

## Pentagon Attack

Interview with Frances A. Gray (USAF, Retired)  
November 8, 2001

Putney: This is an oral history interview with Frances (Fran) Gray, management analyst. It is November 8, 2001, and we are in the Pentagon. [The interviewer is Diane T. Putney, OSD Historical Office.]

Would you describe what you do as a management analyst?

Gray: I handle the awards program for all of Real Estate and Facilities, and I also am the alternate for the training and travel program. We also work appraisals, and I am the mentor program monitor as well. There are a myriad of other tasks that I do when called upon.

Putney: Before September 11 were you aware of officials being concerned about security and a possible attack against the Pentagon? Could you see things happening over the last couple of years that made you aware of tightening security?

Gray: Yes. There was the introduction of the magnetized Building passes, and every once in a while as we come into the Building they searched our baggage. Other than that, I can't think of anything recently.

Putney: Were you here in this room, 5A119, on September 11?

Gray: Yes, I was.

Putney: Were you involved with evacuation procedures prior to September 11? Did you have any fire drills or instruction on how to get out of the Building quickly?

Gray: In late August there was an actual fire down in the cleaning area on the first or second floor, so there had been an evacuation of this area of the Building prior to the terrorist attack. After that evacuation our procedures were revamped a bit. We all had gone out to the center courtyard, and we were told not to do that again. Subsequently, when the attack happened, none of us went out into the courtyard, so that helped with the evacuation procedures after the attack.

Putney: What were you doing that morning and how did you learn that something had happened?

Gray: Everybody was at their work station, and Connie had a small TV that was on because someone had called and told her the World Trade Tower had been hit. Everyone was milling around her desk. We were talking about it, and I made the comment that this would be the last place anyone would hit, because Lynn has a son over at the child care center. Within seconds of that, it hit, and we all saw the fireball.

Putney: Did you feel it and hear it?

Gray: Yes. It was a big "thump," and we actually heard the engines whining up and saw the tail part of the plane and the fireball that came over.

Putney: You were here in 5A119?

Gray: Yes, we have windows out into the center courtyard.

Putney: What was the next thing you did?

Gray: When we saw that, I started running out, and I took my bag because I wanted my keys. Lisa and I went toward the right, the rest of them exited toward the left. I didn't see anyone else until the next morning.

Putney: You all exited outside the Building by the E-ring not the courtyard?

Gray: Correct.

Putney: Did you have anyone from your office over in that area?

Gray: Not from this office, we were all here when it happened.

Putney: What did you do once you got outside? Did you think it was an orderly evacuation?

Gray: I was running out of the Building, down the stairwells. I grabbed two people who were going out into the courtyard and told them the Building had been hit. I didn't know if it was a helicopter or not, because the helipad was over in that vicinity. Then I proceeded out towards the front entrance toward South Parking. There were people running out, and some going up the stairwell wondering what was going on and being told to get out of the Building. When we ran out, it was the initial exit, so I am not sure if it was orderly or not, because some people didn't know what was going on. I went out to the middle of the parking lot, and there was someone backing up in the middle of the lot, and she got out and asked what had happened. I told her it appeared that the Building had been hit by a plane. I used her cell phone and tried to call home but could not get through. I stayed out on the perimeter of the lot.

Putney: Did anyone direct you over there or say anything?

Gray: No, I just wanted to get as far away from the Building as I could.

Putney: Could you see it when you got out in the lot, and what did it look like?

Gray: There were plumes of black smoke, and I could smell the jet fuel as we were going down the hallway, too.

Putney: Was it burning at that time?

Gray: Yes.

Putney: Did anyone mention anything about another plane?

Gray: While I was standing out there watching all this, we heard some people talking about that. I was standing by some patrolmen out in the lot, and I could hear it on their walkie-talkies.

Putney: Did they say to move farther away or anything like that?

Gray: I don't think so. Right before I left, they wanted people to move down toward the I-395 exit, underneath the underpass on the other side. I asked to get my car, and I got it out and left. At that point they were asking people to move back.

Putney: Part of your staff split up?

Gray: Two of us went toward South Parking, the rest went toward North Parking.

Putney: When did you find out that everyone made it out okay?

Gray: The next day.

Putney: What did you do the next day?

Gray: I was in the next day; there were three of us.

Putney: How did you know to come in? Why did you come in?

Gray: I was listening to the news, and they said it was liberal leave and that the Pentagon was open.

Putney: What was it like coming back in?

Gray: I had to find out how to get back into the Pentagon; they didn't have it posted anywhere. There was an acrid smell, you could still smell the jet fuel. There was a lot of soot over everything. It was still smoky down this corridor. The fire was still burning, and the firefighters were still on the roof.

Putney: So you can see them fighting the fire as you are at work. What kinds of things did you do that day?

Gray: To tell you the truth, I think I cleaned my desk. At least for the other folks in RE&F, there were some offices that had to be moved, there were no phones. Anytime anyone needed anything, I was running around helping out. There wasn't a request to us for help, per se. I don't think that much work was done. I remember that day, but just in bits and pieces. We were just talking about what had happened.

Putney: What kinds of things did you do throughout the week? Did you come to work every day?

Gray: Yes. I stayed late Wednesday and came in early the rest of that week and the following week to help out. They were setting up different parking areas, so Lisa and I came in early and posted fliers at all the entry points throughout the Pentagon. We did that for three or four days. We needed to make sure the fliers were kept stacked throughout the day. Graphics needed help later on to review the biographies of the deceased.

Putney: Where did the biographies come from?

Gray: From the family members. We helped proof them.

Putney: How soon were those prepared?

Gray: I don't have a definite date. It was sometime after the 17th.

Putney: There was a different variety of tasking. One thing Tom Tucker mentioned was that you might had been involved with the reserve personnel call-up.

Gray: When the president decided to do the reservist call-up, we knew we had some employees who were reservists. I put together a database for all of them. I worked

with the military personnel division out of WHS, here on the 4th floor, to figure out a way to make our reservists exempt from that call-up. We worked with CW4, Jim White, and put together a memo requesting that and sent it through MilPers and Doc Cooke up to the SecDef's office for concurrence. That ultimately came back for Reserve Affairs to do it for all reservists seeking exemption, and that is still in the works, now. As I understand it, each service department is reviewing the request, but it has not been approved yet.

Putney: What kinds of critical jobs are being performed by the reservists?

Gray: The ones I have seen called up were either military policemen, civil engineers, and one medic. The majority were security police or law enforcement.

Putney: They are essential to keep security at various levels here.

Gray: That was one of the reasons for the request for exemption. They were already maintaining the security of the perimeter of the Pentagon reservation. They had not yet called up any other military units to help with that.

Putney: Were there any other activities, issues, or support that you were involved in?

Gray: Because I do the awards program, I just finished a massive input of recommendations for valor as well as other taskings that were done here during reconstitution efforts as well as recovery on the day of the attack. We just had the incentive awards board meet on the 24th of October and again on the 26th. The awards right now are over in Labor Management and Employee Relations going through. There were quite a few submissions for folks that helped during the recovery efforts, including nine or ten who were actually rescuing personnel.

Putney: Is there a write-up, like a justification for recommendation for an award?

Gray: For a particular—this incident?

Putney: Right.

Gray: I have about 250 of them.

Putney: Write-ups describing what the individuals did?

Gray: Yes.

Putney: When decisions are made and the awards are given, this would be a good document collection. Are these kinds of things public record?

Gray: I assume they would have to be requested as a Freedom of Information request, because they have Social Security numbers on them and would fall under the Privacy Act.

Putney: If all the personal data were removed, they would be good documents of what people did. We are collecting documents like evacuation plans and such to show that people were thinking about disasters even before the attack. These write-ups would be good records about what people did—heroic things—people did.

Gray: They are. The majority of the ones put in for the Medal of Valor, depicted individuals rescuing people either alone or in small teams.

Putney: Were the write-ups you did for OSD people? How extensive were they?

Gray: They were actually for RE&F people. I didn't actually write up the awards. I just received the awards and made recommendations to the division directors for RE&F.

They were all RE&F folks that were submitted for awards.

Putney: Do you think it is possible, after the awards have been made, to get those citations?

Gray: We can coordinate that with Tom Tucker and Mr. Haselbush.

Putney: And delete any personal information. Just to have those citations as part of the record would be an excellent source of documentation. Were there any other kinds of support activities that you did?

Gray: Drafting memos and stuff, but lots of people did that. I didn't have hands-on for anything at the site, just behind the scenes stuff. I played a very minor part.

Putney: Did you come up with any lessons learned about how you do your job or functions you perform?

Gray: My interest was for the evacuation route, because no one met up afterward, and there was question of who was able to get out safely. I didn't hear from anyone until the next day. Tom Tucker came out with a policy letter that required certain people to make sure that everyone got out safely and stating a specific meeting point in the event we have to evacuate the Building. That was one of the lessons learned from it.

Putney: Did you see anything good coming from this tragedy?

Gray: I think it brought people closer together.

Putney: Is there anything else that you would like to include in this?

Gray: I lost a lot of friends. Everyone here in the Pentagon pulled together to do whatever was necessary to keep the Building open and get everyone back in the next day.

Putney: Were these, if I may ask, WHS people?

Gray: Army and Navy. I've been here in the Building since 1994. I just retired from the military. I worked with quite a few of them during that time.