

Pentagon Attack

Interview with Linda Luczak
November 7, 2001

Putney: This is an oral history interview with Linda Luczak, chief of the Design, Construction, and Specialized Contracts Team, Real Estate and Facilities, Office of the Secretary of Defense. It is November 7, 2001, and we are in the Butler building, adjacent to the Pentagon. [The interviewer is Diane Putney, OSD Historical Office.]

What are your key responsibilities here in this office?

Luczak: Our duty here is to be responsible for all of the design, and, primarily, the construction of any projects here in the Pentagon, FOB 2, Hybla Valley or U.S. Courts of Military Appeals building. We also do some work in leased space from time to time on design. We specialize and also do service contracts, such as the trash contract and an O&M contract at FOB 2. We also do the pest control, landscaping contracts, and all the Pentagon services contracts.

Putney: Before September 11, did your work involve anything that might have been involved with providing better security for the Pentagon's concern about a terrorist attack?

Luczak: We did some design work on the new Metro entrance. We did primary design studies, building studies, moving the buses farther away from the Pentagon and putting concrete barriers up. We also had the paving contract.

Putney: These are city buses, so it will be a major Metro bus stop feeding into the Pentagon.

Luczak: Pentagon Renovation is actually doing the construction, we did the preliminary studies to see if it was possible to move it out farther.

Putney: Were you aware of this office having to contribute to any kind of contingency or emergency plan?

Luczak: We were working on a contingency plan, all military installations do, but that was handled by our director and deputy director.

Putney: Before the 11th did you have drills for evacuating the building?

Luczak: We would have a fire drill about once a year, that's about it. I don't think we've ever had one in the Butler building.

Putney: Were you at work on September 11?

Luczak: Yes, I was.

Putney: Would you explain what you were doing that morning and how you learned of the airplane hitting the Pentagon?

Luczak: I was at my desk meeting with a contracting officer who works for me. I had just finished reading the news from the Defense Protective Service (DPS) that said the Building's threatcon was normal, in spite of the New York attacks. We actually heard the plane coming. Because the building is metal, we hear the planes from National Airport all the time. They do come over the Pentagon, some very low. This one was incredibly low, and I was commenting on how low it was when it hit the Pentagon and shook our building. My desk jumped off the floor and some debris from the ceiling tiles came down. We decided to evacuate immediately and got everybody out.

Putney: So you associated the noise and shaking of the building with the airplane sounds?

Luczak: After I read the report about the two planes hitting the World Trade Center and heard the plane coming in very low, I made the assumption that it had to be the plane hitting the Building.

Putney: So the DPS reported condition "normal," but you had learned of the Trade Center.

Luczak: Yes. After I heard the plane, I just knew what it was.

Putney: Was the place evacuated in an orderly fashion or was there confusion?

Luczak: It was very orderly. Everyone made sure that everyone else got out, and we all looked around in the offices and made sure. I was concerned about a severely handicapped woman, but we got her into the elevator and out quickly. Two people carried her to my car.

Putney: Where did you go then?

Luczak: We went immediately out of the gate into the parking lot. I could see the black smoke from the jet fuel. Wade Shankel and Mike Brown carried Lynn to my car. She was very upset. She stayed there while we waited.

Putney: Did security officials direct you?

Luczak: They directed us out of the gate.

Putney: Had you heard anything about another plane?

Luczak: When we were leaving the building, they said there was the possibility of another plane.

Putney: Even as you were exiting the building, that early?

Luczak: There were Marines down below, and one of the officers came up and mentioned that.

Putney: So you were told to get as far away as possible from the Building. That is consistent with everyone's recollection, they heard that from all different angles.

Luczak: One contract specialist was on the concourse. She didn't even feel the Building shake. She didn't know anything had happened. Her first clue was when people came running down the ramps to get out of the Building.

Putney: How would you describe what the impact site looked like, when you were standing outside? You saw billowing black smoke?

Luczak: We got out of the building fairly quickly, probably among the first people out. There was a big billow of black smoke that got bigger and bigger. The wind was blowing it toward the parking lot, so everyone backed up farther.

Putney: Did you see fire?

Luczak: I did see fire, about 15-20 minutes later.

Putney: Did you have any contract personnel in that area that you were aware of?

Luczak: We had custodial people over there, and we were concerned about that. We were concerned about the IDIQ contract--HITT contracting, which does construction work in various locations in the Pentagon. They had been doing renovation over there. Wedge One had just been renovated, so there was not that much work still going on in that side of the Building. And electrical work was being done.

Putney: How long were you there and what did you do for the rest of the morning until the early afternoon?

Luczak: I had Lynn in my car, and she was extremely nervous and upset, not knowing how she would get home, she couldn't walk home, so I needed to get her home. We stayed there about half an hour. The fire trucks had come in by the time I was able to

get my vehicle out. A lot of people could not get out. I talked to several people, like our legal counsel, and contacted the director's husband to let him know that she went to the child care center. I contacted Lynn's ride and drove her to the Price Club parking lot where she could be picked up by her driver. It took about an hour. We were on the cell phones trying to connect, because there was so much traffic.

Putney: How many miles was that?

Luczak: It was only one-quarter mile. I didn't get out of Crystal City for about three hours.

Putney: Then did you do anything for the rest of the afternoon?

Luczak: I was on my way to the Beltway in Virginia, but I live in Maryland. I got the map out and finally got to the Beltway about 2:45. I got home about 3:45. Then I sat and answered phone calls. Everybody called. I called my mother, and got through. At the Pentagon, there was a sea of cell phones. I couldn't get through to my husband.

Putney: Everyone says they couldn't get through. Was the phone dead or was there just a busy signal?

Luczak: There was a busy signal. I knew my mother would be panicking, so I called long distance, and told her to call my husband on the regular phone line. I called everyone long distance, but I couldn't get the local calls through. When I went to see another lady later on, the phones were still backed up.

Putney: When did you return to the Pentagon?

Luczak: At 6:00 a.m. on Wednesday.

Putney: What was that like, coming in?

Luczak: It was interesting. Security was extremely tight; there were long lines, and they were checking everything.

Putney: Which entrance do you use?

Luczak: I went in through the River entrance. I got in about 5:45; I start work at 6:00. I immediately made phone calls to AWG, the Alterations Work Group of the Federal Facilities Division, the carpenter shop, mechanical shop, an electrical shop, and they are our technical people. I thought they might have some requirements for putting up barriers. Then I called PBMO, the Pentagon Building Management Office--they also work under the Federal Facilities Division--to let them know I was in, in case there was something we needed to work on. I remained there until 8:30 or 9:00 p.m.

Putney: All that day into that night.

Luczak: Yes, for several days.

Putney: Long hours. What kinds of requests were coming into the office?

Luczak: That night my director had called to establish a contract for cleaning the Building.

Putney: The night of September 11?

Luczak: Yes. People were mobilizing to come in and begin cleaning, which was a security problem, because none of them were badged. We had to start arranging escorts for these individuals. We called people locally in RE&F to get escorts. I have been working on a project up at the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, a big organization up at FOB 2, to see if they would help out with some escorting, because they all have Top Secret and above escorting privileges. They immediately responded to help escort. We made some calls to some contractors who had been badged, and

they volunteered to come in and escort people around the Pentagon. HITT contracting was one that was very beneficial, because they knew the Building, they knew systems in the Building, and they had escort privileges. DCB, the Delaware Cornerstone Buildings, volunteered their time; a project manager from Gilford Corporation volunteered her time. DM&S (paving contracts) volunteered; all our contractors were calling and volunteering their services. We had offers of lighting trucks, they sent the trucks down free of charge.

Putney: Did most of the contractors make calls through this office?

Luczak: Right. We did get a call from a company out in the mid-West about steel, they sent two trucks of steel, and we referred those calls to the Pentagon Renovation Office. They would be responsible for rebuilding that area. CPF (underground utilities) helped us put the jersey barriers up to block off areas. Basically they sent anything we needed. The plane hit a concrete barrier to a vault and took the roof off the vault. Then water got down into the vault, and CPF came out immediately and pumped the water out.

Putney: And CPF is?

Luczak: Underground utilities. They pumped all the water out and looked for damage. We lost pressure up to FOB 2 and thought there might be damage to the vault, but luckily, there was not.

Putney: If the security police need something, do they come to this office to get it? You mentioned the jersey barriers.

Luczak: They came to us because the technical people that we support had the equipment on site, the means and methods of doing it, so it was just natural that they

would do it. My section does not do the contracting for DPS, but another branch in our office is responsible.

Putney: You are doing the construction of major items associated with the impact site?

Luczak: No, that's the Pentagon Renovation office. We were tasked with other areas of the Building, like Corridor 3, the A-ring between 2 and 3, 4 and 5, down to part of Corridor 5. We started mobilizing on Thursday, putting tarps out. Late Wednesday we got a contract with one of our IDIQ contractors (Forrester Construction). We got them on board to start pulling up and removing debris and slate and start protecting the interior of the Building from any further damage.

Putney: The roof has slate and there are holes in it now.

Luczak: It's burnt slate, it's actually on a concrete deck, so the holes are at the impact site. Between the concrete deck and slate tiles is wood decking. There is a cavity in there and the fire ran along that wood decking underneath the slate, which kept it nice and warm and the fire going, and the firemen had made several cuts in the slate to stop the fire from spreading. Most of the fire had been traveling underneath the slate.

Putney: So the firemen had cut holes for firebreaks.

Luczak: Everywhere it had burned, they tore off the wood decking and the slate to make firebreaks. We spread the tarps on that to temporarily protect it from further damage.

Putney: The contractors did that, and it came through this office.

Luczak: We got a crane on site and immediately started tearing tons of debris off the roof--burnt slating, decking, metal. We had to wait to get clearance, and then we

started on Corridor 3. The FBI would clear each area for us, and we would get closer and closer to the crash site.

Putney: Were you aware of the fire chief being in control first, and then the FBI taking control, and then passing it through the regular Pentagon maintenance system? Who was in charge at first, from what you could tell?

Luczak: I didn't delineate between the firemen and the FBI. From where we were, up on the roof, it was the FBI that we dealt with. When it was still burning, the fire chief told people where they could go, but once the fire was put out, it was considered a crime scene, and our contractors were not allowed in, but as there were areas cleared to us, they would continue on with putting the tarps down to prevent any further damage, from rain--whatever. An interesting fact is that a tornado came by later, and the FBI saw it. They were scrambling to get off the roof in case it came our way.

Putney: Was your staff able to come back the next day or did people have to take care of family matters and other things?

Luczak: On Wednesday only Nancy and myself were in, and Tina Nevitt came in around 10:00. There were only three people that day--the 12th. On Thursday we had about a quarter of our staff, and on Friday we had more. We didn't get the majority back until Monday morning.

Putney: Would you say that Wednesday and Thursday you were still here making phone calls and bringing the contractors in to do the necessary jobs?

Luczak: Yes, at that point we were hot and heavy on getting the roof done. As we got more spaces, changes had to be made and modifications had to be written into the contract to add additional areas as we went along. That went into the next week. We

also wrote contracts for cleaning. There were hot spots of asbestos on desks and such, and we had a contractor come in and clean them and make sure they were acceptable. We also had contracts for asbestos work between Corridors 5 and 6. We had to get classified material out and set up containment so they could clean the safes and get them out of there. That was from Corridors 5 and 6 on all floors. They had to make sure all materials were out and then it was cleaned to make sure no asbestos was left.

Putney: Under circumstances like this, are there different rules you follow for contracting to speed the process along?

Luczak: Yes. For urgent and compelling reasons, we are allowed to go out and limit competition to contractors that we feel can respond to meet our needs as quickly as possible. I had been trying to get four IDIQ design/build contracts for months prior to this, and we had just gotten it finalized at the end of August. Had we not had those contracts it would have been more difficult to get someone out here right away. They were in place ready to go.

Putney: IDIQ is?

Luczak: Indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity contract, where you can call and place orders against established contracts. We also did the duct work. We noticed that Servicemaster would clean, and hours later they came back and found the duct grills dirty again with soot. We had someone come out and evaluate the duct system. There is no way to clean the duct systems, they couldn't withstand it, being so old. We had to have someone come out and evaluate what alternative we had for ductwork. If we couldn't clean it, we put special filters on it. We already were replacing the filters daily

because of all the soot. They were evaluating what we could do to stop any further soot in the system.

Putney: Does the Pentagon itself have teams that monitor air quality or do you also bring in people from the outside?

Luczak: We have the IQ contract with Applied Environmental that does all our IH, industrial hygienist, testing. They test air quality, do asbestos sampling--that's how we found out about the asbestos on the tables and floors--lead sampling--they will do wipe samples to determine if there is high lead content. They basically became a 24-hour operation. On 4E601-652 we had to let a contract to remove carpeting because the carpet was soaked, and mold was growing up the walls. We had a contractor rip out all the carpet and put dehumidifiers there to start drying out everything.

Putney: Servicemaster was the contractor for beginning the cleaning process. They have special capabilities to deal with this kind of situation?

Luczak: They have the knowledge of how to deal with disaster cleaning, they are disaster response cleaning contractors. They have resources all over, and people came from all over the country to work on this project. Basically, they cleaned everything in the hallway, from the light fixtures, grill vents, to the bottom of the floor, all the nooks and crannies. They cleaned doors, sills, windows, trophy cases, picture frames but not pictures. Sometimes they will clean things two or three times because the dirt was so heavy in some areas.

Putney: Are they doing the corridors and going into the offices, too?

Luczak: They are now going into offices. People are requesting that their offices be cleaned. For a couple of weeks after the disaster we were concentrating on the

hallways. They started from Corridors 7 and 8 and then back toward 6, and as far as they could go between 2 and 3. They started cleaning ring by ring, hallway by hallway.

Putney: How many personnel did they have over here?

Luczak: Initially they had over 200. By Friday they had three 8-hour shifts running around the clock, and we had to provide escort. People from our office did very little escorting, but we had to be there to coordinate and make sure they had enough escorts and got to the areas and got their supplies in. We got some of the hepa filters and vacs in, because they were large units and there were some security concerns about bringing them in. They brought buckets and ladders, and it all had to be hand-carried up to the station, and into the Building. This took a long time. The BMDO gave us 44 people to escort here and there. We also had to get escorts for the roofing contractors. We even had some BMDO and Air Force personnel actually help us tear off the roof. They wanted to do something, and we are not talking lieutenants, but colonels, majors, captains, the high grades as well as the lower grades. We had one lieutenant colonel who didn't think the project was organized or going fast enough and was very frustrated by that. He had to do something, so we gave him gloves, a mask, and a hardhat and told him to go at it. When he came back he was covered with soot, but happy to do something besides just standing and watching others work. He hauled slate in wheelbarrows off the roof. He thanked us with tears in his eyes.

Putney: You are doing emergency contracting, do you have to follow it up with a lot of paper work?

Luczak: Yes, on emergency contracts we do what we call a letter contract, it is not on a regular form, but has the contractor's signature on the bottom. It lists the requirements,

and the funding, and tells them to proceed. After you are done with that, you have to follow it up with a fully documented contract, with justification and authorization for doing it, as urgent and compelling. There is a lot more work involved in the long run to do the paperwork after a letter contract than for a regular one.

Putney: You said you talked with the legal counsel. Did you talk with finance people, too, to get fund site numbers?

Luczak: We were concerned about verbal phone contracts and had to verify that there were enough funds to cover it. The roofing contractor--we basically gave verbal notice to proceed because it was late at night, and they needed to get to work early the next morning before we could get a letter contract in place. They were mobilized to get out here the next morning, but he was one of our IDIQ contractors, and we technically already had him on contract to do that. Even if someone volunteered material, like the lighting contractor, we had to write a zero dollar purchase order saying that they would provide equipment for a period of time at no charge to the government. We still had to follow up with that type of paperwork.

Putney: Your systems here all work, you are able to function out of this Butler building?

Luczak: It was smoky for about a week. We found out later, they turned off all the ventilation systems, and there was no air circulating. They thought to check it out about a week later. Once they turned on the air, it cleared out. It had been really bad down in the lobby, because that door doesn't shut all the way. The wind was blowing this way, and the building is not sealed very well.

Putney: Are you back to normal yet?

Luczak: We are now making the final repairs to the roof. We were starting back to normal after the Columbus Day holiday, and after the ceremony on October 11.

Everyone was more at ease. We are still nervous in this building, watching planes taking off from National Airport. I have noticed that they go directly up now, instead of taking a slow ascent. They changed their pattern. There are more helicopters. They had a fly-by last week for a funeral at Arlington cemetery. They flew over the Pentagon, and we were not given notice of it. It was very scary. It was very loud, and the Butler building shook. People were running around and were nervous about it. We would have liked to have known about it and hopefully they will notify us in the future. We are a lot more conscious about what's going on. The contractors were making sure everyone is badged. That process has been a nightmare for us, with the extra requirement for escort, it has slowed everything down. I've had to delay claims because we can't get into spaces. FOB 2 is locked down even tighter than the Pentagon right now. I have a large construction project going up there right now and can't get materials in. We are also responsible for paying delayed claims because of it, and the contractors are sitting around with nothing to do. Most of them have waived off about a week, they are eating on their own. Because of security, we are having to pay out for claims.

Putney: Are there lessons learned that you have thought about?

Luczak: A personal lesson--I have always worked on a military base and have been in contracting. I am used to seeing military vehicles around, that's probably why I came in so early the next morning, I knew they would have this place locked up as tight as a drum. But a lot of my employees were not at ease. I couldn't understand it, because this place was safer than it had been before the incident. There was no way they were

going to let anything happen to us. I couldn't understand why everyone was still so nervous. You sign up to work for DoD, and it's something you have to deal with. I wasn't as sympathetic with my employees as I should have been, and I am now more concerned, especially with the anthrax scare we had recently with the post office. I sympathize more with what they are feeling and the work stoppage because of it. I am usually business as usual and keep on going. We put a lot of hours in.

Putney: Do you see anything good coming out of this?

Luczak: I think we will learn a lot. It hit that side of the Building, but if it had hit up higher it would have done even more damage. There are five floors. In the majority of places in the Pentagon between the rings on the first and second floor, there are usually offices in between, except where A&E drive goes through. But in most places you have the second floor and that was the case between D&E and C&D rings in that area. Had it gone higher it could have gone through the cavity areas and even skimmed the roof and gone all the way across to the courtyard. It could have been a lot worse in other areas of the Building. PenRen had reinforced that side of the Building with blast-proof windows, which couldn't even be broken to get out. PenRen will have lessons learned from individuals, and I think we will learn what worked. Our office is contracting to put up a PA system all the way through the Pentagon. The one we have is problematic and gets garbled. We will have one that is interconnected. We will zone it so that we can notify an area right away of any threat instead of alarming everyone at the same time. We are looking at security, and we were a little lax about that. They knew there was a security problem for the Butler building even before the attack. They will move us out of this building into the RDF.

Putney: So we know, please describe the Butler building.

Luczak: It's a metal modular-type three-story building, basically of trailer material. It would crumble quickly, much like a tin can.

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

Luczak: We will just continue to work on the Building. For me, I just had to come back and repair. I had to fix it and continue to fix it. That's as much as we can do. We have even volunteered to PenRen if there is some minor construction work we can do. We are working together with PenRen on the roof. The new section will have to intertwine with the old roof, and we are working with them to insure a good roofing system. One thing coming is that they are putting fire breaks on the roof. Even though the roof is very sturdy and well designed for being as old as it is, it is all wood decking up there under the slate areas. With what we learned about how the fire traveled, we will be putting fire breaks in. We are working with another contractor to do various repair throughout the Building and will be putting in the fire breaks. Even if we have a general fire, we will have those breaks. So we will be better off for it.

Putney: Thank you so much.