

Pentagon Attack

Interview with John Pugrud
November 1, 2001

Rochester: This is an interview on November 1, 2001 with Mr. John Pugrud, deputy chief of the Defense Protective Service, in his Pentagon office. The interviewers are Drs. Stuart Rochester and Roger Trask.

As the head of the Defense Protective Security Services, what are your responsibilities?

Pugrud: We are the support agency, so to speak, to the Defense Protective Service. My people do the operational security, the information security programs, the Comsec security program, and the technical security program. We do all the camera and alarm installations and design surveys for cameras and alarms for the Pentagon and the delegated buildings in the NCR. We run the incinerator plant for destruction of classified material. We run the pass office. We manage security on the cars used by the secretary and his deputy.

Rochester: Were you in the Building when the plane hit the Pentagon on September 11? If you were, how close to the impact site were you and what were your initial thoughts at the time?

Pugrud: I was sitting in this office. We had been in a meeting across the hall. They interrupted us to tell us about the planes that hit the World Trade Center. At that point everybody knew it had been deliberate. I met my boss in the hallway and we discussed going to a higher force protection condition. I was in here on the phone to communications to implement that instruction when we heard a thump. We thought

someone had tipped over a garbage bin in the hallway. While talking on the phone, in the background I could hear the radio saying a plane had just hit the Pentagon and the fire alarms went off. I hung up the phone and moved out.

Rochester: What was your primary concern and task at that point? Was it in terms of protecting personnel, or information, or was there even presence of mind at that point to prioritize what your tasks had to be?

Pugrud: The concern is the evacuation of the Building. We know from prior fire alarm tests that not everyone hears or responds to fire alarms or announcements to get people moving calmly out the doors and that type of thing. I went out, got my staff and everyone in here, spread them up and down all five floors here on the 2nd Corridor to start evacuating people. Basically at that point we were standing in the hallways directing people which way to go, making them walk carefully. That was our first call.

Rochester: Did you have men in the area of the impact at the moment of the attack? Which of your people would be the first on the scene?

Pugrud: To answer the first part, no.

Rochester: Did you lose any people?

Pugrud: No, fortunately, not. I did lose an installation contractor. He chose to smoke a cigarette at the wrong time and it seems he was in the area where the plane hit. We were unclear about one person for several hours, but then he called in.

Rochester: Who was the first in your group to be on the scene, and how did interaction between DPS personnel and the fire and rescue personnel begin?

Pugrud: As we cleared out the floors, starting from the top down, beating on doors, we got down to the third floor and encountered a Navy officer who was running up and

down the halls looking for fire extinguishers. We asked him what for, and he said people were trapped and burning. I sent some men off to the facilities people to get fire extinguishers and told them to meet us in the center court. Then about four of us followed the officer out and into Corridors 3 and 4 and out into the A&E drive. Once we got out to that area there was visible fire in the walls, and injured people with people helping them.

Rochester: Did you know what caused it?

Pugrud: Yes, we knew, and plus there was a wheel from the plane sitting there. At that point the fire extinguishers started arriving. We escorted some people back out into the center court, where the meds were coming. I stopped at the entrance into Corridors 3 and 4 and started weeding people out, because at that point we were getting people just coming to see what was going on. Smoke was getting heavy.

Rochester: How long after the impact was this?

Pugrud: I would guess about 20 minutes. The Building evacuated fairly quickly.

Trask: Did everyone go into the center court?

Pugrud: No, we sent everybody out. When fire alarms went off I went out and intended to take everyone out of Corridor 2. Somebody yelled they could see smoke. I ran out and looked out the center court window and it seemed that the fire was coming up over the top of the 3-4 corner. We knew that when a fire had occurred at the A&E drive two weeks before we had had a huge problem of people emptying out from that side and getting in the way of the fire trucks. So I decided to take everyone out the Mall side.

Rochester: How well organized were you for something of this magnitude? You plan all the time, but do you anticipate anything like this scenario?

Pugrud: No. Those are two separate subjects. We plan for evacuation. I think that went well. I think if this had occurred a year ago it would not have gone as well. In the past year we have been able to do practice evacuations. Prior to that the Pentagon refused to do an evacuation drill, because everyone was too busy. Finally the deputy secretary of defense said he wanted evacuation drills. So we had done about three, and people were used to responding to it. In that regard it went well. There are still some issues about how well the PA system works, and there are still some people who think they are too busy to evacuate.

Rochester: How was the coordination between what you had to do and the firefighters and rescue people and at some point the FBI? Explain the extent to which things gradually came under the control of the command post and how that worked?

Pugrud: From my take, taking you through day one, my background is Air Force security, so I've done these drills throughout my career. Once we started controlling entry into the crash site, the fire department didn't come onto the scene for another 20 minutes or so. My feeling is that the fire department responded to the outside where the fire was and it took them some time to realize that they needed to send units inside. Once the fire trucks came inside and the firemen went in, I left two of my men there to control entry and went up to hook up with the fire chief, who was inside, and set up their control center. They basically roll in with a vehicle such as an Explorer, and in the back they have a plot table and all that. We started to coordinate with them, the Facilities Division was there, Steve Carter, and we worked to get them whatever they needed. We were their liaison to DPS, and Steve Carter was their liaison to building management.

Rochester: Was there adequate communications? Were the channels intact?

Pugrud: They were initially flooded, but when I went out and linked up with the fire chief, I grabbed a DPS patrolman walking by and told him to come with me because I needed his radio. I don't normally carry one. I made him liaison with the fire chief, to talk to him and do whatever he needed. My first contact with the radio was probably 30-40 minutes into the exercise, so when I started listening it was going fairly well.

Rochester: Did your people get involved with the rescue?

Pugrud: From inside the Building I witnessed some walking casualties, no stretchers; there were not many coming out. They evidently all went out the other way. We did not see many coming out the front side.

Rochester: At what point did the FBI enter the picture?

Pugrud: On the inside, we never saw the FBI. I was here until about 10:30 p.m. The FBI came through later to make sure we were securing the crime scene area.

Rochester: With regard to classified information, securing the Building and materials, how did that figure in with what you were doing? Take me through that first day.

Pugrud: I have some really good people, and we were doing a two-tier effort, controlling people coming in at Corridors 3/4 and 5/6, because in the A&E drive there was only access through certain points. The wind started changing and one way filled with smoke, even on the first floor. Basically, we were using the A&E drive between B and C rings as the access point. My guys were still back in this area, watching what was going on, picking up the classified and putting it off to the side. Whoever was here kept watch.

Trask: What kinds of material was this?

Pugrud: Just papers.

Rochester: Did you bring in your people who were off, or do you normally work on shifts?

Pugrud: No, it was just men who were here and two contractors who helped. The contractors don't work for me, they just try to sell me stuff.

Rochester: How many regular personnel do you normally have at one time?

Pugrud: In security services I have right now about 51 people. The people I'm talking about were the people in these immediate offices and my two upstairs, which is about ten people. They were assisting. My other people were on the outside doing the same things, picking up classified, helping with crowd control, assisting in taking people out.

Rochester: Do you know at what point the secretary or deputy secretary came into the area?

Pugrud: I have no idea. We had the JCS chairman show up just before dark, about 7:30 or 8:00. He came in the center court and wanted to go in; at that point, the firemen, working in shifts, were lined up getting ready to send the next shift in. We talked him out of trying to go in at that time. He said, "I'll go outside."

Rochester: At what point did you begin to discuss security procedures for the next day?

Pugrud: We started working that out from about 7:00 p.m. We worked with operations and got officers to cover certain positions to make sure no one walked out with classified material.

Rochester: Did the airplane disintegrate?

Pugrud: The only thing we saw was the wheel. There was a story that someone saw the cockpit and all the people in it, and the FBI quickly confronted him about it. He said no such thing.

Rochester: What time did you get home that night?

Pugrud: I got home about 11:45 p.m.

Rochester: Did you feel that by the next day you had a pretty good handle on the security situation, in terms of reopening the Building and getting back in business?

Pugrud: Sometime during the afternoon or evening there was a meeting. DPS Chief Jester and I met with the FBI and the fire marshal and it was determined that the FBI wanted to set up a joint operations center at Fort Myer, a location offsite with a lot of phones, to coordinate the efforts of law enforcement and the fire people, and that type of thing. It was determined that starting on the 12th I would go to Fort Myer and start working the job.

Rochester: So the determination was made at some point on the 11th that the Building was safe to reenter, once you closed off certain corridors, except for the lasting effect of the mold, smoke, and other things?

Pugrud: The mold wasn't an issue at that point. There was a combination of things that happened. Because of the president's statement that business would continue as normal, there was a concerted effort by management leadership here that the Building would be opened. Listening to the conversations of the fire people and the FBI, they had concerns about bringing people back into the Building, and limiting the number of people. There was a huge problem in the flow of people coming in over the next couple of days, because the FBI had said the area from Corridor 2 to Corridor 7 was their crime

scene and no one could go near there. That became a huge problem, because the people could walk down Corridor 7, look down the hallway toward Corridor 6 and see that it didn't look or smell too bad, and they didn't see why they couldn't go back in and get their papers and belongings. Bringing people back into the Building under "normal operation" caused the management some concern.

Rochester: Two months later, what remains the biggest challenge that you continue to face from a Building security standpoint?

Pugrud: The fact that we are still expecting another attack. If you throw that out, life is pretty easy.

Rochester: So you have upgraded all your operations as much as you can and have taken whatever precautions you are able to take; what about in terms of the bio-chemical threat?

Pugrud: We have a classified and an unclassified version of that. The response to that is that prior to this we initiated a program years ago called "Tiedown" to address the chem-bio threat. It was coming along to the point that we were ready to start putting in some limited equipment. Unfortunately, that didn't occur. That whole thing has been accelerated. The Army has brought in their experts and they are coming up with a concept of operations that incorporates sampling, getting test results, and the kind of actions that need to take place once something occurs, things like that. We in this area are light years ahead of where others are right now. Also, it involves other agencies such as DITRA, DARPA, and those who are interacting with what is going on on Capitol Hill and the State Department, picking up lessons learned there and bringing them over here. We are a lot better in the chem-bio area, but we are still not there yet.

Rochester: In terms of lessons learned from an organizational standpoint, are there things you will be doing differently in terms of how you are organized?

Pugrud: It is now recognized that the manpower strength of the DPS is not enough to do what is expected to be done. Since September 11th the DPS has been on 12-hour shifts, with limited days off. Basically, since that period there have been three days I haven't been in the Pentagon. Take the kid out there carrying a gun, they are not much better off. So that is an issue--to bring up manpower strength. The Army MP unit was brought in because of that issue, recognizing that there is not enough manpower to do things that need to be done. To push out that detection wall a bit farther out so that the first interphase with the bad guy occurs well outside the wall.

Rochester: Will that Army presence remain permanent, beyond the indefinite future, do you think?

Pugrud: No, they can't. The Army is manned up to do other things, unless there is a huge change in thinking. That's being addressed now--what happens when the Army leaves? They are looking at the possibility of bringing in the Reserves to fill those spots. What is the ability for us to man up to fill those? We have half again as many contract guards right now at the perimeter. The contract guards companies around here are fully utilized. Everyone is doing the same thing, so the ability to replace contract guards is just not there.

Rochester: The location of the delivery facility as a remote facility is, I'm assuming, a help compared to the old setup, offering a certain line of defense against entry.

Pugrud: Yes, compared to the old days of coming into south loading with the first inner drop into the Building, the Remote Delivery Facility (RDF) has proved to be very useful.

We had people set up who were used to doing screening, running things through X-ray, looking at packages. It's a set up process, so we know what delivery trucks are expected. If a delivery truck shows up and is not expected, it is turned away. That process has been in place for a couple of years and people are used to it. Now there are organizations across the area here who are trying to gin up a program like that. We are very lucky to have the RDF screening things.

Rochester: Do you have anything else you want to add? Did you witness or know of any particular heroic performances on the part of your people or others in terms of leadership or rescue?

Pugrud: In the areas of rescue on the inside, there were not a lot of people that came out this way, unfortunately. As for leadership, I had people like Mike Copeland, Chris Lochet, Ian Brown, and Bill Zalinga, a contractor who had been Air Force, who just stepped up and asked what needed to be done and did it without any guidance.

Rochester: Do you feel that you are getting back to a sense of normalcy? Are you still very busy, and preoccupied with the aftermath and the expectation that something else is yet to happen?

Pugrud: I probably need to step out and look at it in that way. When you are this close you don't see progress. We are moving along again, in chem-bio protection, which is a brand new field. It has been around for years, but just in theory. They were talking about theories of what to do on the battlefield, but this is the first time we've discussed chem-bio protection in the urban environment. It's a wide-open field, but there is not a lot there.

Rochester: We noticed today at least one individual on the roof, what kind of precautions are taken there?

Pugrud: There is a concern with the air intakes. Everyone is afraid of that.

Rochester: Have flight paths been altered at all?

Pugrud: No, we still get calls about it. Are you in the Building?

Rochester: We are in Rosslyn now.

Pugrud: You didn't get the fly-by yesterday. They had a missing-man formation for a funeral in Arlington and the pilot thought it would be a neat time to buzz the Pentagon. It didn't go over too well. There were numerous cases of people who had to be sent home. FOB 2 was partially evacuated. The fear factor is way up. Throw in the anthrax scare on top of that.

Trask: In terms of the area that burned, what is the status there now? Is there access to anyone?

Pugrud: There is no access. There is a huge lesson learned. Here is a little personal history. I got sent down to Homestead Air Force Base after hurricane Andrew went through and wiped it off the map. We ended up drilling probably 60-some safes because we couldn't identify who they belonged to. We had to do the same thing here, we had to open up about 80 safes because we couldn't tell who they belonged to. We need to stencil room numbers on the safes so that when they show up in the trash pile we can see who to call to open it. An ongoing problem occurring after this was when we moved back to the old barrier wall we had severe mold problems. By the 6th Corridor, we had asbestos, lead paint, and mold. The issue we had in those spaces was that they weren't burned and people's belongings were still there. There was a

huge personal impact there, people couldn't go in and get their things. What's happening now is that on the backside they have opened the entire area up and discovered that the fire fractured the concrete back into the Building a lot further than they thought. They have to rip out Corridors 4 to 5 and start over. Just the E, D, and C ring, the A and B-rings had no problem.

Rochester: Is there still a part of that wedge that you cannot get into without special protection?

Pugrud: They are clearing up Corridors 3 to 4 right now, and 5 to 6 is still ugly. They say it's pretty spiffy to go watch the mold. They have cleaned most of it out, but they have some interesting varieties. They are trying to clear out the air vents and that type of thing. I think their intent is to gut it back out to the concrete and start over again, to get rid of the mold and other problems.

Rochester: We will be talking with Lieutenant Stout, what are his responsibilities?

Pugrud: Right now and initially after the incident Stout has taken over the security of the crash site. The crash site became basically the heliport area. This is the FBI crime scene; we set up access control to get in there, it is a broad open area. There are a lot of dynamic problems with people who don't have badges. There are firemen from all over without any IDs. There was a sorting out of those people and the same with every investigative service in the military and DoD, who wanted to go into the crime scene and look for things. We had DIA, NSA, and others going in to get classified information. Stout took over that part, and he and Captain Harper made up a security plan. Stout was off on the 11th, heard the news and tried to get back here in his car. He got stuck in traffic and had to go home and get his ten-speed and came back here on that.

Rochester: Do you now have periodic meetings among the various components of your organization on a regular basis, dealing with the aftermath of September 11th in terms of tasks relating to preserving classified information and future planning?

Pugrud: I basically went to my staff and asked them to do classified recovery. We are still doing it, two months later. It's partly due to the floor in the area being so unstable that the PenRen asked us not to take the safes out for fear of causing the floor to go off kilter. So we are still doing classified recovery. In that regard I have briefings to see how we are doing. On the renovation side we are working with Renovation, securing those areas. The drive right now is to build another barrier wall that will seal this area off so that the construction workers cannot come into the rest of the Pentagon and Pentagon people cannot go into the construction area. With my force protection section, I am looking at the future, calling meetings with them on almost a daily basis now. There is a huge concern about the outside buildings right now. We've done a fair job on the Pentagon, but the outside buildings are a huge concern. There's not a lot I can do. We are not going to stop truck traffic on the street, they are not closing off the sidewalks or the underground garages. If you consider everything that can go wrong around the Building, we are having to deal with that. The only plus side on the outside of the Building is that they are not high-profile targets, that someone will look at and say, "I just brought down 1500 Wilson Boulevard."

Rochester: Or 1777 North Kent Street.

Pugrud: To us, that's a very personal issue, but to the outside world, it would just be that 1500 North Wilson fell down today.

Rochester: Thank you very much. We will be getting a copy of the transcript to you.