

## Pentagon Attack

Interview with David Chu  
February 1, 2002

Cameron: This interview with Dr. David Chu, regarding the Pentagon attack on September 11, 2001, is taking place in his office in the Pentagon on February 1, 2002. The interviewers are Drs. Alfred Goldberg and Rebecca Cameron.

Please tell us where you were on September 11, and what you did.

Chu: I started the morning here at the Pentagon. I was part of the Secretary of Defense's breakfast that morning for members of Congress who had been questioning some of his initiatives in trying to transform the military services. As one member was challenging this, the Secretary said something to the effect that someone was going to attack us in a fashion we did not anticipate and we would wish we had done something about it.

Goldberg: Someone said that?

Chu: Rumsfeld said it in response to a question from one of the members challenging his intention to change things in the Pentagon, and change the way the military forces are constructed, etc.

Goldberg: I'll ask him whether he remembers saying that.

Chu: Rumsfeld leaned across the table and lectured them in his most decisive manner that we would in some future date look back and weep that we hadn't taken action. I think this member was gracious enough in a subsequent newspaper interview to say that driving back to Capitol Hill he saw in his rear view mirror the smoke rising out of the Pentagon. After the breakfast adjourned I was scheduled to speak to the Reserve

Forces Policy Board that was meeting at the Army-Navy Country Club up the hill from here, just behind us. As we drove up to the site of the conference, we heard on the radio about the second attack on the Twin Towers in New York, which clearly indicated that this was some kind of terrorist effort. At that juncture, the Pentagon had not been attacked. I went in and gave my talk, and at the conclusion, about 9:45, when I was to be followed by Secretary White, I could tell that something terrible had happened, because he suddenly left the room.

Goldberg: Who was this?

Chu: Tom White, the Army Secretary. As I went out to get in my car, my driver said that a plane had hit the Pentagon. He had seen it come in quite low—too low—over the hill and it was quite disturbing for him. He did not see the actual hit from that point. We drove back to the Pentagon, and it is an indication of how we are in a peacetime mindset that, even though he had made clear that it was a large plane, I was thinking that a small plane, such as a Cessna, had been commandeered. That impression was reinforced because when we got back here, only ten or fifteen minutes after the impact, there was no plane. We came down past the Navy Annex. There was smoke and the police had already started to seal off the Pentagon. Since it was clear that they were evacuating the Building, as we discovered by a telephone call, I repaired to the Navy Annex. I knew that the Marine Corps had a set of offices up there that aren't used much and no one would be discommoded by me if I showed up, and there were telephones that functioned at that location. I discovered that the Marine Corps had an alternate command post up there, which was fortuitous because most of the Navy and

Marine Corps hierarchy also came up to that building. They knew it was there, I just stumbled upon it. They all gathered there.

Goldberg: They left the Pentagon?

Chu: They left the Pentagon and came up there. My office has office space in a number of commercial buildings around town and later I went to where our Defense Manpower Data Center has its offices because that's where some of my people had gathered. We began to function late in the day beyond the immediate problem of whether everyone was okay and accounted for. We started to work on the question of what we should do to get ready to take care of the families who would be missing somebody in the Pentagon attack. We had no idea at that time of what the size of the casualty count would be, what the balance of injured and dead would be, etc. We still didn't fully appreciate the magnitude of the event, even though I had been able to watch some of the events with Lt. Gen. John Kadish. The Ballistic Missile Defense Office has its offices at the south end of that annex. John and I and some others watched some of the firefighting.

Goldberg: He is in Ballistic Missile Defense?

Chu: Yes. We saw some of the operation, and watched the fire spread slowly. I did come back that evening. I wanted to get some things out of my office in case we couldn't come to work the next day, and I wanted to get my car out of the parking lot.

Cameron: You were allowed back in?

Chu: Yes. It was about 6:00 or 7:00 p.m., and I came back into the Building through the Mall entrance. It was very smoky at that point.

Cameron: The next day, at one of the first press conferences that you held with Ms. Clark, you talked about the Family Assistance Center. Can you tell us about that?

Chu: We started that going the afternoon before. My office supervises the establishment of these centers in any kind of disaster or major event of a surprise nature. We have broad oversight and responsibility for casualty assistance and so forth throughout the military. We had never actually had to do it ourselves so this was a new experience. But the key person, Meg Falk, supervisor of this area of our responsibility, is very experienced in how these things should be done. She began working on it that afternoon, and conferred with me about the parameters we should use, including the decision about where it should be and the cost. You don't really want it in a government building that has controlled access, because then many family members who have no ID can't get in. You need a place that is publicly accessible, near public transportation, with plenty of parking. We had to have running water, too. She had called around all afternoon to the various local jurisdictions, and thanks to the city of Arlington that was very helpful to us, she was able to locate a hotel nearby, which we contracted for.

Cameron: When did you set up United in Memory, the family web site?

Chu: It was set up very recently.

Cameron: Was this the second phase of family assistance?

Chu: This is the most recent phase. For the first month, through October 12, we ran a full-up center, very graciously staffed with a combination of paid and volunteer staff, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. This was to be a refuge for the families. One of the lessons we have learned from the past is that the families need a

connection, some place to come to for authoritative information. Another lesson learned is that we need a senior, preferably a flag officer, on site. General Van Alstyne, a three-star general, agreed to do this.

Cameron: What is his position?

Chu: He is our Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy.

Goldberg: We wrote a letter to him asking for an interview, and he hasn't answered.

Chu: I am sure he would be glad to. He's very reticent about tooting his own horn. He was a hero in this effort because of his reassuring but firm approach to dealing with family issues. He was the on-site officer in charge. In the past we have found it important to have a senior officer, because one of our problems, particularly in Washington, D.C., is the issue of maintaining the families' privacy. One of the difficulties is that the press wants access. So it's very helpful to have a senior officer to say, "No, this is not a circus, this is not a voyeuristic event."

Goldberg: There was no access to the press at the family center?

Chu: There were some press, but under very careful and controlled conditions. We did not want to turn it into some kind of spectacle, we wanted to respect the privacy of the families.

Goldberg: Did the families spend a lot of time there?

Chu: Some did. They had a wall of pictures. They can talk to you about it if you like. It turned out that the number of victims was far lower than could have been the case, for a variety of reasons. We were able to be very personalized in our approach. We set this up and for the first six weeks there was a lot of individual attention. One reason to do it that way is that the status of each family is different in terms of what benefits it

gets, what its legal situation is. You have to have counselors, including legal staff, who can talk to each family and tell them about the death benefit rules and eligibilities and how to apply for them. It's a whole very rich list of items that the country does for people in these circumstances, particularly if they are in the military.

Cameron: You were also dealing with the families of the civilians, weren't you?

Chu: Oh, yes. We even extended this to the American Airlines families. We told American Airlines to provide the staff, but we gave them quarters and made them part of the same operation, and did not discriminate. In fact, one of the American Airlines victims was a Pentagon employee, Bryan Jack. The captain of the plane was a retired Navy reservist.

Goldberg: This was in existence for a month?

Chu: We decided to end it at one month. We did not want to do it forever, the families need to move on, but you can't shut it off too soon, they need to come to closure. It was fortuitous that the President set the ceremony here on October 11. We shut it with the one month anniversary.

Goldberg: Did General Van Alstyne spend all of his time here?

Chu: He spent his entire day there, often also evenings and weekends, throughout this period.

Goldberg: The whole month?

Chu: Yes. He is very dedicated on this point. It was very important in terms of the closure process for the families. I don't want to sound critical of New York. We have a much smaller scale problem than New York does, we're all one family so to speak, but I think you can see in some of the strains that are coming out that we have fared far

better than New York. One reason for that is we devoted all the resources up front, that's one of the lessons we learned from the past, the Cole episode.

Goldberg: You had the resources, also. New York may have been *ad hoc*.

Chu: Yes, although as we all know there was an outpouring of charitable contributions, so there has been plenty of funds with which this can be done. You've got to establish a way for these families to reorganize their lives, depending upon them to do it all for themselves is not wise. It is our responsibility to provide support as the Department of Defense. The first month, the full-up center, then we moved for several weeks to a transitional office in a different location, which was much more a nine-to-five sort of thing.

Goldberg: For the same purpose?

Chu: Diminished purpose. The idea in the first stage was to get all the families squared away with their benefits and so forth. The second stage was more, "If you still have a problem, call us up." Each family had a casualty officer whose job it was to take care of their needs and stay in touch with them. As we moved on from that, because you don't want it to become a crutch, we then contacted all the family support centers in the U.S. where we thought the families might go in future. All the families are not located in Washington, D.C. They might contact other centers here and there, and we needed those centers to make an extra effort. The United Memory website is an effort that we have sanctioned to allow some connectivity with the families as time goes on. We need to get the families to the point where they can function on their own without our assistance.

Goldberg: This was on a scale that you could handle. Suppose it had been on a far larger scale with far more casualties. How could you have handled it?

Chu: We are writing up a lessons learned document from this, as we have done in previous such episodes.

Goldberg: We hope something will be learned from it.

Chu: I think our view is that while we might not be quite as graciously staffed in terms of ratios, we would do the same thing. The scale would be bigger; the degree of excess capacity you might have to deal with emergency situations might be less, but we would do a similar kind of thing. There is a lot of volunteer help in this. You've seen pictures, we even have comfort dogs; people specialize in grooming and training dogs that can help people feel good about themselves.

Goldberg: During the Vietnam War we did this. We had casualty officers visit the families. For the POWs also, we did this. It ran out of people and got to the point where they were devoting so many officers it finally went down to using noncoms. It got to be a terrible burden, especially since it often required repeated visits to the families.

Chu: At some point you have to think about whom you use. We could use retired military personnel. We don't have to use active, necessarily. There are ways to scale up.

Goldberg: They use reservists, they did in Vietnam.

Chu: There are ways to scale up, but the lesson is that you need to provide a transitional service for the families, in particular to provide benefits counselors, the really important government function, besides giving the families the sense that you really do care about their loss, which is part of the signal you are sending them. You



help them get squared away with the complexities, which are unbelievable. Over the years there has been a sort of archeological accretion of legislation as to what rights you have in certain circumstances. Many of the people are covered by several programs, so we have to help them think through what there is and what is the best opportunity.

Cameron: Are Pentagon people eligible to receive payments from the recently established federal fund?

Chu: That is a separate issue, we did not deal with that. They are eligible. There is a controversial question about offsetting the amount of benefits that you would otherwise have. Our benefits are pretty generous, both for civilian and military. That is an important note to put on the record here. One of the things September 11 forced us to do was to think about whether the various instruments at our disposal were adequate to the task at hand. I mention three in particular where we concluded they were not enough. Because of the time of year this occurred, we went to Congress and sought and received, in the two cases in which we needed legislative relief, additional authority. In order of importance financially, the most important was what was the death benefit if they were on active service but not retirement eligible. Retirement eligible means there is a right to a pension. If you are not retirement eligible, there is a VA pension, but sometimes you get zero from the military, and you do not do as well as if you are retirement eligible, even adjusting for the fact of your few years of service. What has happened in the past and was likely to occur in this situation is that the military department would wish to use the fact that you are missing to say they would put you on disability retirement. That means that since you are missing you are

presumed disabled. If you do that, then once you are found to be deceased, they can say you actually died on them and the family gets a quite large pension that way. It's a bit manipulative of the rules, and the services came to me and asked if it was okay. I said no, if our death benefit is inadequate we should go to Congress and get the death benefit changed. The services would otherwise be playing games with the rules, which can be particularly injurious to fairness with others and the Treasury and so forth. We went to Congress and sought a new death benefit, which Congress gave us the power to enact.

A smaller item in terms of money per capita but larger in full expense had to do with hostile fire pay for civilians. Given the President's and the Secretary's characterizations, the early decision was that this did trigger hostile fire pay for the military. Our whole thesis throughout this response period was that the civilians and the military are both in this together, and we should not differentiate in terms of the risks they face. In fact, we had more civilians killed than military. I asked that an initiative be undertaken by Congress. We had to decide whether the military was eligible for hostile fire pay and the answer was yes. The obvious next question was about the civilians. According to the law, we could pay hostile fire pay to civilians who were overseas, but not in the United States.

Cameron: We've not had that before, have we?

Chu: We've never had that problem, at least not since 1941. So we went to Congress, the authorization bill was still open—that was our lucky break—so we could get language put in. It was not the money, that's only \$150 a month, but the symbolism. We will treat both equally, the civilians were equally at risk and did, in fact, suffer more

dead in the event. I will acknowledge that some of the currently serving military were a little upset, feeling that it was not something to do for civilians. Interestingly, the civilian reaction was terrific. Their view was that we recognized that they were equally at risk and suffered losses as well.

More significant than the money in terms of psychological impact was the question of how we recognize with some appropriate decoration those who were wounded or killed on the civilian side. The military, of course, get the purple heart. The question came up of giving the purple heart to civilians. We have occasionally awarded military decorations to civilians, but the military properly feels that is misuse of a military award. I think that is right, but the scale here was most significant. This is something the Secretary has authority to do, we didn't have to go to Congress for it. We persuaded the Secretary to create what we call the Secretary of Defense Defense of Freedom Medal. We got it signed, cast, and delivered just in time for the October 12 ceremony to recognize the civilians. That we could do it is a great tribute to the staff that worked on it because it was an urgent job and there was a little competition for the design and so on. Mr. Abell, my deputy, was the design judge. He put together pieces of what we thought were the best designs for the final product. The medal maker in Texas deserves the real prize, because we went to him and told him we needed to make it happen quickly. This guy set aside everything else to do it on time.

Goldberg: This is one time that it was good that Congress was running more slowly than usual.

Chu: That's correct. Their tardiness was actually helpful in this regard.

Cameron: What about the contentious issue over burial at Arlington?

Chu: We have not changed the rules there. We did look at whether we should change the rules. First of all, for veterans there is space at any one of a large number of other cemeteries and they are all very lovely. Arlington has come, as you appreciate, to occupy a special symbolic place in the nation's psyche. We decided not to change the rules because Arlington is a resource that is not only for this generation, but also for future generations. It is a bit like environmental stewardship. The question for this generation is, do we wish, selfishly, to use up all the space for our heroes at the expense of our children's and grandchildren's and their children's heroes?

Goldberg: We have cremation.

Chu: That's right. For many of those not eligible for burial themselves, they can be cremated, and there are issues of whether the family accepts that and so forth. I'm not trying to defend the intellectual construct by which the current rules were arrived at. There is obviously an arbitrary character to them, but we do have to set some standard, that's what the rules are there for. So our conclusion was not to change the rules just because of this tragedy, but enforce them now. Ken Burlingame's family was very successful at conducting a public campaign and we ceded ground so as not to have an unfortunate incident, given that Congress wanted to legislate his burial at Arlington. He had been offered cremation as an alternative.

Goldberg: More and more military are being cremated.

Chu: The story on the Burlingame episode is that his in-laws in California, his brother-in-law in Hollywood, is alleged to have warned the Army from the get-go that he was going to make this happen regardless of the rules. He was very skilled in using the

media and creating a very sympathetic case for it. Not to take anything away from Burlingame, who is not here to vote on whether he wanted Arlington.

Cameron: The Old Guard, normally with a ceremonial role, was on site almost immediately digging in the debris, as well as dealing with remains. Why was that unit used for this job?

Chu: I don't know. I suspect they were handy.

Goldberg: At a time like this they don't stand on ceremony!

Cameron: Did you have any personal connection with anyone in that part of the Building?

Chu: No, this office did not lose anybody. The husband of one of our employees, Veronica Cruz, was badly burned, but he worked elsewhere in the Pentagon. He is recovering although he was very severely injured. I did know Tim Maude, the Army general who was killed in the attack. He was in Army manpower. Many people here knew people who were killed or injured in the attack, but this office was spared.

Cameron: Does your office have a formal coordination function with Secretary White and his special assistant, Lt. Gen. Frank Libutti?

Chu: Yes, as many others do. Important parts of what Secretary White is responsible for as the homeland security person for the Secretary of Defense fall within this office. The two more important elements are use of the Reserves, because this office includes reserve affairs issues, and health affairs. Homeland defense is involved in protection against bio-terrorist attacks. So we have often worked with Secretary White on issues of mutual concern.

Cameron: When the new Northern Command reorganization comes about, will your office be affected?

Chu: It probably will, but that part has not been decided yet, as to what the Secretary wants to do about the responsible officer within the civil part of DoD as far as homeland defense is concerned. Everyone agrees that it should not be the Secretary of the Army; that is unfair to the Army. It ought to be someplace in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Goldberg: The Army's been dodging that for forty or fifty years.

Chu: So the command is similar to any other unified command, whatever command structure is established prior to the President signing off on it. That would control the military elements that support whatever the President and the Secretary direct. In terms of oversight, which is really what this office does, the question has not yet been worked through as to who in the Office of the Secretary of Defense is going to be the Frank Libutti equivalent. There was talk last fall of an under secretary of defense for homeland security. I think that idea has waxed and is now waning because everyone understands the danger of doing that. It would create a whole new bureaucracy, which is not what we need. This is policy oversight. Whatever command is constituted for homeland security will do the operations. This office in the Pentagon is to make sure the command is doing its job and paying attention to issues and setting policy directions, advising the Secretary, and so forth. There are a variety of options on how the Secretary can solve that problem, but my bet at this juncture is that we are unlikely to see an under secretary for homeland security. What will happen, in terms of office realignment once that decision is made, depends on the nature of the decision. We

might have some other office or department assigned this as part of his or her responsibilities, or the integration of some office, perhaps at an assistant secretary level or some other level, that deals with it. I think that will be a signal of how wholesale any change in the organization will be. Given where it's headed, I expect some changes, but not really tumultuous ones. Let's say an assistant secretary is created who does homeland security issues for the Secretary. I can see that person having on his or her staff one or two people to do reserve issues, but we would still do the bulk of reserve oversight. Since we do it for all other reserve issues, it is inefficient to divide it up. But they would need some in-house expertise. Similarly true of bio-terrorism. We have most of the clinical and medical service delivery expertise in terms of oversight in this office. There might be some specialists on the new person's staff, but we wouldn't necessarily move the whole entourage over to that position. It is my expectation that we will see some small changes.

Cameron: So you think that the Secretary is not going to ask for the two new under secretary positions?

Chu: I don't know what we are going to do in space, and there is also intelligence, but my bet is we will see a more modest proposal.

Goldberg: There are enough under secretaries already.

Chu: I think many people think that way. In fact, Congress, as you know, declined to give the Secretary the authority on this point. I think this has peaked.

Cameron: After you came in you were asked about the pros and cons of the up-and-out practices for the military. How do you think that the new threats, as reflected in the

budget and QDR, will affect the training, retention and readiness of our forces, and how we recruit these people?

Chu: First, I think we will see changes in the structure of the military forces in response to the kinds of threats we now face. Exactly what it will be has not been decided. Will it change whom we wish to attract and retain? To some extent. But in terms of entry-level enlisted personnel, we will have approximately the same criteria. We basically want above-average individuals. We pay above average, too, for just that reason. Exactly which skills they are trained in and how we shape their careers, that will shift, but I don't see a large change in who we want from the youth population. I think it will underscore the importance of high aptitude scores of people who have a certain amount of self-motivation. That's why we emphasize high school—diploma graduate status is what we are looking at. In terms of whom we will retain, this is a function of the requirements. Broadly speaking, I think we will still want to keep a high fraction of those we start out with. I do see evidence of changing the specifics to emphasize certain kinds of skills. I don't see broadly changing requirements, just quality standards. We will continue to push them up. We have already reached levels that were not thought of years ago in terms of the people the volunteer force could produce. Retention is a trickier issue, and intersects with the question of having longer careers for some and shorter careers for others, which would have been something Mr. Rumsfeld insisted we address, regardless of September 11.

Goldberg: On the subject of the Guard and Reserve, given the role they are playing and presumably will play, particularly in homeland defense, have the units that have been extant to this point been particularly effective?



Chu: Yes. We have had the most successful reserve involuntary call-up.

Goldberg: I'm talking about those dealing with the sort of thing that happened in New York and here.

Chu: Yes. Within hours of the New York incidents the civil support team, one of several teams organized specifically to back up first responders and additional tests and verifications and so on, was on the scene in New York. These are National Guard units. These units were very successful—every governor wants one. But in our view the thirty-two we have are enough. We have been told by Congress to come to a different conclusion, and they will legislate on this point in the end. The units that have been called up have performed just fine.

Goldberg: The ones in New York also?

Chu: Yes, we have had no significant complaints. Of course, the major calls are not so much for domestic purposes, but to support Enduring Freedom, the overseas operations. It's disproportionately air-oriented. There is a fascinating case study here in terms of what you might call just-in-time personnel management. The Air Force in the early stages of the call was running 20,000 volunteers a day.

Goldberg: They have always had the best reserve.

Chu: They have taken it to a new level. We are still meeting our call-up requirements with about 10,000 volunteers. Where this is significant is that we will take people for as little as one day. If you have the skill we need, sometimes we can fit you in even for just one day. The system allows that. They basically are taking a big matrix of what they need. Some people come for one or two weeks, and some three days a week. Some of this is helped by the airline problem, because their business is down. They're

furloughing people and they don't want to lose people, so they are happy to have them work for us part of the time. It's a real triumph to put this huge jigsaw puzzle together effectively such that the operating unit never notices all the back room work that makes it happen. It's a terrific story in terms of personnel management. I think it is a good news story and I am encouraging other military departments to think more about that as a model in future. Why? Because if we can make it voluntary we can avoid all the disruptive aspects that an involuntary call-up involves.

Goldberg: The Army is on so much larger a scale than any of the others.

Chu: That's right. Many of the positions don't suit this model, but we haven't been willing to think about this model. The Air Force has, I think, given it a strong base on which to build and taken it to a new level. They have every right to be proud. The Secretary was flabbergasted because I said we were doing this. He didn't think we could do it for just one day. Take the guards at the Pentagon. We can change people out front every day, except for the training aspect; we could change people every hour, if need be.

Goldberg: What are the plans for expanding the use of these forces for homeland defense?

Chu: There is an ongoing debate as to what we should have, and those answers have not yet been arrived at.

Goldberg: Presumably the Reservists and National Guard will play a substantial role.

Chu: Presumably they will.

Cameron: But the thirty-two authorized haven't yet been certified, as I understand it.

Chu: They have all been chosen, the last five were just selected. We are in different stages. We have gotten the first ones certified now.

Cameron: Do we have some units that are specialized, not necessarily reserve, dealing with bio-terrorism issues?

Chu: Yes, we do. You can see part of the product of that outside the Pentagon. The Army had a series of biological detection units, a couple companies' worth. When the anthrax problem developed and we made the decision that they weren't doing a lot of good at Fort Polk, Louisiana, where they were located, we brought a couple of platoons up here and had them deploy their sensing equipment around the Pentagon. It has since been replaced by a second generation of sensing equipment, which are the small vans out there, very colorful. Actually, we have deployed some of the biological detection system units elsewhere since then.

Cameron: What about the equivalent of the DoE's teams for radiological, which we heard were stationed all around town?

Chu: That I don't have any say about.

Cameron: We don't have the DoD equivalent of that radiological equipment?

Chu: The Army detection companies can deal with a wide range of problems.

Goldberg: We have had our ten minutes.

Chu: Good luck to you, I will ask General Alstyne to talk to you. He has a good story to tell.