only room we lost was 1D513. We had to leave our room as well, 3A669, because of smoke damage.

After we returned on September 12, we assessed the damage to determine an estimated dollar amount of our loss, what people were missing, and what rooms were damaged. As the day went forward, our immediate concern was to try to relocate the displaced employees. We worked jointly with Space Policy to obtain space and establish connectivity in those rooms. We arranged for network cabling runs and provided new equipment for their work spaces. Right now, Real Estate and Facilities is in the middle of an upgrade task, so we are replacing all of our old work stations. We had new work stations on hand, but luckily not in 1D513 storage room. They were downstairs in the David O. Cooke (RDF) Remote Delivery Facility. That's where our configuration office is located. As displaced offices received new space we worked feverously to meet their needs. We moved computers in or bought new computers for SSD, which is a vital organization, not just for Real Estate and Facilities, but for all of OSD and the Pentagon, DoD. If you buy anything through the government, those are the people you go through. The Safety and Environmental Management Division is the organization that does all the testing for hazardous waste, spills, and all that type of service for the Pentagon. That is another organization that was temporarily displaced as well. We relocated them to the Butler building and supplied them with additional PCs and got them up and running. They are still located there. They will be moving back into their old space soon. Support Services is located down the hall in 3A673 and 3A693. They are up and running, back to business as normal as can be expected.

Putney: Were they mostly damaged by smoke? Why did they have to move?

Cheaves: They had to move because the entire office was filled with smoke. We haven't had an opportunity to assess the damage to their equipment. We moved their

equipment from 3A669 over to RDF to be evaluated. We have a contract with TSI. TSI's function is to evaluate the computers, clean them up, and make sure they are working properly. We are very fortunate in that we didn't lose any equipment, as far as the rooms that were damaged by smoke.

Putney: Does your division operate a server?

Cheaves: Yes, we do. We have three server rooms.

Putney: And they were not affected?

Cheaves: No.

Putney: They were in locations far enough away from smoke and the impact?

Cheaves: Yes, one server room is 1C1070, another in 1C1065, right across the hall.

That one actually supports the Washington Headquarters Services network. We have another room, 1D196, that supports Real Estate and Facilities. All of those rooms escaped damage, and thankfully nothing happened to 1D1070, because that is where our main connectivity funnels through. Our major network was fine. It was just the remote offices that had problems.

Putney: Everyone is familiar with the Pentagon global system and how you can contact people, even in other services. Is that system operated through your servers, also?

Cheaves: Yes, through WHS.

Putney: It is connected throughout the Building and to certain sites outside the Pentagon, and it was still up and running that day and the next day, wasn't it? Is there a main server for that?

Cheaves: I believe the main room, power-wise, is 1D1070. As far as the servers, each organization has its own server, and if they can't get through 1D1070, you more than likely won't be able to get out of the Building. (I'll check that.)

Putney: That's interesting, to have such an enormous impact against the building and have the basic computer system continue to operate. What you are doing, as the offices are relocated, is giving them computer support.

Cheaves: That's correct. And, to be honest, the magnitude of the event also impacted other offices. We supported offices at the crash site, Fort Myer, and the Army National Guard. We were able to support and help as much as we could, as it relates to establishing connectivity back to the RE&F LAN and Technical Support, hardware and software requirements and user support.

Putney: The JOC was set up at Fort Myer that night, the first meeting was at about midnight, and if anyone needed computer support you would have been able to help? Where did you get laptops, did you have enough?

Cheaves: Yes. We were able to pull back some from other organizations. We don't store them in one location, we distribute them out, which is a good thing, because if they had been in the storeroom, they would have been destroyed, and we would have had to buy more. Each organization had laptops allocated they could spare, and we distributed them to people who needed them for remote access to the network and communicate throughout the Pentagon.

Putney: You mentioned the National Guard.

Cheaves: The Army National Guard--the MPs--supports the Defense Protective Service and Security Services. They worked together jointly on this whole operation. Criminal

Investigations were involved as well--Physical Security and Col. John Pugrud, and John Jester is in charge of DPS.

Putney: Do you service classified and unclassified service?

Cheaves: No, just non-classified. If we have to provide equipment for a classified service we turn it over to the individuals, but will not receive the equipment back once classified materials have been loaded.

Putney: Was there a steady flow of electricity? How would you characterize the utilities and electrical systems?

Cheaves: We were relocated to 3A286. Everything worked fine. Maybe once or twice there was a surge, but not a damaging one. The power was out in the damaged areas for about a week and a half. The water was out, also.

Putney: Did you have a lot of extra staff meetings during that time?

Cheaves: Yes, that was necessary to keep the employees briefed and to keep them calm. There was always a tendency for some to get nervous whenever a plane flew over head. For me, the more information I have the better off I am. Eric Shilling, and Mr. Paul Haselbush, his supervisor, RE&F, did a wonderful job making sure that the organizations were well informed.

Putney: Were you working different hours, and how long did this continue?

Cheaves: Information Technology Division is the management branch, and then we have what is called DynCorp, our facilities support people. DynCorp was on call 24/7. Eric was on call as well. It was a 24-hour operation. If any problems with the network needed to be addressed, at any time during the day or night, they could call Eric or those assigned. We had a roster identifying emergency personnel. We are pretty much

still on a 24-hour operation. It's now on an on-call basis. If support is needed for certain operations, we will take care of that need.

Putney: Are most of the calls coming in through the regular help desk lines or into your office?

Cheaves: They are coming to WHS and RE&F help desk lines, and also to our Information and Technology Division. If there is a project to be done, my office, the management branch, will address it, and our facilities personnel will take care of it.

Putney: Were there any lessons learned from this experience?

Cheaves: You can never prepare enough for something like this. I believe that we handled it very well, based upon the situation. If something was to hit the Pentagon again, I believe we would be better prepared, depending on the situation. We can never prepare enough. This time, the damage was minimal, the next time it might be worse. Suppose it falls in the middle. I don't believe you can prepare enough for a situation like this except to be calm and be able to address situations at the drop of a dime. I don't think it will be the same if something like this happens again. We have a mission and want to help the force, and that's what we are here to do. It may sound corny, but we are here to do our jobs, to support the people in the Pentagon. It doesn't matter what uniform you have on or what organization you're in, if someone needs assistance we are here to help. We were able to reach out to other organizations that were involved, such as the FBI and the National Guard. We are willing and able to do that.

Putney: Did you have any interaction with the FBI or FEMA?

Cheaves: Some of our DPS personnel did, and we provided equipment and support for them as well. DARPA, the Army National Guard, JOC, and other organizations, including "unknown groups," were provided equipment and support.

Putney: Did you have to go at some point and put out contracts to get more equipment?

Cheaves: We were able to maintain with what we had and also able to increase our credit card limit per month, for things such as printers, a major issue. We had to buy fax machines, copiers, printers, cabling, switch boxes, and a lot of other things, particularly for offices that were relocated. There were only two drops in one room, before cabling support could get there, we had to get them up and running temporarily until more drops could be installed. To do that we used a switch box to support everyone in the office. We were able to buy things, but we had a lot of computers and supplies already on hand.

Putney: How much smoke can a computer take? You said they were testing them over in the Doc Cooke building. Are they pretty hardy?

Cheaves: I stand by Dell, they held up for us. They suffered through all the smoke, and a gentleman came in from TSI and cleaned everything out, and they work as well as a new PC. I really don't know how much smoke a computer can take, but for now we are not experiencing any problems.

Putney: You are not quite back to normal, but you are supporting everyone's needs.

Cheaves: As the need arises we provide support.

Putney: Would you be the folks supporting the Secretary of Defense's computer?

Cheaves: No, he has his own cabling and computer support office. But, if he needed us, we would be there.

Putney: As far as you know, they were up and running?

Cheaves: Yes, I believe so.

Putney: Are there other organizations you can list that you reached out to? If you think of any, we would like to be sure we have a representative list. Have you changed your procedures at all because of this?

Cheaves: Actually, no, as procedures have not changed much. We have gone on with business as usual. If anything, we have come closer as a group, because we have to depend on one another. Everyone has his/her own specialties. We have Robert Costanzo, the budget person; Floyd Perry, our security expert; Tanya Samson, and Robert Mitchell, who were working with the employees, customer service, putting out fires, and working on special projects. Eric Schilling and Jennie Blakeney in management, and I do a bit of everything--procurement, management, customer service. We have come together as a group, and we are here for one another and the organization.

Putney: Did anyone try to exploit the disaster by attacking the computer systems? More viruses?

Cheaves: I think we had a few, but our anti-virus protection and the system we have in place is very strong and catches everything. Alex Benton, Floyd Perry, and Min Myo have anti-viruses set up and are doing research on a day-to-day basis, so it is hard for anyone to get anything in to our network.

Putney: Virus protection doesn't have different threatcons, does it? Can you do different things if you know outside sources are trying to attack you or are you always at a high level?

Cheaves: We are at a constant high level 24-7. We don't take any chances.

Putney: The building manager was explaining the importance of chilled water to the big computer systems. Do any of your people get involved in this problem of chilled water? Are these the huge op centers, not in WHS?

Cheaves: Not in WHS. If anything, it would be a chilled water system located at the Heating and Refrigeration Plant (HRP). We service the computers in the plant, but not the ones that support the chilled water system.

Putney: Is there anything else you want to add? We want to document that your office threw yourselves into giving needed support and finding out whether you had any serious damage.

Cheaves: Real Estate and Facilities was very fortunate, because we didn't have a lot of damage, unlike the Navy or Army that suffered the loss of personnel which is more valuable than anything else. We can buy more equipment, but we can't replace lives.

Putney: Thank you very much.