

Pentagon Attack

Interview with R. E. Rabogliatti
November 5, 2001

Hunt: Would you please state your name and position for the record?

Rabogliatti: My name is R. E. Rabogliatti. I go by "Rab," and I am a building management specialist here with the Navy Annex FOB 2, and work out of the Federal Facilities Division, which is part of Washington Headquarters Services.

Hunt: Where were you on September 11 at the time of the attack?

Rabogliatti: Just prior to the attack, we had, through telephone calls and messages, been notified of the attacks in New York. And we received an E-mail from the Defense Protective Services that the Threatcon had not been elevated even though the second plane had hit the Twin Towers. I had several meetings scheduled at the Pentagon and was getting ready to go. I called Bill Battle, now the acting chief, and we were talking about a meeting over here at 10:00. I had sent someone to pick him up. At that time, I was looking out the window behind my office and saw an airplane traveling so low across the space that it blacked out the space between the two wings of the building. So the elevation above the building had to be less than 150 feet. At the time, it sounded as if the pilot had maxed out the throttle. You could hear the jet screaming. I made some exclamation over the phone to Bill and said someone was moving fast. No sooner did I say that than I heard the plane impact on the Pentagon. The concussion shook this building. I said, "Bill, you've been hit," and I knew where he was. I told him to get all his people out through the Metro exit. I didn't know from where I was sitting where the plane had actually hit, but I knew it either had to be on the Heliport or South

Parking side. So I knew the only clear exit for his office space would be through the Metro exit. I dropped the phone, ran outside, and helped DPS direct traffic in back of this building, because all of their squad cars were up here on the compound, and all the people were moving down to the Pentagon. We had to keep the walkways clear because people were evacuating, were running out of the building at this point.

Hunt: People were spontaneously evacuating?

Rabogliatti: As soon as they heard the hit, they were running out of the building to the parking lot. After a few minutes of helping DPS keep the walkways clear so that they could get their vehicles down to the Pentagon to provide support, the determination was made to evacuate the building. We pulled the fire alarm system and began to evacuate the building. Because all of the DPS personnel were down at the site, we did not have, other than the three Master Security contract personnel, any security forces to clear and sweep the compound. We had our two-way radios. I got with the other people in our office and we established a sweep of the building to support DPS and Master Security. I was actually the last one to sweep from the seventh wing through the end of the building to make sure that all personnel had left their offices.

Hunt: Were there many people still there?

Rabogliatti: There were still many people in there, even though the fire alarms were going off and everything else. It's an ongoing problem. Every time there is an alarm in a building like this, because of the size of the building and the frequency of nuisance alarms, a lot of people will wait until they either smell smoke or see fire before they decide to leave their office space.

Hunt: So there were people here that were not aware of the crash?

Rabogliatti: Correct. Basically, I told them we were under a threat of being hit, using the term bomb scare. They could understand that. I grabbed all of our vehicle keys that are stored here and got on the radio to all the people who were willing to volunteer to help. We drove all the vehicles down to the bottom of the hill to help with the triage and help the patients in recovery. In the vehicle I was using, we transported personnel with the reactionary force from DPS. I brought several doctors, PAs, and medical teams and their equipment from the clinic here and drove them down and back and forth to provide support.

Hunt: How was this organized? It sounds like it unfolded naturally. It must have been chaotic.

Rabogliatti: Basically, we shot from the hip and used common sense. I have worked on emergency response teams before. I had prior military service, where I had to deal with emergency situations on several continents. It's kind of a reaction thing, where you realize what is happening and go in and try to do what you can. There were some chaotic issues where the triage was being done because they had multiple sites down there. It took me a few minutes to find out who the senior commander in charge of the operation was as far as the medical teams and pre-ops. I found a Navy captain, a doctor, who was looking for the man in charge. I told him he was the senior man and he was in charge. I said, "What are we doing?" I worked with them. We noticed immediately that thousands of people had been evacuated from the Pentagon. We had quite a few people being treated for minor and severe injuries, and there was no water. We got several vans back up to the annex. We have an emergency water supply of bottled water in this building and we took all of that down to the Pentagon and

distributed it. We took two vehicles up to the local Safeway and purchased two pallet loads of bottled water. Mr. Alexander was instrumental in doing that. We took the vans down to the roadway to deliver. At the same time, we were picking up medical, law enforcement, and fire department personnel. We worked with the chief of the Arlington fire department to help them into the space. We worked throughout the night.

Hunt: With all the people around the site, was it hard to locate the people in charge of particular functions?

Rabogliatti: Most of the medical teams had their titles on their reflective vests. If you have worked with emergency response teams before, as I have, you look for the guy who has something on his jacket. Also you look for senior rank. As I mentioned before, a Navy captain, a doctor, who was treating a few patients there and didn't realize he was the senior man. There was an O-5, who was actually in charge of the operation, and he was trained to manage an emergency site. But was not there when I approached the doctor. So I told him he was the senior man and asked him what he wanted me to do. There were some chaotic issues, but there are always lessons to be learned. Things I was planning to do days before would have better prepared us for this attack.

Hunt: In your wildest imagination had you anticipated this kind of attack?

Rabogliatti: No. I don't think anyone did.

Hunt: Did the training and experience you had in emergency management really prepare you for the scope of this?

Rabogliatti: People say, you've done this before, it doesn't bother you. But it's like hitting your thumb with a hammer. You've done it before, but it doesn't make it any

easier every time you do it. So you just react; you look and see what there is to do to help and go into auto-pilot for the most part.

Hunt: So you continued to make trips down there?

Rabogliatti: By about 5:00 p.m. on the 11th, some of the other things were coming into play. For example, I had one of our people get on the phone and contact some of the local vendors for portapotties. There were thousands of people down there and they couldn't get to their vehicles to leave. They couldn't get back into the building obviously. These people were not injured, but thousands of them were standing on the roadway and were moved further and further back. This building, FOB 2, was closed, because we were still under potential threat of attack. So we couldn't let people come back in here. Frankly, this building has 125 bathrooms and there are hundreds of them are in the Pentagon. Common sense says someone will have to use the bathroom. One of the things we did was to use a couple of our vehicles to shuttle people up to the Navy Exchange gas station at the foot of the hill to use their rest room. I had another person trying to procure portapotties. It was a Catch-22 situation. We identified a vendor who could get the portapotties but he could not traverse the traffic congestion to get to the building. The other one said that even if he could get through the traffic, he could not get through the roadblocks. We had to set up arrangements to provide an escort to get the tractor-trailer full of portable toilets to the building. All of that was a coordination effort that we had to shoot from the hip. The portapotties got here by evening, and we got large bottled water trucks from the Air Force base later that evening. The other thing was working with the triage teams, helping them move minor casualties and then getting them onto vehicles. A lot of them were being treated and kept there because

the medevacs were using the fields here below the gas station as an emergency LZ for the medical helicopters.

Hunt: Were you involved with the helicopter landings?

Rabogliatti: A ground control team did that. We helped the medical people load people on the aircraft. Everybody there was trying to do whatever needed to be done to make it work.

Hunt: How long were your days at this point?

Rabogliatti: On the 11th, I didn't leave here until close to midnight. There were other issues as far as bringing this building back into operation. There were things that affected the systems within this building as well, and I had to work on bringing the systems back up here because we have several command operations. One of the things we lost was some of our air conditioning capability, not so much for the creature comforts of the people, but we have a lot of electronic equipment and that becomes a critical thing. We moved in portable air conditioning units and set them up. We got some exhaust fans, and once we restored our coolant capabilities we brought it back online and set up normal operations.

Hunt: When the building was evacuated, were any of the systems shut down?

Rabogliatti: Yes, that's standard procedure. Once we had evacuated the building, we had our operations and maintenance crews come in and secure the gas and water lines and shut down all non-essential power equipment, to include all of the air handlers and mechanical systems. Even though we had evacuated, we had critical areas in this building that continued to be manned due to the nature of their operations. In those

areas we maintained at least circulation of air, even though we lost our air conditioning. We brought them back on line with backup systems.

Hunt: When were people allowed to come back into the building to work?

Rabogliatti: We didn't allow anyone back in the building except for mission essential personnel until the 12th. We brought groups of people through the building to get their vehicle keys so that they could get their vehicles and go home. That started about noon and we had pretty much evacuated all those people by 3:00 p.m.

Hunt: Did any people who were evacuated have to spend the night here?

Rabogliatti: A lot of them walked to the nearest bus and train stations, or called friends or family to come get them. Coming up Southgate Road from the Pentagon there were over a dozen people walking back into Arlington and Alexandria, because their vehicles were in the Pentagon parking lots and they couldn't get them out. There was no one billeted here, per se, but we provided whatever support we could to help them get home.

Hunt: So people began coming back on the 12th and normal operations then resumed?

Rabogliatti: Normal operations within the restrictions of the obvious change in threat condition and change in the environment. The biggest thing was getting back to the building, because the whole area was sequestered due to the heightened security issue. From the intersection up in Arlington off Columbia Pike to this building I had to go through five checkpoints. If you didn't have the right answers at any of the checkpoints you were turned around and sent back. We had people who could not, on the 11th and on the morning of the 12th, get back to FOB 2, to this building, because of the security constraints. They were stopped and sent back.

Again, we went down to the site on the 11th and 12 to give support to our engineering team and help them assess the collateral damage to the systems on site. That support included escort for people at the Pentagon, the recovery and cleanup crews. We had to tighten operations here. Because of the situation there were a lot of personnel and equipment sent up here to co-locate with existing centers we had maintained because we had a fully operational building within a high security compound. That was on the 12th, doubling and tripling the number of people per square foot in certain areas, adding telephone lines, electrical drops, and other conditions. Air conditioning considerations as well. We worked well into the night every night. On the 12th and 13th I was here until at least 10:00 or 11:00 p.m. and we were coming in at 5:00 a.m. Part of that was that if you didn't get within 1/2 mile of this building by 5:00 a.m., the security checks and backed up vehicles made it almost impossible to get through the stoppages. That's it in a nutshell.

Hunt: Were you ever tasked by the building manager's office in the Pentagon to provide assistance to them in subsequent days?

Rabogliatti: We didn't wait for them. We went down there. On the 12th we were there with the HVAC, the heating and configuration plant manager and his crews, working with them and the building manager's office at the Pentagon. Also with our contracting office so that they were aware that if they needed any escort support because of bringing in teams to do repair work and emergency cleanup without clearance to go through the building, a couple of us volunteered to take up the slack. Once there was a bit more stability, (word inaudible) was able to maintain on-site support. We provided support throughout the duration, whatever they needed.

Hunt: When did your job revert to its normal condition? When were you no longer directly involved with Pentagon attack issues?

Rabogliatti: It was cause and effect. It made us realize that there were other issues that needed corrective action in this building. Things we found that are deficient, such as ways to improve the security posture of the building. Things we realize that we can do to improve communications within the building, the public address systems, and the like, which had been shelved because of the funding issue, now have become critical as far as life safety and base communication. It accelerated certain projects, things that we would have been doing anyway. Within FFD we tend to provide an interlocking support among all of our organizations anyway, so it's kind of a task force type of situation. If they need help on a project, anyone within the Federal Facilities Division-- (word inaudible) is under the same division. Much like a military organization, it would be the equivalent of a brigade headquarters in two different battalions. I can put it in those terms. Obviously, there would be a task force configuration sometimes to accomplish projects. That task force takes components from all the battalions within your brigade. That's the kind of thing we do here. There is no definitive line for us to stop providing support to the Pentagon. They provide support for us as well in certain times. We work with our contracting office and if they need help to work out specific statements of work for a project we would do that; we provide personnel from this building to serve as escorts to work forces. It's more intense because of this situation. Our actual commitment, as the driving force in damage and repair work on the Pentagon, was probably a week and a half or two weeks afterward. We never fully

recovered, so to speak, from that, because it has altered the way we do business significantly.

Hunt: In what ways?

Rabogliatti: First of all, because of the security issue, we lost 700 parking spaces within the immediate compound. It takes much longer to get into the building; it is more difficult to get to the building during working hours, so one has to come in earlier and leave later. It's kind of a self-inflicted wound. There are projects both on life safety and security for the facility that we identified at that time and are making corrective action on them now.

Hunt: Is there a formal study you are undertaking to look at the experience and lessons learned?

Rabogliatti: That is going through the Defense Protective Services as the overall responsible agency for that. We work closely with them on a regular basis. They are under the same organization of Washington Headquarters Services, RE&F, as we are. As these discussions change our ways of doing business, we are involved in that with them. But the overall responsible agency is the DPS, as the law enforcement agency here. I know they are working closely with some teams in DoD that are assessing the situation.

Hunt: Is there anything else you wish to add?

Rabogliatti: I think we have covered everything. Hopefully this gives you another snapshot or vignette of the experience.

Hunt: We are doing interviews at the OSD level; the Army historians are doing interviews with Army people and the Navy historians are doing interviews with Navy

people. Someone will pull those together and make a big mosaic and get the whole picture. Thank you very much.