

THE LEGACY
OF 9/11

THE U.S. MARINE CORPS
AND THE TERROR ATTACKS
OF SEPTEMBER 2001

An Anthology

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The Twin Towers are visible in the fog as Marines man the rails aboard USS *Iowa* (BB-61) during a port visit to New York City, October 1984.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DN-ST-85-05239.





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FOREWORD

Twenty-five years ago, on September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked our Nation and brought war to our shores. Like most Americans, Marines remember exactly where they were when they heard the news. Many Marines carry a 9/11 story. We remember what we were doing, who we were with, and how the events of that day affected us in that moment and in the years that followed. We remember the shock and the immediate understanding that our country had been attacked. It became clear that the United States had entered a new fight. Like Marines everywhere, I knew our Corps would answer the call.

Immediately following the attacks, Marines flew combat air patrols over our Nation's Capital to help defend the homeland. Marines descended on Ground Zero and the Pentagon impact site to support recovery operations. We stood up a new anti-terrorism brigade to protect American forces and facilities. Within months, Marines launched a 650-kilometer amphibious assault from the sea into Afghanistan. It was one of the deepest amphibious operations in our history, and a reminder of the unique expeditionary capability our Marine Corps provides.

These actions remind us that Marines are the most ready when the Nation is least ready.

That responsibility has not changed in the 25 years since 9/11. From Afghanistan and Iraq to Syria and beyond, Marines took the fight to those responsible and to those who supported them—serving with courage, determination, and an unwavering commitment to the mission and one another. When the Nation calls upon Marines, we answer without hesitation and remain engaged until the job is done.

This book commemorates 9/11 and the Marines who answered that call. It remembers those who deployed in the long years of conflict and honors those who made the ultimate sacrifice. Their service continues a legacy that stretches back to the founding of our Corps, built by generations of Marines who stood the watch long before September 11, 2001. From those who fought in conflicts before that defining moment to the Marines who have carried our ethos forward, each generation has strengthened our enduring legacy of faithful service and unwavering devotion to duty.

The lessons of 9/11 remain clear. We do not get to choose when our Nation is tested, only how prepared we are to respond. Our adversaries are studying us, challenging us, and looking for opportunities to strike. Marines have always understood that freedom requires constant vig-

ilance and a willingness to defend it. Therefore, we must stay alert, grounded in discipline and prepared by our training. As a Marine Corps, we must remain forward, capable, and ready to fight and win. The Marines of the 9/11 gener-

ation proved that enduring truth through their service and sacrifice. The Marines who serve today carry that same responsibility forward. They stand ready.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric M. Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Eric M. Smith
General, U.S. Marine Corps
Commandant of the Marine Corps

PREFACE

In 2018, Marine Corps History Division published *The Legacy of Belleau Wood: 100 Years of Making Marines and Winning Battles*, inaugurating the legacy anthology series. The following year, it published *The Legacy of American Naval Power: Reinventing Maritime Strategic Thought*. Both works were conceived as anthologies of enduring value to Marines, combining historical records with scholarship to provide Marines and the American public with a fresh look at important aspects of our history.

This volume is the third in the legacy anthology series and is different in that it is the first Marine Corps History Division work to commemorate the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States and is meant to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of those attacks. It presents a curated collection of official Marine Corps records, speeches, previously published articles, and original essays. Unless indicated otherwise, all essays appearing in this volume were written specifically for it. Previously published works appear as they did when originally printed, except that obvious typographical errors have been silently corrected and square brackets have been used for editorial additions and clarifications. Together, these materials provide an overview of the attacks,

the Marine Corps' response, and the enduring effects of 9/11 on the Service and a generation of Marines. The intent of this volume is to commemorate not only the events of that day but also the operations, experiences, and consequences of the 25 years that followed.

The Legacy of 9/11 is organized into four chapters. The first two focus on the attacks and the Marine Corps' immediate response. The latter two are more reflective in nature, presenting testimonies on what 9/11 has meant to Marines and essays on the enduring legacy of those events for the Corps. Together, they preserve the record of a defining era in our Service's history, honor the sacrifices Marines made, and acknowledge the legacy of the generation that 9/11 shaped.

The collective efforts of the Marine Corps History Division team made publication of *The Legacy of 9/11* possible. Within Histories Branch, Dr. Lisa Budreau was the initial editor and organized the first draft. The project was then completed through the efforts of Paul Westermeyer, Dr. Henry Himes, Mary Rose, and Dr. Seth Givens, each of whom was responsible for a chapter. Shawn Vreeland strengthened the manuscript through careful editing. Lieutenant Colonel Timothy G. Heck, USMCR; Major Ja-

son C. Brezler, USMCR (Ret.); and Lieutenant Colonel Gareth P. Hughes, USMCR (Ret.) were instrumental in assisting Dr. Budreau while they were members of our Field History Branch. In Archives Branch, John Lyles, Dr. Tyler Reed, and Heather Smith provided critical source material. Our partners in the Marine Corps history program—Marine Corps University Press and the National Museum of the Marine Corps—were invaluable. The press capably executed the layout and design. At the museum, Marine Corps Artist in Residence Kristopher Battles designed and painted the cover, Art Curator Joan Thomas assisted with works of art, and Curatorial Section Chief Owen Connor provided information about 9/11 artifacts that the museum holds. The Marine Corps Heritage Foundation

provided crucial support for the project through their special assistants, Shawn Vreeland and Matt Raffenburg, both of whom are invaluable members of the History Division team.

Special thanks to all contributors for the care and dedication they brought to their work. *Leatherneck* magazine and the *Marine Corps Gazette* graciously granted permission to reprint their articles. Particular gratitude is also owed to two former members of the division, Dr. Fred Allison and Dr. Joshua Schroeder, and to Dr. David Ulbrich, for their thoughtful reviews of the manuscript. Any errors that remain are History Division's alone.

Dr. Shawn P. Callahan
Director, Marine Corps History Division

THE LEGACY OF 9/11

Though not on active duty at the time, Marine Sgt Jason L. Thomas and SSgt David W. Karnes drove to the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 to assist with recovery efforts. They helped discover some of the last survivors found. Their efforts are immortalized in Thomas F. Miller's *Semper Fi, Always Faithful*.
Courtesy of Thomas F. Miller.





CHAPTER ONE

The Attacks

Paul Westermeyer

On the morning of 10 September 2001, Marine Corps leaders believed they had a clear sense of the kinds of missions the Service would most likely be called on to perform. During the previous decade, the United States had no clear nation-state adversary, and the Marine Corps gained practical experience deploying in response to crises around the globe, from Africa and the Middle East to the Balkans and the Indo-Pacific. Military operations other than war, including humanitarian assistance, military support to civil authorities, peace operations, and noncombatant evacuations, had come to define the Corps' operational rhythm, reinforcing the belief that persistent regional instability would characterize the conflicts of the future. They expected a mixture of threats from nonstate actors, regional powers, and ascendant superpowers who would spark conflicts in the crowded littoral areas along coastlines, where growing populations, competition for resources, and the overlapping activities of terrorists, insurgents, and criminal organizations increased instability.¹

The Marine Corps saw itself as uniquely prepared for this “chaos in the littorals,” as its

¹ Headquarters Marine Corps, *Concepts and Issues, 2001: Forging the Future Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2000), 7–9.

leaders put it. Throughout the 1990s, it produced strategic guidance and operational concepts emphasizing close cooperation between the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps to project power into those regions, culminating in *Operational Maneuver from the Sea* under Commandant General Charles C. Krulak.² The Service's naval character and expeditionary traditions were advantages for the nation, the Corps' argued, as they offered national leaders a forward-deployed, sea-based, and flexible force that could provide humanitarian relief but rapidly transition to combat if needed.³

This outlook shaped how the Marine Corps was postured on the eve of the attacks. Most Marines were conducting routine training and operations either at home stations or as part of the Unit Deployment Program, which rotated units to the Indo-Pacific. The principal exceptions were three Marine expeditionary units (MEUs), the Service's primary means to rapidly respond to overseas contingencies. While the 31st MEU—the Corps' only permanently forward-deployed Marine Air-Ground Task force—was ashore in Okinawa preparing for its next cycle of exercises and humanitarian operations, two other MEUs were embarked with U.S. Navy amphibious ready groups. The 24th MEU (Special Operations Capable [SOC]) was embarked with the Kearsarge Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) in the Mediterranean Sea, where they had been focusing on training evolutions and conducting exercises in Morocco,

Greece, Spain, and Italy since early May.⁴ That morning, the MEU's battalion landing team was in Kosovo.⁵ In the Pacific Ocean, the 15th MEU (SOC) was early into a float with the Peleliu ARG to conduct exercises and provide humanitarian assistance to East Timor. They were in the process of reembarking after spending the previous four days conducting training ashore at Darwin, Australia.⁶

Back on the East Coast of the United States, clear blue skies and pleasant temperatures greeted commuters on the morning of 11 September. Within hours, America and the Marine Corps would find themselves suddenly confronting a conflict not on distant shores, but at home. At 0846 eastern daylight time (EDT), terrorist hijackers flew American Airlines Flight 11 into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. Seventeen minutes later, United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the South Tower. At 0937 EDT, American Airlines Flight 77 struck the west side of the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. Forty minutes later, after a struggle between terrorists and passengers, a fourth airliner, United Airlines Flight 93, crashed in a meadow near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.⁷ Nineteen conspirators associated with the Islamist extremist group al-Qaeda, headed by Osama bin Laden, had carried out this unprecedented assault on the United States. Al-Qaeda had been targeting American interests for years, bombing U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998

² Headquarters Marine Corps, *Operational Maneuver from the Sea*, Marine Corps Concept Paper 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1996), 1–2.

³ Gen Charles C. Krulak, "A Marine Corps for the 21st Century," *Marine Corps Gazette* 79, no. 8 (August 1995): 12–13.

⁴ 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) (Special Operations Capable [SOC]) Command Chronology (ComdC), January–June 2001, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, hereafter Marine Corps Archives.

⁵ 24th MEU (SOC) ComdC, July–December 2001, Marine Corps Archives.

⁶ 15th MEU (SOC) ComdC, July–December 2001, Marine Corps Archives.

⁷ Priscilla D. Jones, *The First 109 Minutes: 9/11 and the U.S. Air Force* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2011), 55.



Built between 1966 and 1973 on the southwestern tip of Manhattan, the World Trade Center was a seven-building complex dominated by its iconic Twin Towers, each 110 stories tall and among the tallest buildings in the world at the time of their completion. Tens of thousands of people worked in its offices daily, making it a symbol of American economic power.

Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress, photo no. LC-HS503-1107.

and attacking the guided missile destroyer USS *Cole* (DDG-67) in 2000, even if the full scope of its ambitions and reach was not yet understood in Washington. The targets on 9/11 were specifically chosen for their global, symbolic significance. The World Trade Center represented the nation's economic strength, and the Pentagon serves as an icon of military power. The fourth intended target is believed to have been the White House or the U.S. Capitol, both of which symbolize democracy and American political power.⁸

⁸ See p. 4 of National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, "Outline of the 9/11 Plot: Staff Statement No. 16," 9-11 Commission Records, 16 June 2004, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-Y3-PURL-LPS52495/pdf/GOVPUB-Y3-PURL-LPS52495.pdf>.

Excluding the hijackers, the death toll of the 9/11 attacks in New York City, the Pentagon, and Pennsylvania is believed to have been 2,977, which includes the victims and those who later succumbed to fatal illnesses caused by exposure to toxic dust from the World Trade Center site. While no active-duty Marines were killed during the attacks that day, 23 U.S. Marines were among the more than 400 first responders who died at Ground Zero, including some who were still serving in the Marine Corps Reserve. Additionally, the copilot of United Flight 175, Michael Horrocks, was a former U.S. Marine pilot and flight instructor. Another 184 victims died at the Pentagon: 59 people aboard the



Since January 1943, the Pentagon has served as the headquarters of America's defense establishment and a symbol of the nation's military power. Located in Arlington, VA, just across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, it encompasses 6.5 million square feet of floor space, making it the largest office building in the world for 80 years. The row of long buildings in the upper left corner of the photograph is the Navy Annex, where Headquarters Marine Corps was located from 1941 to 1995. To the right of the Navy Annex is Arlington National Cemetery.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DF-SC-91-11977.

airliner and 125 people inside the building, of whom 55 were active-duty military personnel. At Shanksville, 40 passengers and crew perished aboard United Airlines Flight 93.⁹

An otherwise ordinary morning for a Ser-

vice focused on forward-deployed expeditionary forces preparing for distant littoral conflicts gave way to a war without clear front lines that was born out of an attack on the homeland. For the Marine Corps, 11 September 2001 marked not only a moment of national tragedy but the opening of a new era that would define a generation of Marines.

⁹ Total death toll figure from "September 11, 2001 Commemoration," 9/11 Memorial and Museum, <https://www.911memorial.org/connect/commemoration#:~:text=September%2011%2C%202001%20Commemoration,the%20anniversary%20of%20the%20attacks>; Pentagon figures from Alfred Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, Defense Studies Series (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2007), 180.

“WE HAVE SOME PLANES”

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States

The 9/11 Report is the full, official account of the 11 September attacks, encompassing the nation's readiness for and response to them. Produced by an independent, bipartisan commission established on 27 November 2002 at the request of Congress and President George W. Bush, it was released in July 2004. What follows reconstructs the hijacking of the four aircraft that al-Qaeda used to carry out its attack.

Tuesday, September 11, 2001, dawned temperate and nearly cloudless in the eastern United States. Millions of men and women readied themselves for work. Some made their way to the Twin Towers, the signature structures of the World Trade Center complex in New York City. Others went to Arlington,

Virginia, to the Pentagon. Across the Potomac River, the United States Congress was back in session. At the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, people began to line up for a White House tour. In Sarasota, Florida, President George W. Bush went for an early morning run.

For those heading to an airport, weather conditions could not have been better for a safe and pleasant journey. Among the travelers were Mohamed Atta and Abdul Aziz al Omari, who arrived at the airport in Portland, Maine.

1.1 INSIDE THE FOUR FLIGHTS **Boarding the Flights**

Boston: American 11 and United 175. Atta and Omari boarded a 6:00 A.M. flight from Port-

This excerpt originally came from National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004), 1–14.

land to Boston's Logan International Airport.¹⁰

When he checked in for his flight to Boston, Atta was selected by a computerized prescreening system known as CAPPS (Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System), created to identify passengers who should be subject to special security measures. Under security rules in place at the time, the only consequence of Atta's selection by CAPPS was that his checked bags were held off the plane until it was confirmed that he had boarded

the aircraft. This did not hinder Atta's plans.¹¹

Atta and Omari arrived in Boston at 6:45. Seven minutes later, Atta apparently took a call from Marwan al Shehhi, a longtime colleague who was at another terminal at Logan Airport. They spoke for three minutes.¹² It would be their final conversation.

Between 6:45 and 7:40, Atta and Omari, along with Satam al Suqami, Wail al Shehri, and Waleed al Shehri, checked in and boarded American Airlines Flight 11, bound for Los Angeles. The flight was scheduled to depart at 7:45.¹³

In another Logan terminal, Shehhi, joined by Fayez Banihammad, Mohand al Shehri, Ahmed al Ghamdi, and Hamza al Ghamdi, checked in for United Airlines Flight 175, also bound for Los Angeles. A couple of Shehhi's colleagues were obviously unused to travel; according to the United ticket agent, they had trouble understanding the standard security questions, and she had to go over them slowly until they

¹⁰ No physical, documentary, or analytical evidence provides a convincing explanation of why Atta and Omari drove to Portland, Maine, from Boston on the morning of September 10, only to return to Logan on Flight 5930 on the morning of September 11. However, Atta reacted negatively when informed in Portland that he would have to check in again in Boston. Michael Touhey interview (May 27, 2004). Whatever their reason, the Portland Jetport was the nearest airport to Boston with a 9/11 flight that would have arrived at Logan in time for the passengers to transfer to American Airlines Flight 11, which had a scheduled departure time of 7:45 A.M. See Tom Kinton interview (Nov. 6, 2003); Portland International Jetport site visit (Aug. 18, 2003). Like the other two airports used by the 9/11 hijackers (Newark Liberty International Airport and Washington Dulles International Airport), Boston's Logan International Airport was a "Category X" airport: i.e., among the largest facilities liable to highest threat, and generally subject to greater security requirements. See Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) report, "Civil Aviation Security Reference Handbook," May 1999, pp. 117–118. Though Logan was selected for two of the hijackings (as were both American and United Airlines), we found no evidence that the terrorists targeted particular airports or airlines. Nothing stands out about any of them with respect to the only security layer that was relevant to the actual hijackings: checkpoint screening. See FAA briefing materials, "Assessment and Testing Data for BOS, EWR, and IAD," Oct. 24, 2001. Despite security problems at Logan (see, e.g., two local Fox 25 television investigative reports in February and April 2001, and an email in August 2001 from a former FAA special agent to the agency's leadership regarding his concerns about lax security at the airport), no evidence suggests that such issues entered into the terrorists' targeting: they simply booked heavily fueled east-to-west transcontinental flights of the large Boeing aircraft they trained to fly that were scheduled to take off at nearly the same time. See Matt Carroll, "Fighting Terror Sense of Alarm; Airlines Foiled Police Logan Probe," *Boston Globe*, Oct. 17, 2001, p. B1.

¹¹ The Computer Assisted Passenger Prescreening System (CAPPS) was an FAA-approved automated system run by the airlines that scored each passenger's profile to identify those who might pose a threat to civil aviation. The system also chose passengers at random to receive additional security scrutiny. Ten out of the 19 hijackers (including 9 out of 10 on the two American Airlines flights) were identified via the CAPPS system. According to the procedures in place on 9/11, in addition to those flagged by the CAPPS algorithm, American's ticket agents were to mark as "selectees" those passengers who did not provide correct responses to the required security questions, failed to show proper identification, or met other criteria. See FAA report, "Air Carrier Standard Security Program," May 2001, pp. 75–76; FAA record of interview, Donna Thompson, Sept. 23, 2001; Chuck Severance interview (Apr. 15, 2004); Jim Dillon interview (Apr. 15, 2004); Diane Graney interview (Apr. 16, 2004). It appears that Atta was selected at random. See Al Hickson briefing (June 8, 2004).

¹² The call was placed from a pay phone in Terminal C (between the screening checkpoint and United 175's boarding gate). We presume Shehhi made the call, but we cannot be sure. Logan International Airport site visit (Aug. 15, 2003); see also Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) response to Commission briefing request no. 6, undated (topic 11).

¹³ Flight 11 pushed back from Gate 32 in Terminal B at 7:40. See American Airlines (AAL) response to the Commission's February 3, 2004, requests, Mar. 15, 2004.

gave the routine, reassuring answers.¹⁴ Their flight was scheduled to depart at 8:00.

The security checkpoints through which passengers, including Atta and his colleagues, gained access to the American 11 gate were operated by Globe Security under a contract with American Airlines. In a different terminal, the single checkpoint through which passengers for United 175 passed was controlled by United Airlines, which had contracted with Huntleigh USA to perform the screening.¹⁵

In passing through these checkpoints, each of the hijackers would have been screened by a walk-through metal detector calibrated to detect items with at least the metal content of a .22-caliber handgun. Anyone who might have set off that detector would have been screened with a hand wand—a procedure requiring the screener to identify the metal item or items that caused the alarm. In addition, an X-ray machine would have screened the hijackers' carry-on be-

longings. The screening was in place to identify and confiscate weapons and other items prohibited from being carried onto a commercial flight.¹⁶ None of the checkpoint supervisors recalled the hijackers or reported anything suspicious regarding their screening.¹⁷

While Atta had been selected by CAPPS in Portland, three members of his hijacking team—Suqami, Wail al Shehri, and Waleed al Shehri—were selected in Boston. Their selection affected only the handling of their checked bags, not their screening at the checkpoint. All five men cleared the checkpoint and made their way to the gate for American 11. Atta, Omari, and Suqami took their seats in business class (seats 8D, 8G, and 10B, respectively). The Shehri brothers had adjacent seats in row 2 (Wail in 2A, Waleed in 2B), in the first-class cabin. They boarded American 11 between 7:31 and 7:40. The aircraft pushed back from the gate at 7:40.¹⁸

Shehhi and his team, none of whom had been selected by CAPPS, boarded United 175 between 7:23 and 7:28 (Banihammad in 2A, Shehri in 2B, Shehhi in 6C, Hamza al Ghamdi in 9C, and Ahmed al Ghamdi in 9D). Their aircraft pushed back from the gate just before 8:00.¹⁹

¹⁴ See United Airlines (UAL) letter, "Flight 175—11Sep01 Passenger ACI [Airports Council International] Check-in History," July 11, 2002. Customer service representative Gail Jawahir recalled that her encounter with the Ghamdis occurred at "shortly before 7 A.M.," and when shown photos of the hijackers, she indicated that Mohand al Shehri resembled one of the two she checked in (suggesting they were Banihammad and Shehri). However, she also recalled that the men had the same last name and had assigned seats on row 9 (i.e., the Ghamdis), and that account has been adopted here. In either case, she almost certainly was dealing with one set of the Flight 175 hijackers. See FBI reports of investigation, interviews of Gail Jawahir, Sept. 21, 2001; Sept. 28, 2001. Even had the hijackers been unable to understand and answer the two standard security questions, the only consequence would have been the screening of their carry-on and checked bags for explosives. See FAA report, "Air Carrier Standard Security Program," May 2001, p. 76.

¹⁵ For Flight 11, two checkpoints provided access to the gate. The second was opened at 7:15 A.M. The FAA conducted many screener evaluations between September 11, 1999, and September 11, 2001. At the primary checkpoints, in aggregate, screeners met or exceeded the average for overall, physical search, and X-ray detection, while falling below the norm for metal detection. No FAA Special Assessments (by "red teams") were done at Logan security checkpoints during the two years prior to September 11, 2001. See FAA briefing materials, "Assessment and Testing Data for BOS, EWR, and IAD," Oct. 24, 2001.

¹⁶ See Air Transport Association/Regional Airlines Association (ATA/RAA) report, "Air Carriers Checkpoint Operations Guide," Aug. 1999; FAA report, "Air Carrier Standard Security Program," May 2001, appendix VI.

¹⁷ Mary Carol Turano interview (Mar. 11, 2004); FBI reports of investigation, interview of Nilda Cora, Oct. 4, 2001; interview of William Thomas, Sept. 14, 2001; interview of Jennifer Gore, Sept. 12, 2001; interview of Claudia Richey, Sept. 15, 2001; interview of Rosarito Rivera, Sept. 25, 2001.

¹⁸ See Transportation Security Administration (TSA) report, "Selectee Status of September 11th Hijackers," undated. For boarding and seating information, see AAL record, SABRE information on Flight 11, Sept. 11, 2001. These boarding times from the American system are approximate only; for Flight 11, they indicated that some passengers "boarded" after the aircraft had pushed back from the gate. See AAL response to the Commission's February 3, 2004, requests, Mar. 15, 2004.

¹⁹ See TSA report, "Selectee Status of September 11th Hijackers," undated; see also UAL letter, "Flight 175—11 Sep01 Passenger ACI Check-in History," July 11, 2002.

Washington Dulles: American 77. Hundreds of miles southwest of Boston, at Dulles International Airport in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C., five more men were preparing to take their early morning flight. At 7:15, a pair of them, Khalid al Mihdhar and Majed Moqed, checked in at the American Airlines ticket counter for Flight 77, bound for Los Angeles. Within the next 20 minutes, they would be followed by Hani Hanjour and two brothers, Nawaf al Hazmi and Salem al Hazmi.²⁰

Hani Hanjour, Khalid al Mihdhar, and Majed Moqed were flagged by CAPPs. The Hazmi brothers were also selected for extra scrutiny by the airline's customer service representative at the check-in counter. He did so because one of the brothers did not have photo identification nor could he understand English, and because the agent found both of the passengers to be suspicious. The only consequence of their selection was that their checked bags were held off the plane until it was confirmed that they had boarded the aircraft.²¹

All five hijackers passed through the Main Terminal's west security screening checkpoint; United Airlines, which was the responsible air carrier, had contracted out the work to Ar-

genbright Security.²² The checkpoint featured closed-circuit television that recorded all passengers, including the hijackers, as they were screened. At 7:18, Mihdhar and Moqed entered the security checkpoint.

Mihdhar and Moqed placed their carry-on bags on the belt of the X-ray machine and proceeded through the first metal detector. Both set off the alarm, and they were directed to a second metal detector. Mihdhar did not trigger the alarm and was permitted through the checkpoint. After Moqed set it off, a screener wanded him. He passed this inspection.²³

About 20 minutes later, at 7:35, another passenger for Flight 77, Hani Hanjour, placed two carry-on bags on the X-ray belt in the Main Terminal's west checkpoint, and proceeded, without alarm, through the metal detector. A short time later, Nawaf and Salem al Hazmi entered the same checkpoint. Salem al Hazmi cleared the metal detector and was permitted through; Nawaf al Hazmi set off the alarms for both the first and second metal detectors and was then hand-wanded before being passed. In addition, his over-the-shoulder carry-on bag was swiped by an explosive trace detector and then passed. The video footage indicates that he was carrying an unidentified item in his back pocket, clipped to its rim.²⁴

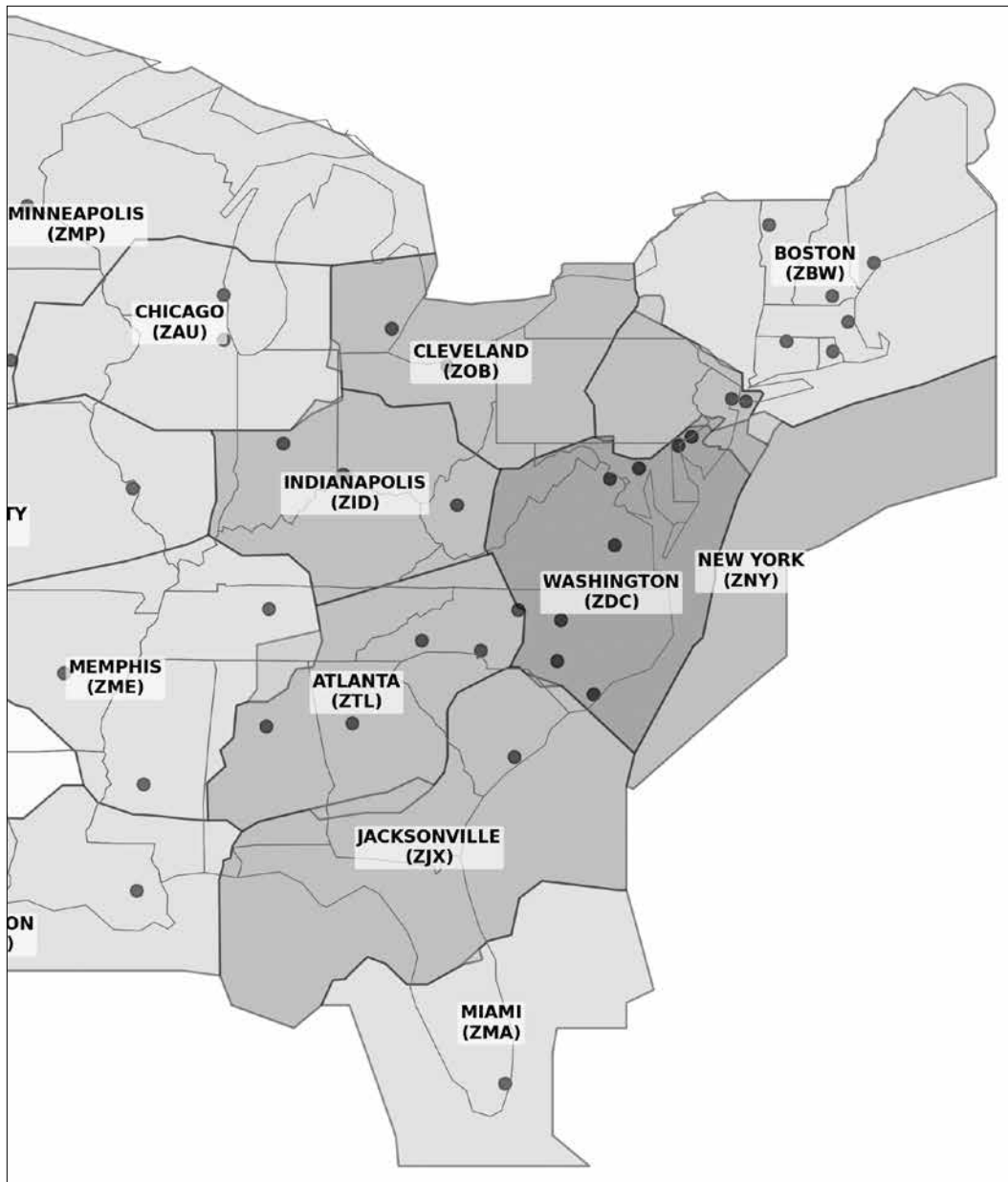
²⁰ The Hazmis checked in at 7:29; the airline has not yet been able to confirm the time of Hanjour's check-in. However, it had to have taken place by 7:35, when he appears on the checkpoint videotape. See AAL record, SABRE information for Flight 77, Sept. 11, 2001; AAL response to the Commission's February 3, 2004, requests, Mar. 15, 2004; Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority videotape, Dulles main terminal checkpoints, Sept. 11, 2001.

²¹ See TSA report, "Selectee Status of September 11th Hijackers," undated; see also FAA report, "Selectee List AALA #77," undated; FBI report of investigation, interview of Vaughn Alex, Sept. 12, 2001; Vaughn Alex interview (July 13, 2004).

²² The FAA conducted many screener evaluations at Dulles between September 11, 1999, and September 11, 2001. While the test results for physical search exceeded the national average, both the metal detector and X-ray results were below average. See FAA briefing materials, "Assessment and Testing Data for BOS [Boston Logan International Airport], EWR [Newark Liberty International Airport], and IAD [Washington Dulles International Airport]," Oct. 24, 2001.

²³ Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority videotape, Dulles main terminal checkpoints, Sept. 11, 2001; see also Tim Jackson interview (Apr. 12, 2004).

²⁴ Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority videotape, Dulles main terminal checkpoints, Sept. 11, 2001; see also Tim Jackson interview (Apr. 12, 2004).



FAA air traffic control centers.

Adapted from National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004), 15.

When the local civil aviation security office of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

later investigated these security screening operations, the screeners recalled nothing out of the

ordinary. They could not recall that any of the passengers they screened were CAPPS selectees. We asked a screening expert to review the videotape of the hand-wanding, and he found the quality of the screener's work to have been "marginal at best." The screener should have "resolved" what set off the alarm; and in the case of both Moqed and Hazmi, it was clear that he did not.²⁵

At 7:50, Majed Moqed and Khalid al Mihdhar boarded the flight and were seated in 12A and 12B in coach. Hani Hanjour, assigned to seat 1B (first class), soon followed. The Hazmi brothers, sitting in 5E and 5F, joined Hanjour in the first-class cabin.²⁶

Newark: United 93. Between 7:03 and 7:39, Saeed al Ghamdi, Ahmed al Nami, Ahmad al Haznawi, and Ziad Jarrah checked in at the United Airlines ticket counter for Flight 93, going to Los Angeles. Two checked bags; two did not. Haznawi was selected by CAPPS. His checked bag was screened for explosives and then loaded on the plane.²⁷

The four men passed through the security checkpoint, owned by United Airlines and operated under contract by Argenbright Security. Like the checkpoints in Boston, it lacked closed-circuit television surveillance so there is no documentary evidence to indicate when the hijackers passed through the checkpoint, what

alarms may have been triggered, or what security procedures were administered. The FAA interviewed the screeners later; none recalled anything unusual or suspicious.²⁸

The four men boarded the plane between 7:39 and 7:48. All four had seats in the first-class cabin; their plane had no business-class section. Jarrah was in seat 1B, closest to the cockpit; Nami was in 3C, Ghamdi in 3D, and Haznawi in 6B.²⁹

The 19 men were aboard four transcontinental flights.³⁰ They were planning to hijack these planes and turn them into large guided missiles, loaded with up to 11,400 gallons of jet fuel. By 8:00 A.M. on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, they had defeated all the security layers that America's civil aviation security system then had in place to prevent a hijacking.

The Hijacking of American 11

American Airlines Flight 11 provided nonstop service from Boston to Los Angeles. On September 11, Captain John Ogonowski and First

²⁵ For investigation findings, see FAA report, "American Airlines Flight #77: Hijacking and Crash into the Pentagon, Sept. 11, 2001," undated. For screener evaluations, see Tim Jackson interview (Apr. 12, 2004).

²⁶ See AAL record, SABRE information for Flight 77, Sept. 11, 2001; AAL response to the Commission's February 3, 2004, requests, Mar. 15, 2004.

²⁷ UAL record, Flight 93 EWR bag loading status, Sept. 11, 2001; UAL record, Flight 93 EWR ACI passenger history, Sept. 11, 2001; UAL record, Flight 93 EWR full bag history, Sept. 11, 2001; TSA report, "Selectee Status of September 11th Hijackers," undated; FBI report, "The Final 24 Hours," Dec. 8, 2003.

²⁸ The FAA conducted many screener evaluations at Newark between September 11, 1999, and September 11, 2001. Detection rates for metal detection, physical searches, and X-rays all met or exceeded the national averages. See FAA briefing materials, "Assessment and Testing Data for BOS, EWR, and IAD," Oct. 24, 2001; see also FAA report, "United Airlines Flight 93, September 11, 2001, Executive Report," Jan. 30, 2002.

²⁹ UAL record, Flight 93 EWR ACI passenger history, Sept. 11, 2001; see also FBI report, "The Final 24 Hours," Dec. 8, 2003.

³⁰ While Flights 11 and 77 were at or slightly above the average number of passengers for the respective flights that summer, Flights 175 and 93 were well below their averages. We found no evidence to indicate that the hijackers manipulated the passenger loads on the aircraft they hijacked. Financial records did not reveal the purchase of any tickets beyond those the hijackers used for themselves. See FBI response to Commission briefing request no. 6, undated (topic 8); AAL report, "Average Load Factor by Day-of-Week," undated (for Flights 11 and 77 from June 11, 2001, to Sept. 9, 2001); AAL response to the Commission's supplemental document requests, Jan. 20, 2004; UAL report, Flight 175 BOS-LAX [Los Angeles International Airport] Load Factors, undated (from June 1, 2001, to Sept. 11, 2001); UAL report, "Explanation of Load Factors," undated.



American Airlines Flight 11's path.

Adapted from National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004), 32.

Officer Thomas McGuinness piloted the Boeing 767. It carried its full capacity of nine flight attendants. Eighty-one passengers boarded the flight with them (including the five terrorists).³¹

The plane took off at 7:59. Just before 8:14, it had climbed to 26,000 feet, not quite its initial assigned cruising altitude of 29,000 feet. All communications and flight profile data were normal. About this time the "Fasten Seatbelt" sign would usually have been turned off, and the

flight attendants would have begun preparing for cabin service.³²

At that same time, American 11 had its last routine communication with the ground when it acknowledged navigational instructions from the FAA's air traffic control (ATC) center in Boston. Sixteen seconds after that transmission, ATC instructed the aircraft's pilots to climb to 35,000 feet. That message and all subsequent attempts to contact the flight were not acknowl-

³¹ See AAL response to the Commission's February 3, 2004, requests, Mar. 15, 2004; AAL record, Dispatch Environmental Control/Weekly Flight Summary for Flight 11, Sept. 11, 2001; AAL report, "Flight Attendant Jump Seat Locations during Takeoff and Flight Attendant Typical Cabin Positions during Start of Cabin Service," undated; AAL report, "Passenger Name List, Flight 11/September 11," undated.

³² Commission analysis of National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and FAA air traffic control and radar data. See AAL record, Dispatch Environmental Control/Weekly Flight Summary for Flight 11, Sept. 11, 2001; NTSB report, "Flight Path Study—American Airlines Flight 11," Feb. 19, 2002; Bill Halleck and Peggy Houck interview (Jan. 8, 2004).

edged. From this and other evidence, we believe the hijacking began at 8:14 or shortly thereafter.³³

Reports from two flight attendants in the coach cabin, Betty Ong and Madeline “Amy” Sweeney, tell us most of what we know about how the hijacking happened. As it began, some of the hijackers—most likely Wail al Shehri and Waleed al Shehri, who were seated in row 2 in first class—stabbed the two unarmed flight attendants who would have been preparing for cabin service.³⁴

We do not know exactly how the hijackers gained access to the cockpit; FAA rules required that the doors remain closed and locked during flight. Ong speculated that they had “jammed their way” in. Perhaps the terrorists stabbed the flight attendants to get a cockpit key, to force one of them to open the cockpit door, or to lure the captain or first officer out of the cockpit. Or the flight attendants may just have been in their way.³⁵

At the same time or shortly thereafter, Atta—the only terrorist on board trained to fly a jet—would have moved to the cockpit from his business-class seat, possibly accompanied by Omari. As this was happening, passenger Daniel Lewin, who was seated in the row just behind Atta and Omari, was stabbed by one of the hijackers—probably Satam al Suqami, who was

seated directly behind Lewin. Lewin had served four years as an officer in the Israeli military. He may have made an attempt to stop the hijackers in front of him, not realizing that another was sitting behind him.³⁶

The hijackers quickly gained control and sprayed Mace, pepper spray, or some other irritant in the first-class cabin, in order to force the passengers and flight attendants toward the rear of the plane. They claimed they had a bomb.³⁷

About five minutes after the hijacking began, Betty Ong contacted the American Airlines Southeastern Reservations Office in Cary, North Carolina, via an AT&T airphone to report an emergency aboard the flight. This was the first of several occasions on 9/11 when flight attendants took action outside the scope of their training, which emphasized that in a hijacking, they were to communicate with the cockpit crew. The emergency call lasted approximately 25 minutes, as Ong calmly and professionally relayed information about events taking place aboard the airplane to authorities on the ground.³⁸

At 8:19, Ong reported: “The cockpit is not answering, somebody’s stabbed in business class—and I think there’s Mace—that we can’t breathe—I don’t know, I think we’re getting hijacked.” She then told of the stabbings of the two flight attendants.³⁹

³³ NTSB report, Air Traffic Control Recording—American Airlines Flight 11, Dec. 21, 2001; NTSB report, Air Traffic Control Recording—United Airlines Flight 175, Dec. 21, 2001.

³⁴ AAL transcript, telephone call from Betty Ong to Nydia Gonzalez, Sept. 11, 2001; AAL transcript, telephone call from Nydia Gonzalez to Craig Marquis, Sept. 11, 2001; AAL transcript, telephone call from Nancy Wyatt to Ray Howland, Sept. 11, 2001; Michael Woodward interview (Jan. 25, 2004).

³⁵ Craig Marquis interview (Nov. 19, 2003); Michael Woodward interview (Jan. 25, 2004); Jim Dillon interview (Apr. 15, 2004). See also AAL transcript, telephone call from Betty Ong to Nydia Gonzalez, Sept. 11, 2001.

³⁶ AAL transcript, telephone call from Nydia Gonzalez to Craig Marquis, Sept. 11, 2001; Obituary, “Daniel Lewin,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 22, 2001, p. B7.

³⁷ AAL transcript, telephone call from Betty Ong to Nydia Gonzalez, Sept. 11, 2001; AAL transcript, telephone call from Nydia Gonzalez to Craig Marquis, Sept. 11, 2001. Regarding the claim of a bomb, see Michael Woodward interview (Jan. 25, 2004).

³⁸ See Nydia Gonzalez interview (Nov. 19, 2003). On standard emergency training, see FAA report, “Air Carrier Standard Security Program,” May 2001, pp. 139j–139o; Don Dillman briefing (Nov. 18, 2003); Bob Jordan briefing (Nov. 20, 2003).

³⁹ AAL transcript, telephone call from Betty Ong to Nydia Gonzalez, Sept. 11, 2001.

At 8:21, one of the American employees receiving Ong's call in North Carolina, Nydia Gonzalez, alerted the American Airlines operations center in Fort Worth, Texas, reaching Craig Marquis, the manager on duty. Marquis soon realized this was an emergency and instructed the airline's dispatcher responsible for the flight to contact the cockpit. At 8:23, the dispatcher tried unsuccessfully to contact the aircraft. Six minutes later, the air traffic control specialist in American's operations center contacted the FAA's Boston Air Traffic Control Center about the flight. The center was already aware of the problem.⁴⁰

Boston Center knew of a problem on the flight in part because just before 8:25 the hijackers had attempted to communicate with the passengers. The microphone was keyed, and immediately one of the hijackers said, "Nobody move. Everything will be okay. If you try to make any moves, you'll endanger yourself and the airplane. Just stay quiet." Air traffic controllers heard the transmission; Ong did not. The hijackers probably did not know how to operate the cockpit radio communication system correctly, and thus inadvertently broadcast their message over the air traffic control channel instead of the cabin public-address channel. Also at 8:25, and again at 8:29, Amy Sweeney got through to the American Flight Services Office in Boston but was cut off after she reported someone was hurt aboard the flight. Three minutes later, Sweeney was reconnected to the office and began relaying

updates to the manager, Michael Woodward.⁴¹

At 8:26, Ong reported that the plane was "flying erratically." A minute later, Flight 11 turned south. American also began getting identifications of the hijackers, as Ong and then Sweeney passed on some of the seat numbers of those who had gained unauthorized access to the cockpit.⁴²

Sweeney calmly reported on her line that the plane had been hijacked; a man in first class had his throat slashed; two flight attendants had been stabbed—one was seriously hurt and was on oxygen while the other's wounds seemed minor; a doctor had been requested; the flight attendants were unable to contact the cockpit; and there was a bomb in the cockpit. Sweeney told Woodward that she and Ong were trying to relay as much information as they could to people on the ground.⁴³

At 8:38, Ong told Gonzalez that the plane was flying erratically again. Around this time Sweeney told Woodward that the hijackers were Middle Easterners, naming three of their seat numbers. One spoke very little English and one spoke excellent English [she said]. The hijackers had gained entry to the cockpit, and she did not know how. The aircraft was in a rapid descent.⁴⁴

At 8:41, Sweeney told Woodward that passengers in coach were under the impression that there was a routine medical emergency in first

⁴⁰ See Nydia Gonzalez interview (Nov. 19, 2003); Craig Marquis interviews (Nov. 19, 2003; Apr. 26, 2004); AAL record, Dispatch Environmental Control/Weekly Flight Summary for Flight 11, Sept. 11, 2001; AAL transcript, telephone call from Bill Halleck to Boston Air Traffic Control Center, Sept. 11, 2001.

⁴¹ See FAA recording, Boston Air Route Traffic Control Center, position 46R, at 8:25 A.M.; Air Traffic Control Recording—American Airlines Flight 11, Dec. 21, 2001.

⁴² See AAL transcript, telephone call from Nydia Gonzalez to Craig Marquis, Sept. 11, 2001; NTSB report, "Flight Path Study—American Airlines Flight 11," Feb. 19, 2002. AAL transcript, telephone call from Nydia Gonzalez to Craig Marquis, Sept. 11, 2001; AAL transcript, telephone call from Nancy Wyatt to Ray Howland, Sept. 11, 2001.

⁴³ Michael Woodward interview (Jan. 25, 2004).

⁴⁴ AAL transcript, telephone call from Nydia Gonzalez to Craig Marquis, Sept. 11, 2001; Michael Woodward interview (Jan. 25, 2004); AAL, Michael Woodward notes, Sept. 11, 2001.

class. Other flight attendants were busy at duties such as getting medical supplies while Ong and Sweeney were reporting the events.⁴⁵

At 8:41, in American's operations center, a colleague told Marquis that the air traffic controllers declared Flight 11 a hijacking and "think he's [American 11] headed toward Kennedy [airport in New York City]. They're moving everybody out of the way. They seem to have him on a primary radar. They seem to think that he is descending."⁴⁶

At 8:44, Gonzalez reported losing phone contact with Ong. About this same time Sweeney reported to Woodward, "Something is wrong. We are in a rapid descent. . . . We are all over the place." Woodward asked Sweeney to look out the window to see if she could determine where they were. Sweeney responded: "We are flying low. We are flying very, very low. We are flying way too low." Seconds later she said, "Oh my God, we are way too low." The phone call ended.⁴⁷

At 8:46:40, American 11 crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City.⁴⁸ All on board, along with an unknown number of people in the tower, were killed instantly.

The Hijacking of United 175

United Airlines Flight 175 was scheduled to depart for Los Angeles at 8:00. Captain Victor Saracini and First Officer Michael Horrocks piloted the Boeing 767, which had seven flight

attendants. Fifty-six passengers boarded the flight.⁴⁹

United 175 pushed back from its gate at 7:58 and departed Logan Airport at 8:14. By 8:33, it had reached its assigned cruising altitude of 31,000 feet. The flight attendants would have begun their cabin service.⁵⁰

The flight had taken off just as American 11 was being hijacked, and at 8:42 the United 175 flight crew completed their report on a "suspicious transmission" overheard from another plane (which turned out to have been Flight 11) just after takeoff. This was United 175's last communication with the ground.⁵¹

The hijackers attacked sometime between 8:42 and 8:46. They used knives (as reported

⁴⁹ The 56 passengers represented a load factor of 33.33 percent of the airplane's seating capacity of 168, below the 49.22 percent for Flight 175 on Tuesdays in the three-month period prior to September 11, 2001. See UAL report, Flight 175 BOS-LAX Load Factors, undated (from June 1, 2001, to Sept. 11, 2001). Nine passengers holding reservations for Flight 175 did not show for the flight. They were interviewed and cleared by the FBI. FAA report, "Executive Summary," Sept. 12, 2001; FAA report, "Executive Summary, Chronology of a Multiple Hijacking Crisis, September 11, 2001," Sept. 17, 2001; UAL record, Flight 175 ACARS [Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting System] report, Sept. 11, 2001; UAL record, Flight 175 Flight Data Recap, Sept. 11, 2001.

⁵⁰ FAA report, "Executive Summary" Sept. 12, 2001; FAA report, "Executive Summary, Chronology of a Multiple Hijacking Crisis, September 11, 2001," Sept. 17, 2001; NTSB report, "Flight Path Study—United Airlines 175," Feb. 19, 2002; NTSB report, Air Traffic Control Recording—United Airlines Flight 175, Dec. 21, 2001. At or around this time, flight attendants Kathryn Laborie and Alfred Marchand would have begun cabin service in first class; with Amy King and Robert Fangman in business class; and with Michael Tarrou, Amy Jarret, and Alicia Titus in economy class. See UAL report, "Flight 175 Flight Attendant Positions/Jumpseats," undated. United flight attendants, unlike those at American, did not carry cockpit keys. Instead, such keys were stowed in the cabin—on Flight 175, in the overhead bin above seats 1A and 1B in first class. See Don Dillman briefing (Nov. 18, 2003); Bob Jordan briefing (Nov. 20, 2003).

⁵¹ Asked by air traffic controllers at 8:37 to look for an American Airlines 767 (Flight 11), United 175 reported spotting the aircraft at 8:38. At 8:41, the flight crew reported having "heard a suspicious transmission" from another aircraft shortly after takeoff, "like someone keyed the mike and said everyone stay in your seats." See NTSB report, Air Traffic Control Recording—United Airlines Flight 175, Dec. 21, 2001.



United Airlines Flight 175's path.

Adapted from National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004), 32.

by two passengers and a flight attendant), Mace (reported by one passenger), and the threat of a bomb (reported by the same passenger). They stabbed members of the flight crew (reported by a flight attendant and one passenger). Both pilots had been killed (reported by one flight attendant). The eyewitness accounts came from calls made from the rear of the plane, from passengers originally seated further forward in the cabin, a sign that passengers and perhaps crew had been moved to the back of the aircraft. Given similarities to American 11 in hijacker seating and in eyewitness reports of tactics and weapons, as well as the contact between the pre-

sumed team leaders, Atta and Shehhi, we believe the tactics were similar on both flights.⁵²

The first operational evidence that something was abnormal on United 175 came at

⁵² See Marc Policastro interview (Nov. 21, 2003); FBI reports of investigation, interview of Lee Hanson, Sept. 11, 2001; interview of Marc Policastro, Sept. 11, 2001; interview of Louise Sweeney, Sept. 28, 2001; interview of Ronald May, Sept. 11, 2001. On both American 11 and United 175, Boeing 767 double-aisled aircraft, the hijackers arrayed themselves similarly: two seated in first class close to the cockpit door, the pilot hijacker seated close behind them, and at least one other hijacker seated close behind the pilot hijacker. Hijackers were seated next to both the left and right aisles. On American 77 and United 93, Boeing 757 single-aisle aircraft, the pilot hijacker sat in the first row, closest to the cockpit door. See FBI report, "Summary of Penttobom Investigation," Feb. 29, 2004, pp. 67–69; AAL schematics for Flight 11 and Flight 77; UAL schematics for Flight 175 and Flight 93.

8:47, when the aircraft changed beacon codes twice within a minute. At 8:51, the flight deviated from its assigned altitude, and a minute later New York air traffic controllers began repeatedly and unsuccessfully trying to contact it.⁵³

At 8:52, in Easton, Connecticut, a man named Lee Hanson received a phone call from his son Peter, a passenger on United 175. His son told him: “I think they’ve taken over the cockpit—An attendant has been stabbed—and someone else up front may have been killed. The plane is making strange moves. Call United Airlines—Tell them it’s Flight 175, Boston to LA.” Lee Hanson then called the Easton Police Department and relayed what he had heard.⁵⁴

Also at 8:52, a male flight attendant called a United office in San Francisco, reaching Marc Policastro. The flight attendant reported that the flight had been hijacked, both pilots had been killed, a flight attendant had been stabbed, and the hijackers were probably flying the plane. The call lasted about two minutes, after which Policastro and a colleague tried unsuccessfully to contact the flight.⁵⁵

At 8:58, the flight took a heading toward New York City.⁵⁶

At 8:59, Flight 175 passenger Brian David Sweeney tried to call his wife, Julie. He left a message on their home answering machine that

the plane had been hijacked. He then called his mother, Louise Sweeney, told her the flight had been hijacked, and added that the passengers were thinking about storming the cockpit to take control of the plane away from the hijackers.⁵⁷

At 9:00, Lee Hanson received a second call from his son Peter:

*It’s getting bad, Dad—A stewardess was stabbed—They seem to have knives and Mace—They said they have a bomb—It’s getting very bad on the plane—Passengers are throwing up and getting sick—The plane is making jerky movements—I don’t think the pilot is flying the plane—I think we are going down—I think they intend to go to Chicago or someplace and fly into a building—Don’t worry, Dad—If it happens, it’ll be very fast—My God, my God.*⁵⁸

The call ended abruptly. Lee Hanson had heard a woman scream just before it cut off. He turned on a television, and in her home so did Louise Sweeney. Both then saw the second aircraft hit the World Trade Center.⁵⁹

At 9:03:11, United Airlines Flight 175 struck the South Tower of the World Trade Center.⁶⁰ All on board, along with an unknown number of people in the tower, were killed instantly.

The Hijacking of American 77

American Airlines Flight 77 was scheduled to depart from Washington Dulles for Los Angeles at 8:10. The aircraft was a Boeing 757 piloted by

⁵³ NTSB report, “Flight Path Study—United Airlines 175,” Feb. 19, 2002; NTSB report, Air Traffic Control Recording—United Airlines Flight 175, Dec. 21, 2001.

⁵⁴ See FBI report of investigation, interview of Lee Hanson, Sept. 11, 2001.

⁵⁵ Flight crew on board UAL aircraft could contact the United office in San Francisco (SAMC) simply by dialing *349 on an air-phone. See FBI report of investigation, interview of David Price, Jan. 24, 2002. At some point before 9:00, SAMC notified United’s headquarters of the emergency call from the flight attendant. See Marc Policastro interview (Nov. 21, 2003); FBI report of investigation, interview of Marc Policastro, Sept. 11, 2001; Rich Miles interview (Nov. 21, 2003).

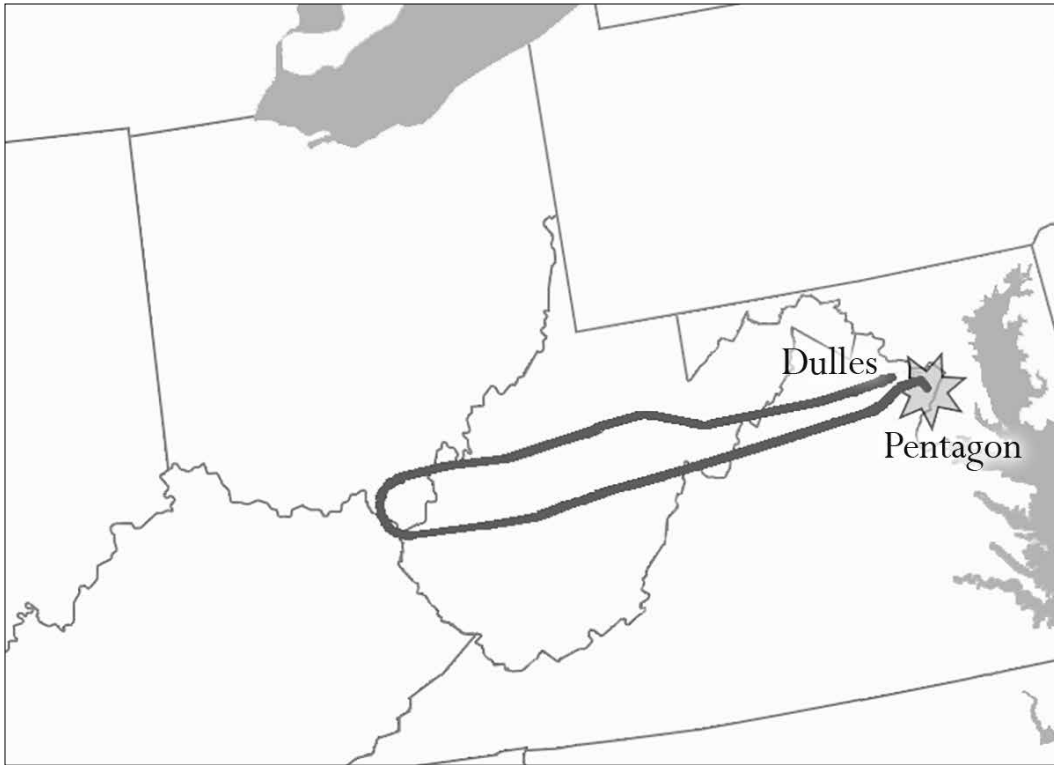
⁵⁶ NTSB report, “Flight Path Study—United Airlines 175,” Feb. 19, 2002.

⁵⁷ See FBI reports of investigation, interview of Julie Sweeney, Oct. 2, 2001; interview of Louise Sweeney, Sept. 28, 2001.

⁵⁸ See FBI report of investigation, interview of Lee Hanson, Sept. 11, 2001.

⁵⁹ See FBI report of investigation, interview of Lee Hanson, Sept. 11, 2001; interview of Louise Sweeney, Sept. 28, 2001.

⁶⁰ NTSB report, “Flight Path Study—United Airlines 175,” Feb. 19, 2002.



American Airlines Flight 77's path.

Adapted from National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004), 33.

Captain Charles F. Burlingame and First Officer David Charlebois. There were four flight attendants. On September 11, the flight carried 58 passengers.⁶¹

American 77 pushed back from its gate at 8:09 and took off at 8:20. At 8:46, the flight reached its assigned cruising altitude of 35,000 feet. Cabin service would have begun. At 8:51, American 77 transmitted its last routine radio

communication. The hijacking began between 8:51 and 8:54. As on American 11 and United 175, the hijackers used knives (reported by one passenger) and moved all the passengers (and possibly crew) to the rear of the aircraft (reported by one flight attendant and one passenger). Unlike the earlier flights, the Flight 77 hijackers were reported by a passenger to have box cutters. Finally, a passenger reported that an announcement had been made by the "pilot" that the plane had been hijacked. Neither of the first-hand accounts mentioned any stabbings or the threat or use of either a bomb or Mace, though

⁶¹ AAL report, "Flight Attendant Jump Seat Locations During Takeoff and Flight Attendant Typical Cabin Positions During Start of Cabin Service," undated; AAL email, Young to Clark, "Flight Crews," Sept. 12, 2001; AAL record, Dispatch Environmental Control/Weekly Flight Summary for Flight 11, Sept. 11, 2001.

both witnesses began the flight in the first-class cabin.⁶²

At 8:54, the aircraft deviated from its assigned course, turning south. Two minutes later the transponder was turned off and even primary radar contact with the aircraft was lost. The Indianapolis Air Traffic Control Center repeatedly tried and failed to contact the aircraft. American Airlines dispatchers also tried, without success.⁶³

At 9:00, American Airlines Executive Vice President Gerard Arpey learned that communications had been lost with American 77. This was now the second American aircraft in trouble. He ordered all American Airlines flights in the Northeast that had not taken off to remain on the ground. Shortly before 9:10, suspecting that American 77 had been hijacked, American headquarters concluded that the second aircraft

to hit the World Trade Center might have been Flight 77. After learning that United Airlines was missing a plane, American Airlines headquarters extended the ground stop nationwide.⁶⁴

At 9:12, Renee May called her mother, Nancy May, in Las Vegas. She said her flight was being hijacked by six individuals who had moved them to the rear of the plane. She asked her mother to alert American Airlines. Nancy May and her husband promptly did so.⁶⁵

At some point between 9:16 and 9:26, Barbara Olson called her husband, Ted Olson, the solicitor general of the United States. She reported that the flight had been hijacked, and the hijackers had knives and box cutters. She further indicated that the hijackers were not aware of her phone call, and that they had put all the passengers in the back of the plane. About a minute into the conversation, the call was cut off. Solicitor General Olson tried unsuccessfully to reach Attorney General John Ashcroft.⁶⁶

Shortly after the first call, Barbara Olson reached her husband again. She reported that the pilot had announced that the flight had been hijacked, and she asked her husband what she

⁶² AAL record, System Operations Command Center (SOCC) log, Sept. 11, 2001, p. 2; NTSB report, "Flight Path Study—American Airlines Flight 77," Feb. 19, 2002. Flight attendant Renee May would likely have started working in the first-class galley; Michele Heidenberger would have been in the aft galley; Jennifer Lewis would have been in first class; and Kenneth Lewis would have been in the main cabin. On cabin service, see AAL report, "Flight Attendant Jump Seat Locations during Takeoff and Flight Attendant Typical Cabin Positions during Start of Cabin Service," undated. For cruising altitude, see NTSB report, "Flight Path Study—American Airlines Flight 77," Feb. 19, 2002. On events in the cabin, see FAA recording, Indianapolis Air Traffic Control Center, position HNN R, Sept. 11, 2001; FBI report of investigation, interview of Theodore Olson, Sept. 11, 2001; FBI report of investigation, interview of Ronald and Nancy May, Sept. 12, 2001; AAL record, Dispatch Environmental Control/Weekly Flight Summary for Flight 11, Sept. 11, 2001.

⁶³ Air traffic control notified American's headquarters of the problem, and the airline began attempts to contact the flight by 8:59 via ACARS. See NTSB report, "Flight Path Study—American Airlines Flight 77," Feb. 19, 2002. On American 11, the transponder signal was turned off at 8:21; on United 175, the code was changed at 8:47; on American 77, the signal was turned off at 8:56; and on United 93, the signal was turned off at 9:41. See FAA report, "Summary of Air Traffic Hijack Events: September 11, 2001," Sept. 17, 2001; Richard Byard interview (Sept. 24, 2003); Linda Povielli interview (Sept. 24, 2003); see also NTSB report, Air Traffic Control Recording—American Airlines Flight 77, Dec. 21, 2001; AAL record, Dispatch Environmental Control/Weekly Flight Summary for Flight 11, Sept. 11, 2001.

⁶⁴ Gerard Arpey interview (Jan. 8, 2004); Larry Wansley interview (Jan. 8, 2004); AAL record, System Operations Command Center (SOCC) log, Sept. 11, 2001.

⁶⁵ FBI report, "American Airlines Airphone Usage," Sept. 20, 2001; FBI report of investigation, interview of Ronald and Nancy May, Sept. 12, 2001.

⁶⁶ The records available for the phone calls from American 77 do not allow for a determination of which of four "connected calls to unknown numbers" represent the two between Barbara and Ted Olson, although the FBI and Department of Justice believe that all four represent communications between Barbara Olson and her husband's office (all family members of the Flight 77 passengers and crew were canvassed to see if they had received any phone calls from the hijacked flight, and only Renee May's parents and Ted Olson indicated that they had received such calls). The four calls were at 9:15:34 for 1 minute, 42 seconds; 9:20:15 for 4 minutes, 34 seconds; 9:25:48 for 2 minutes, 34 seconds; and 9:30:56 for 4 minutes, 20 seconds. FBI report, "American Airlines Airphone Usage," Sept. 20, 2001; FBI report of investigation, interview of Theodore Olson, Sept. 11, 2001; FBI report of investigation, interview of Helen Voss, Sept. 14, 2001; AAL response to the Commission's supplemental document request, Jan. 20, 2004.

should tell the captain to do. Ted Olson asked for her location, and she replied that the aircraft was then flying over houses. Another passenger told her they were traveling northeast. The Solicitor General then informed his wife of the two previous hijackings and crashes. She did not display signs of panic and did not indicate any awareness of an impending crash. At that point, the second call was cut off.⁶⁷

At 9:29, the autopilot on American 77 was disengaged; the aircraft was at 7,000 feet and approximately 38 miles west of the Pentagon.⁶⁸ At 9:32, controllers at the Dulles Terminal Radar Approach Control “observed a primary radar target tracking eastbound at a high rate of speed.” This was later determined to have been Flight 77.

At 9:34, Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport advised the Secret Service of an unknown aircraft heading in the direction of the White House. American 77 was then 5 miles west-southwest of the Pentagon and began a 330-degree turn. At the end of the turn, it was descending through 2,200 feet, pointed toward the Pentagon and downtown Washington. The hijacker pilot then advanced the throttles to maximum power and dove toward the Pentagon.⁶⁹

At 9:37:46, American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon, traveling at approx-

imately 530 miles per hour.⁷⁰ All on board, as well as many civilian and military personnel in the building, were killed.

The Battle for United 93

At 8:42, United Airlines Flight 93 took off from Newark (New Jersey) Liberty International Airport bound for San Francisco. The aircraft was piloted by Captain Jason Dahl and First Officer Leroy Homer, and there were five flight attendants. Thirty-seven passengers, including the hijackers, boarded the plane. Scheduled to depart the gate at 8:00, the Boeing 757’s takeoff was delayed because of the airport’s typically heavy morning traffic.⁷¹

The hijackers had planned to take flights scheduled to depart at 7:45 (American 11), 8:00 (United 175 and United 93), and 8:10 (American 77). Three of the flights had actually taken off within 10 to 15 minutes of their planned departure times. United 93 would ordinarily have taken off about 15 minutes after pulling away from the gate. When it left the ground at 8:42, the flight was running more than 25 minutes late.⁷²

As United 93 left Newark, the flight’s crew members were unaware of the hijacking of American 11. Around 9:00, the FAA, American,

⁶⁷ FBI report, “American Airlines Airphone Usage,” Sept. 20, 2001; FBI report of investigation, interview of Theodore Olson, Sept. 11, 2001.

⁶⁸ See FAA report, “Report of Aircraft Accident,” Nov. 13, 2001; John Hendershot interview (Dec. 22, 2003); FAA report, “Summary of Air Traffic Hijack Events: September 11, 2001,” Sept. 17, 2001; NTSB report, “Flight Path Study—American Airlines Flight 77,” Feb. 19, 2002; Commission analysis of radar data.

⁶⁹ See FAA report, “Summary of Air Traffic Hijack Events: September 11, 2001,” Sept. 17, 2001; NTSB report, “Flight Path Study—American Airlines Flight 77,” Feb. 19, 2002; FAA report, “Report of Aircraft Accident,” Nov. 13, 2001.

⁷⁰ See NTSB report, “Flight Path Study—American Airlines Flight 77,” Feb. 19, 2002; TSA report, “Criminal Acts against Civil Aviation for 2001,” Aug. 20, 2002, p. 41.

⁷¹ The flight attendant assignments and seating included Chief Flight Attendant Deborah Welsh (first class, seat J1 at takeoff); Sandra Bradshaw (coach, seat J5); Wanda Green (first class, seat J4); Lorraine Bay (coach, seat J3); and CeeCee Lyles (coach, seat J6). See UAL response to Commission questions for the record, Apr. 5, 2004; FAA report, “Chronology of the September 11 Attacks and Subsequent Events through October 24, 2001,” undated; UAL records, copies of electronic boarding passes for Flight 93, Sept. 11, 2001; Bob Varcadipane interview (May 4, 2004); Newark Tower briefing (May 4, 2004).

⁷² Although the flight schedule indicates an 8:00 A.M. “departure,” this was the time the plane left the gate area. Taxiing from the gate to the runway normally took about 15 minutes. Bob Varcadipane interview (May 4, 2004); Newark Tower briefing (May 4, 2004).

and United were facing the staggering realization of apparent multiple hijackings. At 9:03, they would see another aircraft strike the World Trade Center. Crisis managers at the FAA and the airlines did not yet act to warn other aircraft.⁷³ At the same time, Boston Center realized that a message transmitted just before 8:25 by the hijacker pilot of American 11 included the phrase, “We have some planes.”⁷⁴

No one at the FAA or the airlines that day had ever dealt with multiple hijackings. Such a plot had not been carried out anywhere in the world in more than 30 years, and never in the United States. As news of the hijackings filtered through the FAA and the airlines, it does not seem to have occurred to their leadership that they needed to alert other aircraft in the air that they too might be at risk.⁷⁵

United 175 was hijacked between 8:42 and 8:46, and awareness of that hijacking began to spread after 8:51. American 77 was hijacked between 8:51 and 8:54. By 9:00, FAA and air-

line officials began to comprehend that attackers were going after multiple aircraft. American Airlines’ nationwide ground stop between 9:05 and 9:10 was followed by a United Airlines ground stop. FAA controllers at Boston Center, which had tracked the first two hijackings, requested at 9:07 that [the] Herndon [Virginia] Command Center “get messages to airborne aircraft to increase security for the cockpit.” There is no evidence that Herndon took such action. Boston Center immediately began speculating about other aircraft that might be in danger, leading them to worry about a transcontinental flight—Delta 1989—that in fact was not hijacked. At 9:19, the FAA’s New England regional office called Herndon and asked that Cleveland Center advise Delta 1989 to use extra cockpit security.⁷⁶

Several FAA air traffic control officials told us it was the air carriers’ responsibility to notify their planes of security problems. One senior FAA air traffic control manager said that it was simply not the FAA’s place to order the airlines what to tell their pilots.⁷⁷ We believe such statements do not reflect an adequate appreciation of the FAA’s responsibility for the safety and security of civil aviation.

The airlines bore responsibility, too. They were facing an escalating number of conflicting and, for the most part, erroneous reports about other flights, as well as a continuing lack of vital

⁷³ Commission analysis of FAA air traffic control data. On the FAA’s awareness of multiple hijackings, see AAL transcript, telephone call from Nydia Gonzalez to Craig Marquis, Sept. 11, 2001; Craig Marquis interview (Nov. 19, 2003); AAL record, System Operations Command Center (SOCC) log, Sept. 11, 2001; UAL System Operations Control briefing (Nov. 20, 2003); Rich Miles interview (Nov. 21, 2003); UAL report, “Timeline: Dispatch/SMFDO Activities—Terrorist Crisis,” undated.

⁷⁴ FAA audio file, Boston Center, position 46R, 8:24:38 and 8:24:56; Peter Zalewski interview (Sept. 23, 2003).

⁷⁵ On September 6, 1970, members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hijacked a Pan American Boeing 747, a TWA Boeing 707, and a Swissair DC-8. On September 9, a British airliner was hijacked as well. An attempt to hijack an Israeli airliner was thwarted. The Pan American plane landed in Cairo and was blown up after its passengers were released. The other three aircraft were flown to Dawson Field, near Amman, Jordan; the passengers were held captive, and the planes were destroyed. The international hijacking crisis turned into a civil war, as the Jordanian government used force to restore its control of the country. See FAA report, Civil Aviation Reference Handbook, May 1999, appendix D. The FAA knew or strongly suspected that Flight 11 was a hijacking 11 minutes after it was taken over; Flight 175, 9 minutes after it was taken over. There is no evidence to indicate that the FAA recognized Flight 77 as a hijacking until it crashed into the Pentagon.

⁷⁶ FAA audio file, Herndon Command Center, line 5114, 9:07:13; FAA audio file, Herndon Command Center, position 15, 9:19. At 9:07, Boston Air Traffic Control Center recommended to the FAA Command Center that a cockpit warning be sent to the pilots of all commercial aircraft to secure their cockpits. While Boston Center sent out such warnings to the commercial flights in its sector, we could find no evidence that a nationwide warning was issued by the ATC system.

⁷⁷ Ellen King interview (Apr. 5, 2004). FAA air traffic control tapes indicate that at 9:19 the FAA Air Traffic Control System Command Center in Herndon ordered controllers to send a cockpit warning to Delta 1989 because, like American 11 and United 175, it was a transcontinental flight departing Boston’s Logan Airport.

information from the FAA about the hijacked flights. We found no evidence, however, that American Airlines sent any cockpit warnings to its aircraft on 9/11. United's first decisive action to notify its airborne aircraft to take defensive action did not come until 9:19, when a United flight dispatcher, Ed Ballinger, took the initiative to begin transmitting warnings to his 16 transcontinental flights: "Beware any cockpit intrusion—Two a/c [aircraft] hit World Trade Center." One of the flights that received the warning was United 93. Because Ballinger was still responsible for his other flights as well as Flight 175, his warning message was not transmitted to Flight 93 until 9:23.⁷⁸

By all accounts, the first 46 minutes of Flight 93's cross-country trip proceeded routinely. Radio communications from the plane were normal. Heading, speed, and altitude ran according to plan. At 9:24, Ballinger's warning to United 93 was received in the cockpit. Within two minutes, at 9:26, the pilot, Jason Dahl, responded with a note of puzzlement: "Ed, confirm latest mssg plz—Jason."⁷⁹

The hijackers attacked at 9:28. While trav-

eling 35,000 feet above eastern Ohio, United 93 suddenly dropped 700 feet. Eleven seconds into the descent, the FAA's air traffic control center in Cleveland received the first of two radio transmissions from the aircraft. During the first broadcast, the captain or first officer could be heard declaring "Mayday" amid the sounds of a physical struggle in the cockpit. The second radio transmission, 35 seconds later, indicated that the fight was continuing. The captain or first officer could be heard shouting: "Hey get out of here—get out of here—get out of here."⁸⁰

On the morning of 9/11, there were only 37 passengers on United 93—33 in addition to the 4 hijackers. This was below the norm for Tuesday mornings during the summer of 2001. But there is no evidence that the hijackers manipulated passenger levels or purchased additional seats to facilitate their operation.⁸¹

The terrorists who hijacked three other commercial flights on 9/11 operated in five-man teams. They initiated their cockpit takeover within 30 minutes of takeoff. On Flight 93, however, the takeover took place 46 minutes after takeoff, and there were only four hijackers. The operative likely intended to round out the team for this flight, Mohamed al Kahtani, had been refused entry by a suspicious immigration

⁷⁸ For American Airlines' response, see AAL briefing (Apr. 26, 2004). For Ballinger's warnings, see Ed Ballinger interview (Apr. 14, 2004). A companywide order for dispatchers to warn cockpits was not issued until 9:21. See UAL report, "Timeline: Dispatch/SMFDO Activities—Terrorist Crisis," undated. While one of Ballinger's colleagues assisted him, Ballinger remained responsible for multiple flights. See Ed Ballinger interview (Apr. 14, 2004). American Airlines' policy called for the flight dispatcher to manage only the hijacked flight, relieving him of responsibilities for all other flights. On American Airlines' policy, see Craig Marquis, Craig Parfitt, Joe Bertapelle, and Mike Mulcahy interview (Nov. 19, 2003). United Airlines had no such "isolation" policy. UAL System Operations Control briefing (Nov. 20, 2003).

⁷⁹ On flight data recorder (FDR), see NTSB report, "Specialist's Factual Report of Investigation—Digital Flight Data Recorder" for United Airlines Flight 93, Feb. 15, 2002; on cockpit voice recorder (CVR), see FBI report, "CVR from UA Flight #93," Dec. 4, 2003; Commission review of Aircraft Communication and Reporting System ACARS messages sent to and from Flight 93 (which indicate time of message transmission and receipt); see UAL record, Ed Ballinger ACARS log, Sept. 11, 2001.

⁸⁰ On FDR, see NTSB report, "Specialist's Factual Report of Investigation—Digital Flight Data Recorder" for United Airlines Flight 93, Feb. 15, 2002; on CVR, see FBI report, "CVR from UA Flight #93," Dec. 4, 2003; FAA report, "Summary of Air Traffic Hijack Events: September 11, 2001," Sept. 17, 2001; NTSB report, Air Traffic Control Recording—United Airlines Flight 93, Dec. 21, 2001.

⁸¹ The 37 passengers represented a load factor of 20.33 percent of the plane's seating capacity of 182, considerably below the 52.09 percent for Flight 93 on Tuesdays in the three-month period prior to September 11 (June 11–September 4, 2001). See UAL report, Flight 93 EWR-SFO load factors, undated. Five passengers holding reservations for Flight 93 did not show for the flight. All five were interviewed and cleared by the FBI. FBI report, "Flight #93 'No Show' Passengers from 9/11/01," Sept. 18, 2001.



United Airlines Flight 93's flight path.

Adapted from National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004), 33.

inspector at Florida's Orlando International Airport in August.⁸²

Because several passengers on United 93 described three hijackers on the plane, not four, some have wondered whether one of the hijackers had been able to use the cockpit jump seat from the outset of the flight. FAA rules allow use of this seat by documented and approved individuals, usually air carrier or FAA personnel. We have found no evidence indicating that one of the hijackers, or anyone else, sat there on this flight. All the hijackers had assigned seats in first class, and they seem to have used them. We believe it is more likely that Jarrah, the crucial pilot-trained member of their team, remained

seated and inconspicuous until after the cockpit was seized; and once inside, he would not have been visible to the passengers.⁸³

At 9:32, a hijacker, probably Jarrah, made

⁸² See UAL report, Flight 93 EWR-SFO load factors, undated.

⁸³ See FAA regulations, Admission to flight deck, 14 C.F.R. § 121.547 (2001); UAL records, copies of boarding passes for United 93, Sept. 11, 2001. One passenger reported that ten first-class passengers were aboard the flight. If that number is accurate, it would include the four hijackers. FBI report of investigation, interview of Lisa Jefferson, Sept. 11, 2001; UAL record, Flight 93 passenger manifest, Sept. 11, 2001. All but one of the six passengers seated in the first-class cabin communicated with the ground during the flight, and none mentioned anyone from their cabin having gone into the cockpit before the hijacking. Moreover, it is unlikely that the highly regarded and experienced pilot and co-pilot of Flight 93 would have allowed an observer into the cockpit before or after takeoff who had not obtained the proper permission. See UAL records, personnel files of Flight 93 pilots. For jumpseat information, see UAL record, Weight and Balance Information for Flight 93 and Flight 175, Sept. 11, 2001; AAL records, Dispatch Environmental Control/Weekly Flight Summary for Flight 11 and Flight 77, Sept. 11, 2001.

or attempted to make the following announcement to the passengers of Flight 93: "Ladies and Gentlemen: Here the captain, please sit down keep remaining sitting. We have a bomb on board. So, sit." The flight data recorder (also recovered) indicates that Jarrah then instructed the plane's autopilot to turn the aircraft around and head east.

The cockpit voice recorder data indicate that a woman, most likely a flight attendant, was being held captive in the cockpit. She struggled with one of the hijackers who killed or otherwise silenced her.⁸⁴

Shortly thereafter, the passengers and flight crew began a series of calls from GTE airphones and cellular phones. These calls between family, friends, and colleagues took place until the end of the flight and provided those on the ground with firsthand accounts. They enabled the passengers to gain critical information, including the news that two aircraft had slammed into the World Trade Center.⁸⁵

At 9:39, the FAA's Cleveland Air Route Traffic Control Center overheard a second announcement indicating that there was a bomb

on board, that the plane was returning to the airport, and that they should remain seated.⁸⁶ While it apparently was not heard by the passengers, this announcement, like those on Flight 11 and Flight 77, was intended to deceive them. Jarrah, like Atta earlier, may have inadvertently broadcast the message because he did not know how to operate the radio and the intercom. To our knowledge none of them had ever flown an actual airliner before.

At least two callers from the flight reported that the hijackers knew that passengers were making calls but did not seem to care. It is quite possible Jarrah knew of the success of the assault on the World Trade Center. He could have learned of this from messages being sent by United Airlines to the cockpits of its transcontinental flights, including Flight 93, warning of cockpit intrusion and telling of the New York attacks. But even without them, he would certainly have understood that the attacks on the World Trade Center would already have unfolded, given Flight 93's tardy departure from Newark. If Jarrah did know that the passengers were making calls, it might not have occurred to him that they were certain to learn what had happened in New York, thereby defeating his attempts at deception.⁸⁷

At least ten passengers and two crew members shared vital information with family, friends, colleagues, or others on the ground. All understood the plane had been hijacked. They

⁸⁴ Like Atta on Flight 11, Jarrah apparently did not know how to operate the communication radios; thus, his attempts to communicate with the passengers were broadcast on the ATC channel. Also, by 9:32 FAA notified United's headquarters that the flight was not responding to radio calls. According to United, the flight's nonresponse and its turn to the east led the airline to believe by 9:36 that the plane was hijacked. See Rich Miles interview (Nov. 21, 2003); UAL report, "United dispatch SMFDO activities—terrorist crisis," Sept. 11, 2001.

⁸⁵ In accordance with FAA regulations, United 93's cockpit voice recorder recorded the last 31 minutes of sounds from the cockpit via microphones in the pilots' headsets, as well as in the overhead panel of the flight deck. This is the only recorder from the four hijacked airplanes to survive the impact and ensuing fire. The CVRs and FDRs from American 11 and United 175 were not found, and the CVR from American Flight 77 was badly burned and not recoverable. See FBI report, "CVR from UA Flight #93," Dec. 4, 2003; see also FAA regulations, 14 C.F.R. §§ 25.1457, 91.609, 91.1045, 121.359; Flight 93 CVR data. A transcript of the CVR recording was prepared by the NTSB and the FBI.

⁸⁶ All calls placed on airphones were from the rear of the aircraft. There was one airphone installed in each row of seats on both sides of the aisle. The airphone system was capable of transmitting only eight calls at any one time. See FBI report of investigation, airphone records for flights UAL 93 and UAL 175 on Sept. 11, 2001, Sept. 18, 2001.

⁸⁷ FAA audio file, Cleveland Center, position Lorain Radar; Flight 93 CVR data; FBI report, "CVR from UA Flight #93," Dec. 4, 2003.

said the hijackers wielded knives and claimed to have a bomb. The hijackers were wearing red bandanas, and they forced the passengers to the back of the aircraft.⁸⁸

Callers reported that a passenger had been stabbed and that two people were lying on the floor of the cabin, injured or dead—possibly the captain and first officer. One caller reported that a flight attendant had been killed.⁸⁹

One of the callers from United 93 also reported that he thought the hijackers might possess a gun. But none of the other callers reported the presence of a firearm. One recipient of a call from the aircraft recounted specifically asking her caller whether the hijackers had guns. The passenger replied that he did not see one. No evidence of firearms or of their identifiable remains was found at the aircraft's crash site, and the cockpit voice recorder gives no indication of a gun being fired or mentioned at any time. We believe that if the hijackers had possessed a gun, they would have used it in the flight's last minutes as the passengers fought back.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ FBI reports of investigation, interviews of recipients of calls from Todd Beamer, Sept. 11, 2001, through June 11, 2002; FBI reports of investigation, interviews of recipients of calls from Sandy Bradshaw, Sept. 11, 2001, through Oct. 4, 2001. Text messages warning the cockpit of Flight 93 were sent to the aircraft by Ed Ballinger at 9:24. See UAL record, Ed Ballinger's ACARS log, Sept. 11, 2001.

⁸⁹ We have relied mainly on the record of FBI interviews with the people who received calls. The FBI interviews were conducted while memories were still fresh and were less likely to have been affected by reading the accounts of others or hearing stories in the media. In some cases, we have conducted our own interviews to supplement or verify the record. See FBI reports of investigation, interviews of recipients of calls from Todd Beamer, Mark Bingham, Sandy Bradshaw, Marion Britton, Thomas Burnett, Joseph DeLuca, Edward Felt, Jeremy Glick, Lauren Grandcolas, Linda Gronlund, CeeCee Lyles, Honor Wainio.

⁹⁰ FBI reports of investigation, interviews of recipients of calls from Thomas Burnett, Sept. 11, 2001; FBI reports of investigation, interviews of recipients of calls from Marion Britton, Sept. 14, 2001, through Nov. 8, 2001; Lisa Jefferson interview (May 11, 2004); FBI report of investigation, interview of Lisa Jefferson, Sept. 11, 2001; Richard Belme interview (Nov. 21, 2003).

Passengers on three flights reported the hijackers' claim of having a bomb. The FBI told us they found no trace of explosives at the crash sites. One of the passengers who mentioned a bomb expressed his belief that it was not real. Lacking any evidence that the hijackers attempted to smuggle such illegal items past the security screening checkpoints, we believe the bombs were probably fake.⁹¹

During at least five of the passengers' phone calls, information was shared about the attacks that had occurred earlier that morning at the World Trade Center. Five calls described the intent of passengers and surviving crew members to revolt against the hijackers. According to one call, they voted on whether to rush the terrorists in an attempt to retake the plane. They decided, and acted.⁹²

At 9:57, the passenger assault began. Several passengers had terminated phone calls with loved ones in order to join the revolt. One of the callers ended her message as follows: "Everyone's running up to first class. I've got to go. Bye."⁹³

The cockpit voice recorder captured the sounds of the passenger assault muffled by the intervening cockpit door. Some family members who listened to the recording report[ed] that they [could] hear the voice of a loved one among the din. We cannot identify whose voice

⁹¹ FBI reports of investigation, interviews of recipients of calls from Thomas Burnett, Sept. 11, 2001; FBI reports of investigation, interviews of recipients of calls from Marion Britton, Sept. 14, 2001, through Nov. 8, 2001; Lisa Jefferson interview (May 11, 2004); FBI report of investigation, interview of Lisa Jefferson, Sept. 11, 2001; Richard Belme interview (Nov. 21, 2003).

⁹² FBI response to Commission briefing request no.6, undated (topic 11); FBI reports of investigation, interviews of recipients of calls from Jeremy Glick, Sept. 11, 2001, through Sept. 12, 2001.

⁹³ FBI response to Commission briefing request no. 6, undated (topic 11); FBI reports of investigation, interviews of recipients of calls from Jeremy Glick, Sept. 11, 2001, through Sept. 12, 2001.

es can be heard. But the assault was sustained.⁹⁴

In response, Jarrah immediately began to roll the airplane to the left and right, attempting to knock the passengers off balance. At 9:58:57, Jarrah told another hijacker in the cockpit to block the door. Jarrah continued to roll the airplane sharply left and right, but the assault continued. At 9:59:52, Jarrah changed tactics and pitched the nose of the airplane up and down to disrupt the assault. The recorder captured the sounds of loud thumps, crashes, shouts, and breaking glasses and plates. At 10:00:03, Jarrah stabilized the airplane.⁹⁵

Five seconds later, Jarrah asked, “Is that it? Shall we finish it off?” A hijacker responded, “No. Not yet. When they all come, we finish it off.” The sounds of fighting continued outside the cockpit. Again, Jarrah pitched the nose of the aircraft up and down. At 10:00:26, a passenger in the background said, “In the cockpit. If we don’t, we’ll die!” Sixteen seconds later, a passenger yelled, “Roll it!” Jarrah stopped the violent maneuvers at about 10:01:00 and said, “Allah

is the greatest! Allah is the greatest!” He then asked another hijacker in the cockpit, “Is that it? I mean, shall we put it down?” to which the other replied, “Yes, put it in it, and pull it down.”⁹⁶

The passengers continued their assault and at 10:02:23, a hijacker said, “Pull it down! Pull it down!” The hijackers remained at the controls but must have judged that the passengers were only seconds from overcoming them. The airplane headed down; the control wheel was turned hard to the right. The airplane rolled onto its back, and one of the hijackers began shouting “Allah is the greatest. Allah is the greatest.” With the sounds of the passenger counter-attack continuing, the aircraft plowed into an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, at 580 miles per hour, about 20 minutes’ flying time from Washington, D.C.⁹⁷

Jarrah’s objective was to crash his airliner into symbols of the American Republic, the Capitol or the White House. He was defeated by the alerted, unarmed passengers of United 93.

⁹⁴ FBI reports of investigation, interviews of recipients of calls from United 93. For quote, see FBI report of investigation, interview of Philip Bradshaw, Sept. 11, 2001; Philip Bradshaw interview (June 15, 2004); Flight 93 FDR and CVR data. At 9:55:11, Jarrah dialed in the VHF Omni-directional Range (VOR) frequency for the VOR navigational aid at Washington Reagan National Airport, further indicating that the attack was planned for the nation’s capital.

⁹⁵ Flight 93 FDR and CVR data.

⁹⁶ Flight 93 FDR and CVR data.

⁹⁷ Flight 93 FDR and CVR data.

THE DEADLY STRIKE

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At 9:37 a.m. on 11 September, the 20,000 people present in the Pentagon had no hint of the stunning explosion and firestorm about to engulf those in the path of the doomed airliner only seconds away from striking its target. A few of those witnessing the televised horror of the crashes into the World Trade Center's Twin Towers in New York did, indeed, wonder aloud if the Pentagon might be next. Their worst fears became reality when, 34 minutes after United Flight 175 struck the South Tower of the World Trade Center at 9:03 a.m., American Flight 77 smashed into the west side of the Pentagon, bringing great damage to the building and death and injury to many of its inhabitants.

Despite the fortuitous circumstance that only 3,800 of the 4,500–5,000 intended occupants had moved into newly renovated Wedge 1 with its strengthened walls and windows and that Wedge 2 had been largely emptied of personnel (about 700 remained) as renovation began there, the exploding airliner exacted a heavy toll

of dead and injured.⁹⁸ Of the 125 Department of Defense fatalities in the Pentagon, 92 occurred on the 1st Floor, 31 on the 2nd Floor, and 2 on the 3rd Floor, all between Corridors 4 and 5. The dead included 70 civilians (10 of them contractor employees) and 55 military.⁹⁹ The Army incurred the greatest loss—75 men and women. Another 106 injured were taken to area hospitals.¹⁰⁰ On the periphery of the damaged area, many persons suffered from inhaling the dense and noxious smoke that engulfed a large part of the building on all five floors, reaching beyond the 2nd and 7th Corridors on either side and as far as the A Ring and even the Center Court on the lower floors.

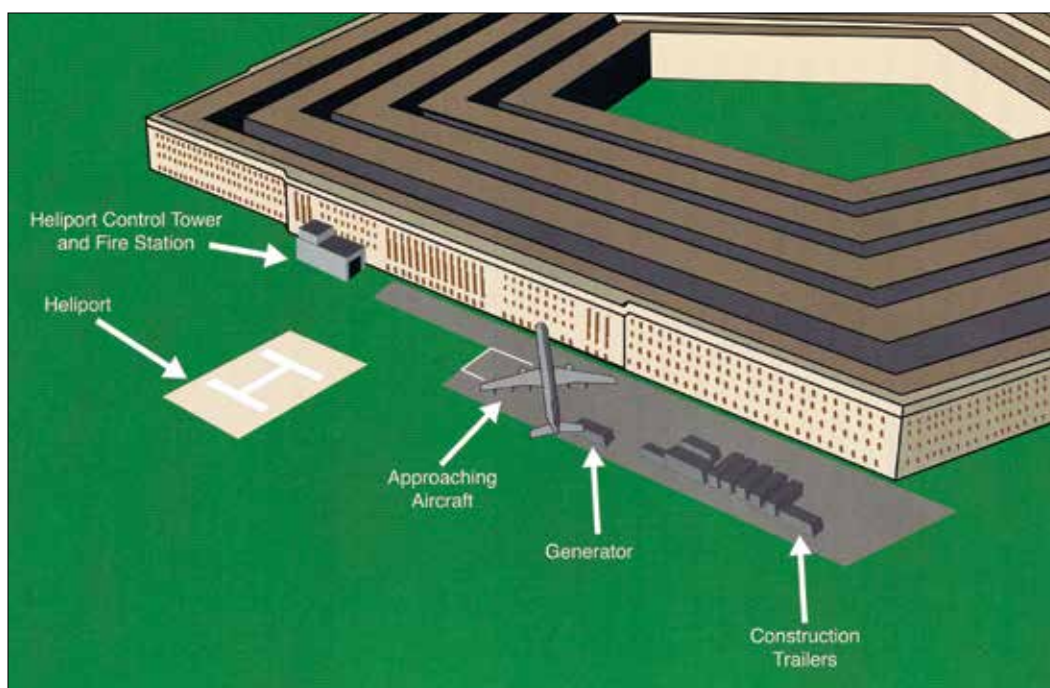
On the airliner, all 64 people died, including the 5 hijackers, most of them instantly. Among the six crew members were a husband-and-wife pair of flight attendants. A party of eight from the Washington area—three teachers, three 11-year-old students, and two escorts from the National Geographic Society had looked forward to a field trip to the Channel Island Marine Sanctuary in California. One

This excerpt originally came from Alfred Goldberg et al., "The Deadly Strike," in *Pentagon 9/11*, Defense Studies Series (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2007), 23–27.

⁹⁸ Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Status Report, 1 Mar 02, 4.

⁹⁹ There is evidence that one OSD contract employee, Allen Boyle, may have been outside the building just before the plane hit.

¹⁰⁰ "Arlington County After-Action Report," B-15.



Path and impact point of American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon.

Alfred Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, Defense Studies Series (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2007), 18.

of the children was the son of a Navy chief petty officer on duty in the Pentagon. A family of four, including two small children, and a honeymoon couple bound for Hawaii were among the victims. What befell two passengers—William Caswell and Bryan Jack—was especially ironic. Both were Department of Defense [DoD] employees on official business trips and had offices in the Pentagon.^{101, 102}

The attack killed 189 people, all of whom, with a few exceptions, died within minutes. Antoinette Sherman, an Army employee, died six days later in the hospital. Caswell and Jack on

Flight 77 brought the total of DoD-affiliated fatalities in the Pentagon to 127.

A life-and-death drama for many hundreds of Pentagon occupants played out on the large stage between Corridors 4 and 5 and mostly on the 1st and 2nd Floors in Rings E, D, and C—an area of some two acres on each floor. Those floors contained numerous offices and hundreds of individual cubicles, creating mazes awkward to negotiate even under normal conditions. The layout of the building and the drastically altered state of their surroundings caused by the crash dictated the escape routes taken by survivors. The main escape routes from the impact area to the outside of the building from the E Ring were Corridor 5 and the Heliport entrance midway between Corridors 4 and 5. In the opposite di-

¹⁰¹ Still another Department of Defense (DoD) employee, Herbert Homer, was killed when the plane on which he was a passenger, American Airlines Flight 11, smashed into the World Trade Center.

¹⁰² September 11, 2001, *Bios on Victims*, OSD Hist. There is no attribution of compiler or date.



The impact point on the exterior E Ring wall. Note the uniqueness of the Pentagon's structural design, with its rings and corridors, which compartmentalized the destruction and fire. Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DF-SD-02-09101.

rection, Corridors 4 and 5 provided the chief exits through the A Ring to the Center Court. Some survivors from Wedge 2 managed to escape through blown windows in the E Ring outer wall. On all floors and most rings, a wooden construction barrier midway between Corridors 4 and 5, a temporary product of the renovation, often prevented people in Wedge 1 from reaching Corridor 5 and those in Wedge 2 from reaching Corridor 4.¹⁰³ In large measure, this particular obstacle determined routes taken by many of the survivors. Other main escape exits

from the impact area were through Corridors 4 and 5 into A-E Drive from the C Ring. Three openings in the C Ring wall between Corridors 4 and 5, one of them the blown doors of the C-4 electrical vault, and a forced window at the 2nd Floor level proved the salvation of many survivors from the 1st and 2nd Floors. The holes into A-E Drive also made it possible for rescuers to enter the building and bring to safety lost and injured occupants who would otherwise have perished.

For people in the immediate vicinity of impact and along the path of destruction, the first minutes brought surprise, disorientation, fear, panic, danger, and death. For those spared annihilation, the first minutes began a grim, desperate

¹⁰³ The wooden construction barrier wall on all floors midway between Corridors 4 and 5 separated Wedge 1 from Wedge 2. Doors in most of the barrier walls permitted access to corridors on either side of a barrier, but they were often obscured by the smoke and most of the escapees from Wedge 2 turned toward Corridor 5.

struggle for survival. In the menacing darkness and smoke, fear for their lives caused some to panic and cry out or scream; many prayed silently or aloud. Others, although frightened and expecting to die, did not panic and strove single-mindedly to find escape for themselves and their coworkers. Close to the crash, bewildered and shaken men and women, their thought and senses clouded by shock, had to function at whatever levels of instinct and willpower they retained. They faced a host of instant hazards: utter darkness, toxic smoke, fire, immense heat, piles of hot debris, collapsed ceilings and walls, live electric wires, blocked exits and stairways, and the beginning of a structural collapse within the critical zone. Hardly any knew or guessed what had precipitated the appalling chaos that had descended on them, even though most were aware of the crashes into the Twin Towers little more than half an hour earlier.

In sections of the building as much as two or three corridors removed from the Corridor 4 crash site, people could not help but notice the effect of the impact—variously described as a loud noise, a sudden shudder of the structure, an explosion, a concussion, the firing of large guns. Most of the occupants in these areas departed in orderly fashion, some after encountering smoke and obstacles. A number stayed behind to help rescue others. Army Major Craig Collier recalled that he and his colleagues remained in their office, 2C638, after the plane hit:

Moments later the building jolted and we heard a muffled boom, then a rumble. Some loose plaster and dust fell from the ceiling, but otherwise there was no other indication of what had just taken place about 200 feet away. All of my peers in the area are experienced combat arms officers, and we quickly agreed that it sounded and felt like a bomb.

Most of us stayed in place watching the news and waiting for more information as one or two officers walked out into the hallway to see what was going on. Remarkably, my boss walked in and asked us what was happening. He had been in the latrine next door and hadn't felt or heard a thing. Within about 2 minutes, the TV banner below the video of the burning towers changed from "World Trade Center" to "Pentagon," but before I could hear any of the details the word came to evacuate the building. Two of our female civilian secretaries bolted out of the office but the rest of us took the time to calmly turn off computers, call our wives, grab our bags, and exit.¹⁰⁴

Away from the impact area, 1,000 and more feet removed, many occupants had no inkling that an attack had occurred and felt little or no immediate effect. They heard the fire alarms, smelled smoke, and heeded instructions from the Defense Protective Service to leave the building. Unlike the skyscraping World Trade Center, the low-lying Pentagon's numerous exits to the outside and to the Center Court facilitated rapid evacuation; for most of the 20,000 inhabitants, the evacuation proved orderly. Once outside the Pentagon, no one could miss the immense column of smoke rising from the crash site.

During the renovation, sophisticated fire alarm and sprinkler systems had been installed in Wedge 1. These operated initially after the attack, but many were soon damaged or destroyed and ceased to work. Surviving sprinklers helped limit the spread of the fire and toxic smoke and provided survivors much needed relief from the great heat. The older alarm systems in the rest of

¹⁰⁴ Pers acct Collier, 13 Sep 01.



At 0957, the Pentagon's exterior wall collapsed above where the airliner impacted the E Ring. Temperatures from the fire were as high as 1,000 degrees Celsius.
Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DM-SD-02-03902.

the building had false alarm and other functional failures. These systems included an automated recorded message giving instructions to evacuate. A backup public address system, called "Big Voice," complemented the automatic announcements by indicating the best escape route. Unfortunately, the systems performed poorly. In some sections of the building, workers heard no alarm at all or received a garbled announcement. In Wedge 2, there were no sprinklers.¹⁰⁵

Many occupants in the newly renovated Wedge 1 on the 1st and 2nd Floors were not yet fully familiar with their new quarters. In windowless, blacked out, and smoke-filled areas, disoriented, they had difficulty knowing where

to turn to find exits leading to safety. Even occupants of Wedge 2, more familiar with their surroundings, found themselves at a loss in the smoke and darkness.

Knowledge of what happened to the hundreds of people in Wedges 1 and 2 and nearby areas most immediately affected by the explosion and fire comes from an abundance of eyewitness testimony and forensic evidence. The accounts of death and survival that follow are representative of the range of experiences endured by most of those unfortunate enough to find themselves in or near the path of the exploding airliner.

Among those who actually saw Flight 77 hit the building, perhaps closest to the crash site were Air Traffic Controllers Sean Boger and

¹⁰⁵ "PENREN [Pentagon Renovation Program Office] Report," 1:2, 3.



American Airlines Flight 77's crash into the Pentagon turned office spaces into a disorienting labyrinth of collapsed ceilings, furniture, and debris. Smoke filled corridors, fires burned, and live electrical wires hung from the ceiling. For survivors, the familiar layout of their workplace had vanished, making the desperate search for an exit a terrifying ordeal.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DF-SD-03-15712.

Army Specialist Jacqueline Kidd, in the air traffic control tower between the building and the Pentagon Heliport, from where they directed helicopter landings and departures. On hearing the news of the crashes in New York, Boger wondered aloud, as he had on other occasions, why no airliner had ever accidentally hit the Pentagon, given its close proximity (approximately a mile) to Reagan National Airport. Moments later, after Kidd had gone downstairs to the restroom, Boger, looking out the window, saw “the nose and the wing of an aircraft just like coming right at us, and he didn’t veer. . . . I am watching the plane go all the way into the building.” He stared as the Boeing 757 “smacked into the building” less than 100 feet away.

When the plane exploded into the Pentagon, Boger “hit the floor and just covered up” his head because he was “surrounded by glass.” As the tower’s alarms sounded and emergency lights flashed, he rose, yanked open the control room door, and plunged down the stairs, jumping steps to avoid a clutter of ceiling tiles, light fixtures, and broken stair railings. On the ground floor he met Specialist Kidd, and the two ran from the scene. About 25 yards distant they fell to the ground and turned to look at the conflagration that had set on fire their cars, parked next to the tower.¹⁰⁶ Inside the building, others in the path of the plane did not have the opportunity to run.

¹⁰⁶ Interv Boger, 14 Nov 01, 10–15.

MARINES AT GROUND ZERO

Paul Westermeyer

On the morning of 11 September 2001, the Marine Corps' formal presence in New York City amounted to a reserve administrative and training facility in Brooklyn. Despite there being no operational units in the city, Marines were present when terrorists attacked the World Trade Center. They responded in their civilian capacities, serving as firefighters, police officers, investigators, and emergency workers. Others, drawn by duty rather than orders, rushed to the scene on their own accord to assist however they could, both on 11 September and in the days afterward. In the chaos and confusion of the attack and subsequent collapse of the Twin Towers, many stories of heroism and sacrifice were lost forever. Still, accounts of some of the Marines there that day have survived. Their experience at Ground Zero represents a distinct and often overlooked dimension of the Marine Corps' connection to the events of 9/11, one that reflects an enduring connection between military service and civic responsibility in a moment of national crisis.

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ATTACKS AND RESPONSE

Thomas M. Armas, a Marine Corps Reserve officer serving as a U.S. Secret Service special agent, had gone into work early. His office was in 7 World Trade Center, in the shadow of 1 and 2 World Trade Centers, which loomed 110 stories above World Trade Plaza. He was in the gym working out with one of the detectives on his task force when he heard something like the sound of a truck driving over steel grates. Immediately, an agent in a vehicle outside radioed, "Hey, a plane just hit the Trade Center."¹⁰⁷

At 0846, terrorist hijackers flew American Airlines Flight 11 into 1 World Trade Center, also called the North Tower, where approximately 8,900 people were at work.¹⁰⁸ The Boeing 767 airliner tore through floors 93 through 96, killing all aboard and hundreds inside the building. Nearly 66,000 pounds of jet fuel produced a fireball that spread in all directions. The impact destroyed all three stairwells on those

¹⁰⁷ BGen Thomas M. Armas, USMCR, interview with Maj Jason Brezler, USMCR, and Maj Gareth Hughes, USMCR, 19 May 2023, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Marine Corps Archives, Marine Corps History Division, hereafter Marine Corps Archives, hereafter Armas interview.

¹⁰⁸ National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), *Federal Building and Fire Safety Investigation of the World Trade Center Disaster: Final Report on the Collapse of the World Trade Centers*, Executive Summary (Gaithersburg, MD: NIST, 2005), 19.

floors, trapping 1,355 people above the impact point.¹⁰⁹ The New York City Fire Department (FDNY) began its response within five seconds of the attack. In less than 15 minutes, 235 firefighters, 7 of the 11 highest ranked chiefs in the department, and the fire commissioner of the City of New York would be on scene.¹¹⁰ One of the first officers to arrive was Captain Patrick J. Brown. A former Marine who had enlisted at 17 years old and served two tours in South Vietnam, Brown joined the FDNY in 1977 and commanded Ladder Company 3 on 9/11. He and his firefighters arrived minutes after the attack and immediately began climbing Stairwell B.¹¹¹

The New York Police Department's (NYPD's) response was equally as fast as the FDNY's. Numerous officers had watched Flight 11 hit the North Tower and responded immediately. The NYPD chief of department issued a citywide mobilization, calling on 800 police officers from all over the city.¹¹² Among them was a police sergeant named Michael Sean Curtin, who was in the Individual Ready Reserve and had been a member of the 6th Communication Battalion, 4th Force Service Support Group, Marine Forces Reserve, stationed in Brooklyn.¹¹³ He completed 12 years on active duty before joining the Marine Corps Reserve, including assignments as a drill instructor at Parris Island, South Carolina, and

as company gunnery sergeant for the 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion during Operation Desert Storm. He was no stranger to terrorist attacks. He had participated in the rescue efforts for the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, in which a truck bomb exploded in the North Tower's parking garage, and the 1995 Oklahoma City federal building bombing, when a truck bomb destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. On 11 September, Curtin was a 13-year veteran sergeant in the NYPD. He was also a member of the Emergency Service Unit, a highly trained rescue and tactical team within the Special Operations Division, serving as the squad sergeant of Truck Company 2. Before heading to the towers with his unit, he called his wife to wish her a happy birthday.¹¹⁴

The Port Authority Police Department (PAPD) was the law enforcement agency responsible for the World Trade Center as well as airports, bridges, and tunnels in New York and New Jersey. The on-site PAPD commanding officer was below street level, on the concourse of the North Tower, when a fireball erupted out of elevator shafts. Immediately, some of his officers began ascending the stairs. Port Authority police officers from the various commands in the area began responding within minutes.¹¹⁵ One of them was Paul Jurgens, a former Marine corporal who had joined the PAPD in 1980. Like Michael Curtin, he had also responded to the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.

¹⁰⁹ NIST, *Final Report on the Collapse of the World Trade Centers*, 20, 24.

¹¹⁰ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), 289.

¹¹¹ Jessica Manfre, "Marine Vietnam Veteran Turned Firefighter Gave His Life to Save Others on 9/11," *We Are the Mighty*, 30 October 2020, <https://www.wearethemighty.com/mighty-trending/marine-veteran-firefighter-gave-life/>.

¹¹² *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 291.

¹¹³ Sgt Ian Leones, "Reserve Marines Remember Their Fallen Brothers," U.S. Marine Corps, 31 August 2016, <https://www.marines.mil/News/News-Display/Article/931048/reserve-marines-remember-their-fallen-brothers/>.

¹¹⁴ 6th Communication Battalion Command Chronology (ComdC), 1 January–31 December 2001, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, hereafter Marine Corps Archives; "Sergeant Michael Sean Curtin," Officer Down Memorial Page, <https://www.odmp.org/officer/15822-sergeant-michael-sean-curtinx>; and Thomas W. Crecca, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Operations, 11 September 2001 to 1 November 2003 (New Orleans: U.S. Marine Forces Reserve, 2005), 3–4.

¹¹⁵ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 292.



At 0903, United Airlines Flight 175 hit the South Tower of the World Trade Center. John J. Celardo captured the moment as it happened from the roof of his office at the National Archives and Record Administration in Greenwich Village.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 64-NY-20010911_JC_009.

On 11 September, Jurgens was driving from Kennedy International Airport to Jersey City when he diverted and responded to the call.¹¹⁶

The largest and most complicated rescue operation in New York City's history was underway, with more than 1,000 first responders deployed, when terrorists flew a second hijacked airliner into the South Tower at 0903. Approximately 8,600 people were at work in the South Tower that morning. The upper half of the building swayed nearly 70 centimeters and momentarily twisted from the force of the impact.¹¹⁷ United Airlines Flight 175 destroyed

floors 77–85 of 2 World Trade Center. Since the Boeing 767 banked just before striking the building, at least one stairwell remained intact, allowing some of the 619 occupants in the floors above to descend.¹¹⁸ Although the stairwells in both towers were designed to compartmentalize fire, the violence of the crash, along with intense heat and debris, breached their fire-rated protections. Near the impact area, thick smoke reduced visibility and made breathing difficult. Doors were jammed, blocked by debris, or locked, further hindering evacuation. These conditions compounded the difficulty of navigating narrow stairwells and confusing interchanges during the descent. FDNY com-

¹¹⁶ "A Nation Challenged: Portraits of Grief: The Victims; Dreams Interrupted or Not Yet Lived, Great Photos Never to Be Taken," *New York Times*, 7 November 2001.

¹¹⁷ NIST, *Final Report on the Collapse of the World Trade Centers*, 37–38.

¹¹⁸ NIST, *Final Report on the Collapse of the World Trade Centers*, 44.

manders on scene quickly determined that they could not fight the fire and made the decision to focus on rescue operations.¹¹⁹

Back at the North Tower, Thomas Armas arrived from West Street and, with several of his fellow agents, began assisting people stumbling out of the building. The scene was chaotic. While people streamed out, they were still not out of danger. Large panes of glass and other debris fell around them. Being so close to the towers when the attack happened, Armas lacked a clear sense of the scale of the drama unfolding around him. While assisting victims, he witnessed individuals who, confronted with overwhelming smoke and extreme heat, made fateful attempts to escape by jumping. Realizing there had to be people wounded and trapped inside, Armas and fellow agent John Buckley went into the North Tower.¹²⁰

Already inside were Calixto Anaya Jr. and Sean Patrick Tallon. Anaya, a Marine veteran who served from 1984–88 and later reenlisted for Operation Desert Storm, joined the FDNY in July 2001. He responded with Engine Company 4, one of the first companies to arrive at the towers.¹²¹ Tallon served in the Marine Corps Reserve as a corporal in the 2d Battalion, 25th Marines, and was a probationary firefighter just weeks away from completing his training. Assigned to Ladder 10 at Ten House, located directly across the street from the southern end of World Trade Center Plaza, he was among the first firefighters to enter the North Tower. With all elevators out of service, he and his fellow firefighters began the climb, each carrying 100

pounds of clothing and equipment. During his ascent, he stopped to assist a fellow firefighter who was having a heart attack before carrying on and reaching the 31st floor.¹²²

Armas and his fellow Secret Service agent were on roughly the same floor. They paused briefly to offer assistance to firefighters helping a wheelchair-bound man before continuing their climb. As they ascended, they passed people moving in the opposite direction who remained calm and orderly despite the chaos, so much so that it unsettled Armas. He stopped on one floor to call his wife, who had just been discharged from the hospital after having a baby. By the time they reached the forty-fourth floor, Armas and Buckley had not found anyone in need of assistance and began making their way back down the stairs.¹²³

By 0915, 23 engine and 13 ladder companies were responding, more than the commanding chiefs had requested. Given the scale of the attacks, many firefighters going off duty at the 0900 shift change volunteered and were authorized to remain as part of on-duty teams. In addition, numerous off-duty firefighters responded on their own initiative, reporting either to their firehouses or driving directly to the scene.¹²⁴ The volume of responding units made it difficult for chiefs at the command post in the North Tower lobby to assign and track tasks.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 294–95.

¹²⁰ Armas interview.

¹²¹ “Calixto Charlie Anaya Jr.,” Roll of Honor, National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, <https://www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighter/calixto-charlie-anaya-jr/>; and Crecca, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Operations, 3–4.

¹²² 2d Battalion, 25th Marines, ComdC, 1 January–31 December 2001, Marine Corps Archives, 6; “Sean Patrick Tallon,” Roll of Honor, National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, <https://www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighter/sean-patrick-tallon/>; “Sean P. Tallon, FDNY, Class of 1992,” Fordham Preparatory School Hall of Honor, <https://www.fordhamprep.org/alumni/hall-of-honor/inductees/single-post/~board/hall-of-honor/post/sean-p-tallon-fdny-class-of-1992>; Crecca, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Operations, 3–4; and “FDNY FF Sean P. Tallon,” Tenhouse Bravest, FDNY Ten House, accessed 16 January 2026, https://www.fdney-tenhouse.org/911/details/sean_p_tallon.htm.

¹²³ Armas interview.

¹²⁴ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 297.

¹²⁵ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 298.

Communication was also difficult, as multiple units tried to transmit at the same time, and radio signals degraded as firefighters climbed higher.¹²⁶

Rescue operations in the South Tower lagged behind those in the North Tower due to several factors: commanders using different radio channels, confusion that left staged units unassigned to the South Tower, uncertainty over which building was 1 or 2 World Trade Center, and the need for responders to find safer ways into the building because of falling debris and people jumping.¹²⁷ Fortunately, most of the 8,600 people in the South Tower were already evacuating, as nearly one-half of the building's occupants left their offices within five minutes after the attack on the North Tower.¹²⁸

Fireman John G. Chipura's unit was one of the first to reach the South Tower. He entered the building while his sister was evacuating the North Tower, where she worked on the sixty-ninth floor. As a Marine, Chipura had survived the Beirut barracks bombing on 23 October 1983. He had just departed for his shift as a radio operator when a suicide bomber drove a vehicle packed with explosives into the barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, killing 220 Marines. That near-death experience, along with his role in recovering the remains of his fellow Marines, deeply shaped Chipura's sense of duty and led him to pursue a life of public service. After his discharge from the Marine Corps, he joined the NYPD, where he served for 12 years before following his father and brother into the FDNY.¹²⁹

Matthew D. Garvey was another firefight-

er in the South Tower with prior ties to Beirut. He served 10 years on active duty in the Marine Corps, deploying to Lebanon as well as in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and becoming a squad leader in 2d Air-Naval Gunfire Liaison Company. He earned the Navy/Marine Corps Parachutist Insignia and was a certified jumpmaster. Following active-duty service, Garvey was a gunnery sergeant in the Marine Corps Reserve and served as operations chief for Company A, 6th Communication Battalion. In the FDNY, he was a fireman in Squad 1, Special Operations Division, an elite unit trained for high-risk rescues, technical firefighting, and hazardous operations.¹³⁰

Others drew on combat experience and years of FDNY service to provide calm, decisive leadership amid the chaos. Joseph Grzelak enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1966 and served a combat deployment in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969. He was discharged from the Marine Corps in 1970 as a sergeant.¹³¹ Grzelak joined the FDNY in March 1973 and worked his way up to commander of Battalion 48 during a 28-year career. On 11 September, he commanded his battalion from the lobby of the South Tower, knowing that his father-in-law was working in the World Trade Center that day.¹³² A voracious reader who was widely respected among his fellow firefighters for his knowledge, he took with him a binder of research on fighting high-

¹²⁶ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 299.

¹²⁷ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 300.

¹²⁸ NIST, *Final Report on the Collapse of the World Trade Centers*, 37.

¹²⁹ Mary Dever, "Family Looks Back on Marine's Life of Service," *Disabled American Veterans*, 10 November 2020, <https://www.dav.org/learn-more/news/2020/always-remember/>.

¹³⁰ 6th Communication Battalion ComdC, 1 January–31 December 2001, 5; "Matthew D. Garvey," Roll of Honor, National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, <https://www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighter/matthew-d-garvey/>; and Crecca, *U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Operations*, 3–4.

¹³¹ "Joseph Grzelak," Roll of Honor, National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, <https://www.firehero.org/fallen-firefighter/joseph-grzelak/>.

¹³² Debra Lauro, "9/11 Story," *Staten Island Advance* (SILive), 14 August 2011, https://www.silive.com/recollections_from_911/2011/08/911_story.html.

rise fires that he had spent years compiling.¹³³

Grzelak's years of studying might have shown him how fire could compromise a building's structural integrity, but no one could have known the full extent of the damage the aircraft had done to the columns, floors, and walls of the South Tower. United Flight 175 hit the building at approximately 850 kilometers per hour, 160 kilometers per hour faster than American Flight 11 had hit the North Tower. The airliner, bound for Los Angeles from Boston, carried about 62,000 pounds of jet fuel, enough to drench several floors and feed the fire.¹³⁴ The impact and subsequent blazes damaged key structural elements, causing the long floor spans to sag and pulling the exterior columns inward. The interior columns, some of which the airliner had sliced through, could no longer properly support the weight of 25 floors above the impact area. Within 18 minutes of the attack, the east wall began to bend inward. For the next half hour, the columns on the east wall continued to bow, leading the wall to lose its ability to support weight or transfer the load to the weakened core of the building. By 0958, the floors above the impact area began to tilt, as columns failed on the north and south walls.¹³⁵

In the North Tower, Thomas Armas had reached the mezzanine level when he heard a sound like a freight train rumbling through the building. Not knowing what it was, he sought shelter in the northwest corner. Others ran to the same spot and began to pray. "I hope this doesn't hurt," he thought. "Just at least don't make it hurt." Then everything went black, as dust, smoke, and debris filled the building.¹³⁶

¹³³ Adam Miller, "Mass Honors Chief Who 'Lived for FDNY,'" *New York Post*, 3 April 2002.

¹³⁴ NIST, *Final Report on the Collapse of the World Trade Centers*, 38.

¹³⁵ NIST, *Final Report on the Collapse of the World Trade Centers*, 43–44.

¹³⁶ Armas interview.

The South Tower collapsed at 0959, sending more than 250,000 tons of steel and concrete crashing to the ground. Seismic sensors 160 kilometers away registered the impact.¹³⁷ The prompt evacuation and the passable stairwell through the damaged floors allowed three-quarters of the occupants who had been above the impact area to escape beforehand. Of the approximately 6,000 people who were below the seventy-seventh floor before the attack, 11 were killed. The number of first responders inside the tower at the moment of collapse remains unknown.¹³⁸ Among them were John Chipura, Matthew Garvey, and Joseph Grzelak. Other Marines in the buildings were police officers John G. Coughlin and Vincent G. Danz and firefighters Gregory R. Sikorsky and Kevin J. Smith.

Immediately after the South Tower fell, the FDNY and NYPD ordered all emergency responders out of the North Tower. Hundreds had felt the concussion but were unaware of the collapse because they either did not have radio communications or were not in a position to see outside. Others like Captain Patrick Brown were incredulous about the order.¹³⁹ "This is the officer of Ladder Company 3," Brown radioed. "I refuse the order! I am on the forty-fourth floor, and we have too many burned people with me. I am not leaving them!"¹⁴⁰ From 0959 to 1028, nearly 700 people had evacuated the North Tower, leaving 107 people from the roughly 7,500 occupants below the impact floors.¹⁴¹ One of them was Thomas Armas, who made his way from the pitch-dark lobby into the street and immediately carried a woman to an ambulance.

¹³⁷ NIST, *Final Report on the Collapse of the World Trade Centers*, 32.

¹³⁸ NIST, *Final Report on the Collapse of the World Trade Centers*, 46.

¹³⁹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 307.

¹⁴⁰ Manfre, "Marine Vietnam Veteran Turned Firefighter Gave His Life to Save Others on 9/11."

¹⁴¹ NIST, *Final Report on the Collapse of the World Trade Centers*, 32.



On 11 September, Marine reservist Thomas M. Armas was in his office building at 7 World Trade Center, where he worked as a Secret Service special agent. He immediately ran to the North Tower to assist with the evacuation. Pictured here during Fleet Week New York on 23 May 2025, BGen Armas, deputy commander of Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic; Marine Forces Command; and Marine Forces Northern Command, speaks with Marines after a joint reenlistment ceremony at the National September 11 Memorial. Department of Defense photo (USMC) 250523-M-OV505-1306.

Realizing he had become separated from his fellow agent, he went back inside to look for Buckley. Locating each other, the two finally withdrew from the plaza and made their way down West Street.¹⁴²

The dramatic change in air pressure from the South Tower's collapse flared the fires in the North Tower and sharply increased temperatures on the impact floors. Like its twin, the North Tower's structure was failing: interior floors sagged while the exterior walls bowed inward, most notably along the south face, which

buckled by as much as 140 centimeters.¹⁴³ At 1028, the North Tower fell.¹⁴⁴ The devastation covered 16 acres that would come to be known as Ground Zero.

Among those killed in the North Tower were Calixto Anaya, Michael Curtin, and Sean Tallon. Other first-responder Marines who perished in 1 World Trade Center were Patrick J. Brown, Michael A. Esposito, Gary P. Geidel, Leonard W. Hatton, Ronnie L. Henderson, William E. Krukowski, Manuel D. Mojica Jr., James W. Parham, Christian O. Regenhart, and Allan

¹⁴² Armas interview.

¹⁴³ NIST, *Final Report on the Collapse of the World Trade Centers*, 32–33.

¹⁴⁴ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 285.



Today, the National Museum of the Marine Corps displays SgtMaj Michael S. Curtin's Marine Corps dress blue uniform, his NYPD uniform, and his NYPD Medal of Honor. The case also holds poignant items that Marine veteran and retired firefighter William Dunleavy donated, including the helmet he wore during recovery operations, a firefighter's Halligan tool, and an unknown victim's keys. Courtesy of Jose Esquilin, Marine Corps University Press.

Tarasiewicz. These Marines were among the 343 FDNY firefighters, 23 NYPD officers, and 37 PAPD officers killed that day.¹⁴⁵

RESCUE AND RECOVERY

After the towers collapsed, New York City emergency services continued rescue and recovery operations around the clock. Marines assisted with these efforts in various ways, joining a large, multiagency response that included firefighters, National Guard personnel, and countless volunteers. Fourteen U.S. Navy corpsmen reservists and one Marine reservist, Gunnery

Sergeant John M. Leach, of the 2d Battalion, 25th Marines, in Garden City, New York, drove to the site to join the grueling and hazardous work amid the rubble.¹⁴⁶ Their presence reflected a broader, if unofficial, Marine contribution during the days after 9/11, as many individuals acted on their training and instincts to help in any way they could.

Among these were Jason L. Thomas and David W. Karnes, who became part of one of the final dramas at Ground Zero. Thomas, a 27-year-old former Marine living on Long Island, had served as an infantryman from 1996 to

¹⁴⁵ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 311.

¹⁴⁶ Crecca *U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Operations*, 2–4.



A ladder truck from FDNY's Ladder Company 3 crushed by the falling towers near the pedestrian bridge over West Street. FDNY Capt Patrick J. Brown, a Marine who served two tours in Vietnam, was one of the initial responders to arrive on the scene in the truck. He and members of his team died in the North Tower collapse when they refused to abandon civilians. Today, the truck is in the National September 11 Museum in New York City.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress, photo no. LC-DIG-ppmsca-02151.

2000, discharging from the Corps as a sergeant. That morning, after dropping off his daughter at day care and making his way to college, he heard about the terrorist attacks on the towers. Off active duty for less than a year, with his uniforms still in the trunk of his car, he pulled over and put on a set of fatigues. He drove toward Manhattan, parked as close to Ground Zero as he could, and continued on foot. News cameras captured Jason Thomas moving toward the ruins of the towers as survivors fled. "It truly looked like a battlefield," Thomas later recalled. "When I got to the World Trade Center, all I could see was other people running in the opposite direc-

tion. And they're telling me, go the other way. But as a Marine, I knew that we never go backwards. We always go forward."¹⁴⁷

David Karnes was an accountant at his desk in Wilton, Connecticut, when his sister called to tell him about the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. A former Marine who had served on active duty and in the Marine Corps Reserve as an infantryman and military policeman, Karnes got out of the Corps as a sergeant. After the second airliner struck the South Tower, he told his coworkers, "You guys may not realize it,

¹⁴⁷ Jo Corona, "Former Marine Sergeant Details Being at Ground Zero to His Youngest Son," *Weekend Edition Saturday*, NPR, 11 September 2021.



What remained of the Twin Towers after the collapses is now referred to as Ground Zero.
Department of Defense photo (USN) 010914-N-1350W-002.

but we're at war right now." He left the office, stopped at a barber for a fresh high-and-tight haircut, and then headed home to don a set of fatigues he kept in his closet. Karnes next headed to a storage unit and gathered his field gear: rope, canteens, web gear, K-bar utility knife, and a flashlight. Before leaving, he went to his church and asked the pastor and fellow parishioners to pray for him.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Department of Defense (DD) Form 214, Certificate of Release and Discharge from Active Duty, for David W. Karnes, 13 January 1992 and 15 September 2007, Historians' Files, Marine Corps Archives; Ryan D. Libbert, "U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. David W. Karnes: Marine Recaps 9/11 Experiences in New York," Defend America, Consolidated Public Affairs Office, USMC, Okinawa, Japan, 10 August 2006, archived from the original (<http://www.defendamerica.mil/profiles/sep2003/pr091203a.html>); and Rebecca Liss, "An Unlikely Hero: The Marine Who Found Two WTC Survivors," Slate, 11 September 2015, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/09/the-marine-who-found-two-wtc-survivors.html>.

Karnes decided to put the top down on his new Porsche 911 so that his uniform and gear would be visible. As he sped toward Ground Zero, most vehicles on the roads were driving in the opposite direction, streaming out of the city. His plan worked. Officers at police checkpoints waved him through when they saw his uniform. When he arrived at the site, Karnes found Jason Thomas already carrying the injured, setting up triage stations, and extinguishing small fires scattered throughout the ruins. The two quickly joined forces.¹⁴⁹

As the day wore on, the fires and smoke made it increasingly dangerous to search. Unsupervised, Karnes and Thomas pressed on, mov-

¹⁴⁹ DD Form 214, Karnes, 13 January 1992 and 15 September 2007; Libbert, "U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. David W. Karnes"; and Liss, "An Unlikely Hero."

ing through the heart of the ruins, a superheated pile of concrete and steel with thick black smoke rising from it. "The ash was so hot," Thomas later recounted, that "it felt like sandpaper running across my body, and the rubber on the bottom of my boot would sink into the rebar."¹⁵⁰ They crawled over the rubble, calling out, "This is the United States Marines! Is anyone down there?" Hours of searching dimmed their hope of finding survivors.¹⁵¹

Deep beneath the rubble, PAPD Officer William J. Jimeno and Sergeant John P. McLoughlin were waiting to be found. They had responded to the World Trade Center after the first attack. Along with PAPD officers Dominick A. Pezzulo, Antonio J. Rodrigues, and Christopher C. Amoroso, they moved underground through the concourse connecting the towers, beneath the large globe sculpture in the center of the World Trade Center Plaza. When the South Tower fell at 0959, tons of rubble punched through the plaza above them, crushing sections of the concourse and basement levels. Rodrigues and Amoroso were killed, but Jimeno, McLoughlin, and Pezzulo survived in a void within the rubble. Jimeno and McLoughlin were pinned in place, however, and Pezzulo struggled to free them while calling for help. He continued his efforts until the North Tower collapsed, sending even more rubble on top of them and mortally wounding him. Jimeno and McLough-

lin remained trapped for hours, as fires crept closer. Flames ignited the ammunition in Pezzulo's service weapon, and rounds ricocheted in the void. A massive slab of concrete pressed against Jimeno's left side, his left leg was badly broken, and the pain and despair overwhelmed him. The thought of seeing his second child, due in two months, and a refusal to allow the terrorists to win, kept him alive.¹⁵²

In the early evening, while picking their way across the dangerous terrain of ruins, Thomas and Karnes found a hole four to five feet in diameter, with a beam sticking from it. The two men heard a faint voice and shouted down the hole, "United States Marines. If you can hear us, yell or tap." Jimeno shouted back with the last of his strength. "Keep yelling," they called back while they began the rescue effort. Jimeno and McLoughlin were trapped nearly 20 feet below the surface, and the cavity was only large enough for one person. As Thomas and Karnes tried to alert authorities, paramedic Chuck Sereika heard shouting and rushed over to help. Soon, several police officers and a fireman joined them. Working together, the two Marines and first responders carefully dug Jimeno out of the rubble as fires flared around them, fully aware that a single mistake could trigger a collapse. After four grueling hours, Jimeno was finally freed. McLoughlin, buried deeper in the debris, would not be rescued until the next morning.¹⁵³

Thomas returned to the ruins for three weeks, assisting in the search before quietly walking away. He told no one, not even his

¹⁵⁰ Corona, "Former Marine Sergeant."

¹⁵¹ Jason L. Thomas Biographical File, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, hereafter Thomas Biographical File; Department of Defense (DD) Form 214, Certificate of Release and Discharge from Active Duty, for Jason L. Thomas, 18 August 2000, Historians' Files, Marine Corps Archives; Glenn Garvin, "A Quiet Hero of the 9/11 Attacks Speaks Out: Documentary Recounts Tale of Marine Who Braved Rubble to Rescue Cops," Reason Foundation, 4 September 2015, <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/quiet-hero-9-11-attacks-speaks-out/docview/2782631761/se-2>; and Liss, "An Unlikely Hero."

¹⁵² Thomas Biographical File; Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn, *102 Minutes: The Unforgettable Story of the Fight to Survive inside the Twin Towers* (New York: Times Books, 2006), 246–47, 256–57.

¹⁵³ Dwyer and Flynn, *102 Minutes*, 261; DD Form 214, Karnes, 13 January 1992 and 15 September 2007; Libbert, "U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. David W. Karnes"; and Liss, "An Unlikely Hero."



Jason L. Thomas takes a short break from recovery efforts at Ground Zero. The former infantry Marine had purchased a full personal set of field gear, including helmet, because he was told by his platoon sergeant that “a good infantry Marine would have another full set of gear.” A firefighter working the recovery operations handed Thomas the gas mask in the photograph with the somber message that his fellow firefighter would no longer need it. Courtesy of Jason L. Thomas.



On 11 September, former Marine David W. Karnes worked as an accountant in Connecticut. After the attacks, he grabbed his old field gear saved from his time in the Corps and drove to Ground Zero. Here, SSgt Karnes, USMC (Ret.), stands at attention during the playing of the “Marines’ Hymn” at Battery Park, New York City, 10 November 2008. Karnes was recognized for rescuing two Port Authority police officers from the rubble of Ground Zero along with Jason L. Thomas. Department of Defense photo (USMC) 081110-M-3580L-009.

family, what he had done at Ground Zero. In 2006, Oliver Stone’s film *World Trade Center* dramatized the ordeal of the PAPD officers and their rescue but portrayed the African American Marine as White.¹⁵⁴ The film renewed interest in the identity of the “mystery Marine” who had disappeared. In the years after 9/11,

¹⁵⁴ *World Trade Center*, directed by Oliver Stone (Paramount Pictures, 2006).

Thomas suffered recurring nightmares. “I didn’t tell anyone what I did,” Thomas explained, “because I just wanted it all to go away.” He chose to bury what he saw and did, fearing that revisiting it would burden his family. It was only after the film came out and Thomas’s role in the rescue was confirmed that he finally spoke publicly about his role at the urging of family members. He was interviewed several times, in-

cluding for the DVD release of Stone's film.¹⁵⁵

Like Thomas, Karnes also continued to volunteer at Ground Zero, assisting in recovery operations for days after the attack. When he returned to Connecticut, he reenlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve and went on active duty. He later retired from the Corps for a second time in 2007 with the rank of staff sergeant.¹⁵⁶

Alongside Thomas and Karnes, dozens of Marines participated in the weeks of rescue and recovery operations that followed the attacks. Most were former Marines or reservists serving in New York City emergency services, particularly the NYPD and FDNY, while others volunteered independently or were activated through their Reserve units. Together, they brought discipline, training, and hard-won experience to the difficult and dangerous work at Ground Zero.

One well-known example is comedian Robert A. "Rob" Riggle. In 2001, Riggle was a Marine Corps Reserve captain assigned to Mobilization Training Unit (Public Affairs) NY-17. On the day of the attacks, his commanding officer ordered him to report to One Police Plaza early the next morning. His unit was activated, and Riggle and his fellow Marines were sent to Ground Zero to join the bucket brigades that moved rubble by hand in support of rescue and recovery efforts. For nine days, Riggle worked 12-hour shifts alongside his fellow Marines, as well as the firefighters, police, and volunteers. Like most Americans, he was angry, but as a Marine officer, he realized that he could do something about it. "I put my hand in the air and told

my commanding officer, 'Put me in this thing.'" Riggle returned to active duty in November, deploying twice in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. He was far from alone, as the attacks similarly inspired many Marines to return to the Service.¹⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

On 11 September 2001, 2,977 people died in the terrorist attacks on the United States.¹⁵⁸ Among them at Ground Zero were Marine reservists serving in civilian roles: 17 Marine reservists were killed serving in the FDNY, 3 in the PAPD, 2 in the NYPD, and 1 in the Federal Bureau of Investigation.¹⁵⁹ The terrorist attack on the Twin Towers affirmed the enduring truth of the saying, "Once a Marine, always a Marine." Faced with danger, smoke, and fire, Marines moved toward the threat, offering their skills wherever they were needed.

¹⁵⁵ Corona, "Former Marine Sergeant"; Garvin, "A Quiet Hero"; *9/11: The Lost Hero*, directed by Steve Humphries (Destination America, 2013).

¹⁵⁶ DD Form 214, Karnes, 13 January 1992 and 15 September 2007; Libbert, "U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. David W. Karnes"; and Liss, "An Unlikely Hero."

¹⁵⁷ Fitness report for Robert A. Riggle, 30 September 2001; Joel Searls, "From Corps to Comedy," *Leatherneck*, October 2024, 56–59; Team Mighty, "Rob Riggle Doubled-Down on His USMC Service while Clearing Rubble at Ground Zero," *We Are the Mighty*, 2 April 2024, <https://www.wearethemighty.com/mighty-trending/rob-riggle-doubled-down-on-his-usmc-service-while-clearing-rubble-at-ground-zero/>.

¹⁵⁸ Total death toll figure from "September 11, 2001 Commemoration," 9/11 Memorial and Museum, [¹⁵⁹ These Marines are listed in Appendix A. See *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 311; and FDNY Marine Corps Association, inscription carving, dedicated October 2014, Firefighter Marines 9/11 Memorial, Semper Fidelis Memorial Park, National Museum of the Marine Corps, Triangle, VA.](https://www.911memorial.org/connect/commemoration#:~:text=September%2011%2C%202001%20Commemoration,the%20anniversary%20of%20the%20attacks,2024; Pentagon figures from Alfred Goldberg et al., Pentagon 9/11, Defense Studies Series (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2007), 180.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

MARINES AT THE PENTAGON

Lisa M. Budreau and Seth A. Givens

For Headquarters Marine Corps, the morning of 11 September began with an ordinary rhythm. Marines and civilians arrived at their offices at the Pentagon, while others reported to the Navy Annex and Henderson Hall, neighboring facilities perched on a strip of high ground between the interstate and Arlington National Cemetery that overlooked the Pentagon nearly one kilometer away. Commandant of the Marine Corps General James L. Jones was in the building that morning eating breakfast with former Secretary of the Navy James H. Webb Jr. and preparing to attend a funeral at Holy Trinity Church in Georgetown.¹⁶⁰ Daily operations, as usual, continued under the supervision of senior leaders on site, among them Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps General Michael J. Williams.

THE ATTACK

Inside the Pentagon, on the fourth floor of the E Ring, Corridor 4, Peter M. Murphy, counsel

to the Commandant and a civilian Senior Executive Service leader, was meeting in his office with one of his attorneys, Major Joseph D. Baker. It was a quiet day. Ordinarily, there were 11 people on deck, but 6 were either on leave or on temporary duty elsewhere that morning.¹⁶¹ CNN played softly on a television in the background of Murphy's office, as it did most mornings. That day, the coverage from New York City attracted their notice and began to intrude on their discussion. When a second aircraft struck the World Trade Center's South Tower, Murphy's deputy counsel, Robert D. Hogue, entered the office to raise concerns about the Pentagon's security posture. At Hogue's direction, the office's administrative clerk, Corporal Timothy J. Garofola, called the Defense Protective Service. The response came back quickly: the threat condition at the Pentagon remained normal.¹⁶²

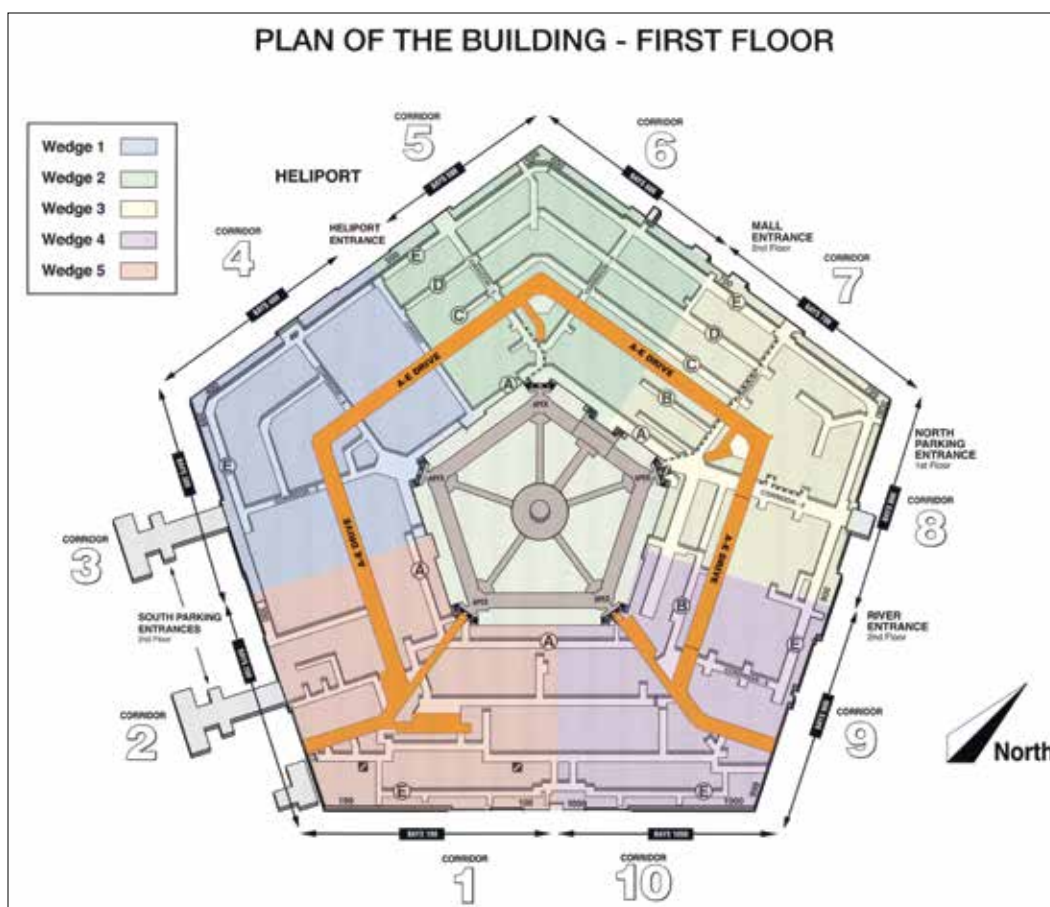
The Office of Counsel shared the hallway with the Office of the Deputy Commandant for Aviation. That deputy commandant, Lieutenant General William L. Nyland, was not present that day. Almost all personnel from the Department of Aviation were not in their Pentagon offices

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¹⁶⁰ Gen James L. Jones Jr., interview with LtCol Timothy Heck, and Dr. Lisa M. Budreau, 12 April 2024, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Marine Corps Archives; and Alfred Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, Defense Studies Series (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2007), 134.

¹⁶¹ Peter M. Murphy interview with LtCol Gary D. Solis, USMC (Ret.), 19 September 2025, Marine Corps History Division (HD) Archives, hereafter Murphy interview.

¹⁶² Murphy interview.



The Pentagon is divided into five wedges, each spanning multiple corridors and wings. A major renovation of Wedge 1 (blue), where American Airlines Flight 77 struck, had just been completed prior to the attacks. The renovation incorporated blast-resistant windows, reinforced walls, and other antiterrorism measures, all of which limited casualties at the Pentagon on 11 September.

Alfred Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, Defense Studies Series (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2007), 7.

either, as they had relocated the previous weekend to a temporary facility approximately 200 meters away, known as the Butler Building, in anticipation of renovations.¹⁶³ The Pentagon was in the middle of a comprehensive, wedge-by-wedge renovation, intended to modernize the structure and improve protection against terrorist attacks. In Wedge 1, the southwest

corner of the Pentagon, about one-fifth of the occupants had not yet returned to their offices. In Wedge 2, the next section clockwise, roughly two-thirds of the employees had vacated the building in preparation for the upcoming renovation phase. Of the 9,500 occupants ordinarily in Wedges 1 and 2, only around 4,600 were in their Pentagon offices.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Maj Fred H. Allison, USMC (Ret.), "Instincts Told Them to Flee—Regardless, Marines Went Forward into a 'Hellish Place,'" *Leatherneck*, November 2001, 18.

¹⁶⁴ Steve Vogel, *The Pentagon: A History; The Untold Story of the Wartime Race to Build the Pentagon—and to Restore It Sixty Years Later* (New York: Random House, 2007), 403–4, 450.

Lieutenant General Nyland's staff was among those who had not yet moved. One member of the staff, Lance Corporal Michael Vera, received a phone call from his mother, a preschool teacher in New Jersey, who told him she had witnessed firsthand an airliner crash into the World Trade Center's North Tower.¹⁶⁵ Lance Corporal Vera alerted others in the office, and someone turned on the television in Lieutenant General Nyland's office. Vera and his friend, Lance Corporal Dustin P. Schuetz, watched the unfolding coverage together. At 0903, they watched as United Airlines Flight 175 slammed into the South Tower. Roughly 30 minutes later, the two Marines walked across the hallway to tell others what was happening in New York City.¹⁶⁶

At the Butler Building, Sergeant Maurice L. Bease and the Marines of the Aviation Support Manpower section began the day as usual, coordinating airlifts and flights for the National Capital Region. The routine ended abruptly when one Marine hung up a phone call with the Joint Operational Support Airlift Center and announced that two aircraft had crashed into the World Trade Center towers. Given their work in aviation, the Marines immediately grasped the seriousness of the situation and turned their attention to the news.¹⁶⁷ Sergeant Bease stepped outside for fresh air.¹⁶⁸ As he spoke with someone nearby, he heard the sound of jet engines approaching. "At first, I thought maybe there

was a flyover at Arlington National Cemetery," Bease remembered. That was odd, however, since he knew his section did not have any word of a scheduled flyover. The sound intensified, and Bease turned to see an airliner at nearly ground level heading straight at the Pentagon. He dropped to the ground as the aircraft disappeared from view.¹⁶⁹ Inside the Butler Building, Sergeant Francis W. Pomrink Jr. heard the same whine of jet engines. A tremendous explosion erupted outside and the floor trembled. He ran outside, where both he and Bease looked up to see smoke and flames rising above the Pentagon's western roof. From their vantage point, they knew the impact had occurred near the E Ring and close to the Department of Aviation's offices.¹⁷⁰

On the hill overlooking the Pentagon, Captain Matthew E. Sutton, an ordnance officer working in Federal Office Building 2 at the Navy Annex, had stepped away from his desk to buy a bottle of water. Like many others that morning, he had been following television coverage of the events unfolding in New York City. As he paid for the water, a deep rumble rolled through the building followed by an explosion. Captain Sutton ran outside and saw a pillar of smoke rising from the Pentagon's west side.

SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS

American Airlines Flight 77 struck the Pentagon at a 40-degree angle, slicing through Army, Navy, and Defense Intelligence Agency offices on the first floor and traveling nearly 100 meters, the full depth of three rings, ending with three-meter-wide hole through an exterior wall that opened onto the paved service road be-

¹⁶⁵ LCpl Michael Vera interview with Maj Fred H. Allison, USMCR (Ret.), 20 September 2001, Marine Corps Archives, hereafter Vera interview.

¹⁶⁶ Vera interview; and LCpl Dustin Schuetz interview with Maj Fred H. Allison, USMCR (Ret.), 13 September 2001, Marine Corps Archives, hereafter Schuetz interview.

¹⁶⁷ LCpl Cedric Haller, "Marine Recalls Firsthand Account of 9/11 Attack on Pentagon," DVIDS, 18 September 2014, accessed 29 December 2025, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/143533/marine-recalls-firsthand-account-9-11-attack-pentagon>.

¹⁶⁸ Haller, "Marine Recalls Firsthand Account."

¹⁶⁹ Haller, "Marine Recalls Firsthand Account."

¹⁷⁰ Allison, "Instincts Told Them to Flee," 18.



This photograph looks in the direction from which American Airlines Flight 77 flew before striking the Pentagon on the building's opposite side. The Navy Annex, the cluster of limestone-colored buildings visible above the Pentagon and to the left, was practically in the flight path.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DF-SD-05-13541.

tween the C and B Rings called A–E Drive.¹⁷¹ On the fourth floor of the E Ring, the impact flung Peter Murphy, Robert Hogue, and Major Baker across the room. The airliner had entered the Pentagon almost directly below their feet. Murphy had been standing with his back to the window, which remained intact because recent renovations had replaced the original panes with blast-proof glass. A fireball blossomed outside the window, and the floors began to buckle.¹⁷²

Down the hallway, Lance Corporals Vera and Schuetz, along with the few Marines in the Department of Aviation, were also knocked off their feet. Moments earlier, Schuetz had been explaining to another Marine what had

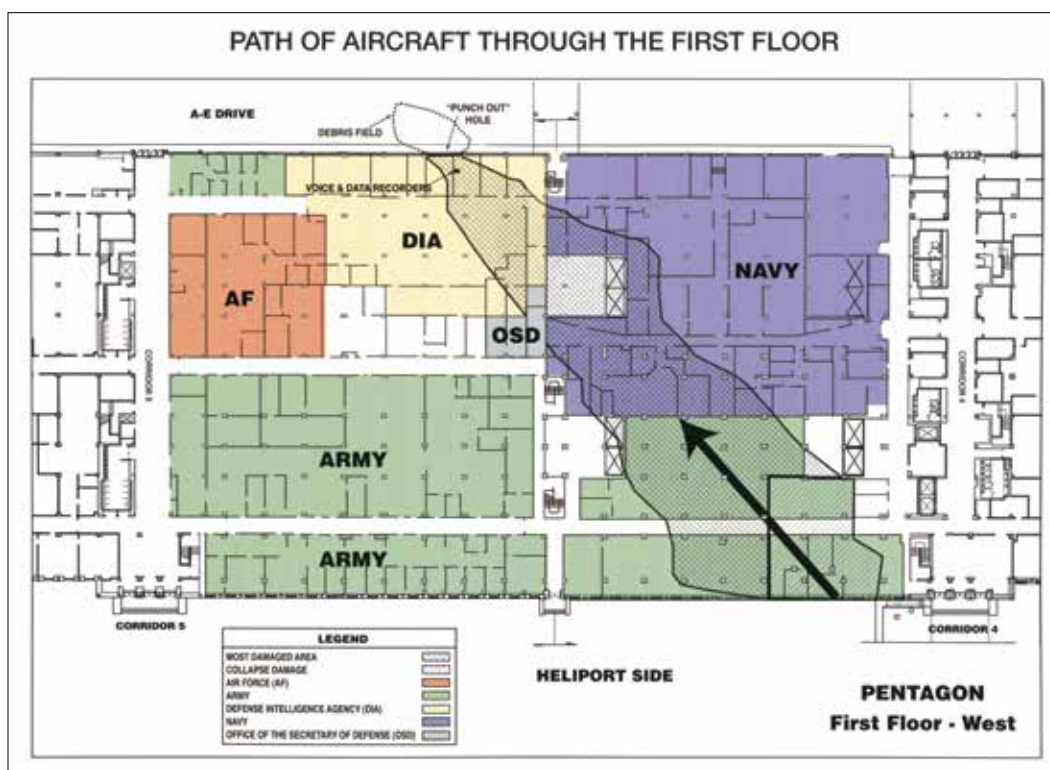
happened in New York City, using his hands to demonstrate how the airliners struck the World Trade Center. As his hands came together, the aircraft hit the Pentagon. The force of the impact knocked everyone off their feet. Vera was thrown into a bookcase, and his manuals spilled down around him. Both Marines quickly regained their footing and ran across the hallway, where their officemates were in Lieutenant General Nyland's office.¹⁷³

The E Ring quickly filled with black, acrid smoke that blotted out the lights and reduced visibility to only a few feet. The disorientation compounded the shock everyone felt. Robert

¹⁷¹ Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 28–36.

¹⁷² Murphy interview.

¹⁷³ Vera interview.



American Airlines Flight 77 tore through three of the Pentagon's five rings before finally stopping at a wall bordering an interior roadway. The two innermost rings, not represented in this figure, were essentially undamaged.

Alfred Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, Defense Studies Series (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2007), 21.

Hogue was soaked in jet fuel.¹⁷⁴ Later estimates indicated that more than 30,000 pounds of jet fuel fed an intense fire and saturated everything in its path, including people.¹⁷⁵ The counsel's office was a secure space that sat behind a heavy electronic vault door. Corporal Garofola struggled to open it, as the impact had shifted the structure and wedged it into its frame. Cracks opened in the floor, and flames were visible be-

¹⁷⁴Thomas J. Brennan, "Point of Impact: An Untold Story of Escape from the Pentagon on 9/11 and the Forever Wars That Followed," *War Horse*, 8 September 2021, accessed 31 December 2025, <https://thewarhorse.org/untold-anniversary-story-september-11-pentagon-attack-survivor-global-war-on-terror/>.

¹⁷⁵Vogel, *The Pentagon*, 431–32.

low.¹⁷⁶ After several minutes, Garofola forced open the door through what Murphy later believed was sheer willpower. The two civilians and two Marines gathered the only other person in the counsel's office, Lieutenant Colonel Katherine Ashton, and the five moved into the E Ring hallway. They attempted to head toward the Department of Aviation, but thickening smoke drove them back, and they turned around to seek another route.¹⁷⁷ In the meantime, Lance Corporal Schuetz and Vera had managed to assist

¹⁷⁶ Brennan, "Point of Impact."

¹⁷⁷ Murphy interview.

in evacuating the two officers and two secretaries in their spaces. Without pausing to confer, the two Marines ran toward the escalators, intending to reach the first floor and assist however they could.¹⁷⁸

While Schuetz and Vera moved swiftly into the Pentagon's interior to work their way toward where the airliner had stopped, other rescuers advanced from the outside. One of them was Captain Sutton, who immediately had run down the hill from the Navy Annex after seeing the smoke and flames. When he arrived at the site of devastation, he saw dozens of people wandering around in shock and in various physical conditions. Several trapped victims dropped from the building's windows, where people attempted to catch them. One of the first responders on the scene later described it as "like Hollywood," with people "sitting there screaming or standing [or] running around yelling 'medics.'"¹⁷⁹ Sutton and other rescuers shepherded injured people to a makeshift triage area on the lawn between the building and Washington Boulevard. He helped escort a woman with severe burns along her entire back portion. One man was missing his hands, but he insisted his coworkers receive care first.¹⁸⁰

Three kilometers to the north, in one of the office buildings at Rosslyn, Virginia, near the Marine Corps War Memorial, Major Dan Pantaleo and his colleagues at the Joint Tactical Radio System, Joint Program Office, watched a thick plume of smoke rising from the Pentagon.¹⁸¹ Major Pantaleo interrupted his commanding officer's meeting to relay what was unfolding in

New York City and, now, just down the Potomac River. Together, they decided to evacuate the office as a security precaution. Pantaleo then called his parents and wife to assure them he was safe, aware that they knew he often traveled to the Pentagon for meetings.¹⁸² After securing the office, Pantaleo and his commanding officer headed downstairs, determined to reach the Pentagon and help any way he could. The streets were in chaos with other offices evacuating. Pantaleo tried to hail a taxi or catch a bus, but traffic was gridlocked. He began jogging instead. Along the way, he fell in with a group of military doctors and nurses who shared the same destination and intent.¹⁸³

The first firefighters arrived on the scene within two minutes of American Flight 77 striking the Pentagon, responding immediately to radio calls rather than waiting to be dispatched. Arlington Fire Department Captain Mike Smith led Engine Company 108 to the impact point at the west wall and entered the building via Corridor 5, where he and his crew confronted a scale of devastation that stunned them.¹⁸⁴ Those caught in the airliner's path experienced something akin to a bomb blast, a crushing concussion followed by confusion, blinding smoke, and unbearable heat. The inferno sucked the oxygen from their lungs and made it feel as though the air was on fire. Later estimates put the heat at approximately 1,000 degrees Celsius.¹⁸⁵ The force of the destruction blew down walls and ceilings, trapping people beneath the debris. For those whose shocked minds struggled to comprehend what had happened, the wreckage and smoke made it even harder to regain their bear-

¹⁷⁸ Vera interview.

¹⁷⁹ As quoted in Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 69.

¹⁸⁰ Capt Matthew E. Sutton, undated narrative, #2 para, sent to L. M. Budreau, Quantico, Virginia, 29 February 2024.

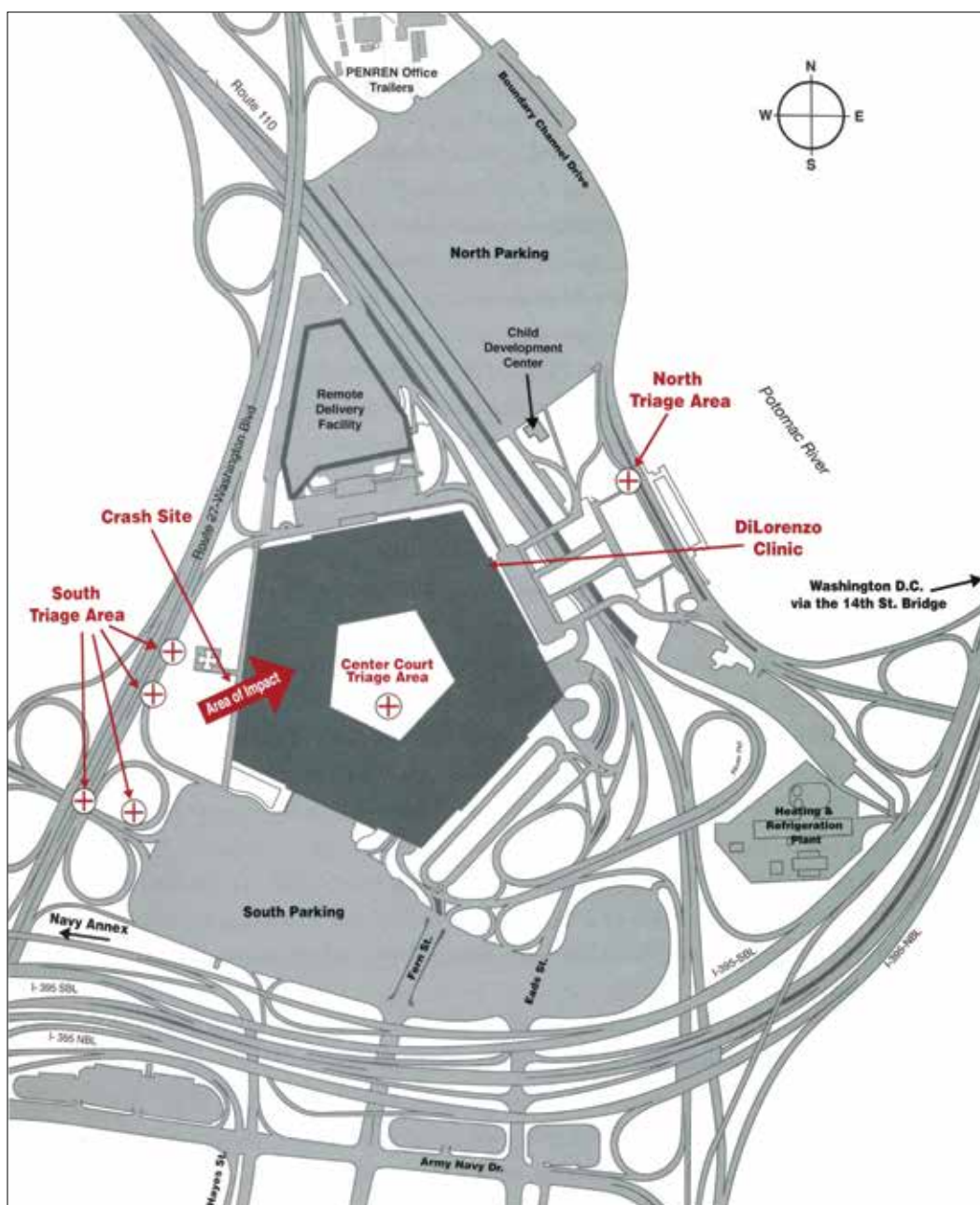
¹⁸¹ Dan Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon: The Account of One Marine's Service at the Pentagon, 9/11/01–9/14/01* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), 13.

¹⁸² Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon*, 17.

¹⁸³ Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon*, 18.

¹⁸⁴ Vogel, *The Pentagon*, 441.

¹⁸⁵ The temperature estimate comes from Vogel, *The Pentagon*, 452; and Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 89.



In the immediate aftermath of the attack, triage areas were established to treat the wounded. The South Triage Area, nearest the crash site, handled the most immediate casualties.

Alfred Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, Defense Studies Series (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2007), 71.



The E Ring exterior minutes before a large part of the wedge collapsed on top of where American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon. Note the cracks in the limestone façade.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DM-SD-02-03881.

ings and determine which way to go to escape.¹⁸⁶

Outside, Arlington County Fire Captain Chuck Gibbs noticed spreading cracks in the façade and ordered an evacuation at 0955, 18 minutes after the attack. Firefighters, civilians, and service personnel streamed out, and the fifth floor crashed down on the fourth just two minutes later. The collapse caused a chain reaction, and a large gash opened in the Pentagon's E Ring at 0957. The section gave way at an expansion joint, directly through Peter Murphy's office. Against the exterior wall, the Marine Corps flag in the Office of Counsel stood precariously at the edge of the sheared-away floor.¹⁸⁷

Before the collapse, Lance Corporals

Schuetz and Vera had made it to the paved service road between B and C Rings, where the remnants of the airliner had punched a hole into the innermost wall of the C Ring. There were approximately 20 rescuers there: Marines, sailors, soldiers, and civilians. A Marine lieutenant colonel, as the senior officer present, took command and organized groups to go into the wreckage and rescue survivors. They all took turns crawling into the hole with flashlights and fire extinguishers in groups of three to five, linking hands to avoid anyone becoming lost. They stayed in the smoke-choked blackness, feeling their way past hanging electrical wires and through rising water, until their lungs could no longer endure it. The rescuers moved toward shouts for help, directing those who could walk where to go and

¹⁸⁶ Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 28–36.

¹⁸⁷ Vogel, *The Pentagon*, 442.



The Marine Corps color visible inside the fourth-floor office of Peter Murphy, the counsel to the Commandant. Murphy was standing near the flag, with his back to the windows, when American Airlines Flight 77 hit the Pentagon. The floor buckled beneath his feet at the expansion joint that would eventually shear, opening this gash in the building.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DN-SD-03-17504.

providing aid to the wounded. Schuetz eventually took off his utility blouse and ripped it in half, soaking it in water to fashion a makeshift mask to help him and Vera breathe. The smell of burning skin and hair was unlike anything they had experienced before, and both Schuetz and Vera knew they would not easily forget it. By the time firefighters arrived and took over rescue and recovery operations from inside the Pentagon, Schuetz and Vera estimated they had rescued approximately one dozen survivors. Instead of evacuating, the two went to the impact point on the building's exterior, where Sutton was, to continue helping.¹⁸⁸ When asked later

¹⁸⁸ Schuetz and Vera interviews. See also Allison, "Instincts Told Them to Flee," 20.

why he ran toward the danger, Schuetz replied, "We're Marines—that's what we're supposed to do. It may sound corny to somebody that is not a Marine, but that's something we've always been trained to do."¹⁸⁹

Seventy meters to the west, Sergeant Francis W. Pomrunk Jr. and Major Dan Pantaleo arrived at the impact point on the Pentagon's exterior wall. After witnessing the explosion, Pomrunk had run back inside the Butler Building to order an evacuation and secure all classified materials. Concern for his fellow Marines in the Department of Aviation drove him to climb over the rubble of the collapsed façade and en-

¹⁸⁹ Schuetz interview.



To the left of where firefighters are standing in the center of the photograph is the exit hole where American Airlines Flight 77 came to a stop. The first responders are walking through the paved service road between the C Ring (to the left) and the B Ring (to the right) called A-E Drive. Note the water from damaged water lines and sprinklers, which made rescue and recovery operations difficult and dangerous. Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DA-SD-03-17530.

The “punch out” hole in the C Ring wall where American Airlines Flight 77 finally stopped. This is the hole into which LCpl Dustin Schuetz and LCpl Michael Vera repeatedly rushed with sailors and other Marines to rescue survivors. Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DA-SD-03-17526.



ter the building, attempting to reach the fourth floor. Thick smoke forced him to turn back, but once outside, he heard cries for help. Without hesitation, Pomrink ran back in, assisting the wounded.¹⁹⁰ When Pantaleo arrived, his group linked up with medical professionals from a local hospital. Together, they set up a triage area

¹⁹⁰ Allison, “Instincts Told Them to Flee,” 18.

beneath the Washington Boulevard overpass and prepared to receive survivors.¹⁹¹

At 1015, however, authorities received a report that another hijacked aircraft was only 20 minutes from Washington. Given that two airliners hit the World Trade Center, some assumed the terrorists might target the Pentagon again. The incident commander ordered everyone to evacuate the area. While the evacuation of the Pentagon had been orderly up to that point, the report of a possible second attack triggered widespread alarm and panic among those on the site. Law enforcement personnel screamed at rescuers to get out of the building. Firefighters, rescue workers, service personnel, and civilians ran roughly 1,000 meters south to take cover beneath the I-395 overpasses.¹⁹² At 1042, the Washington, DC, Air National Guard's 121st Fighter Squadron scrambled two F-16C Fighting Falcons from Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. The F-16s were over the Pentagon within minutes. Fighters circling at low altitude provided a measure of reassurance and allowed rescue teams to focus on aiding the victims.¹⁹³

The aircraft that triggered the panic at the Pentagon was United Airlines Flight 93. Unbeknownst to those on the ground, the passengers of Flight 93 had already forced down the airliner at Shanksville, Pennsylvania, at 1003, 12 minutes before authorities in Washington received reports of another aircraft approaching the capital.¹⁹⁴ The evacuation was the first

of three that day due to reports of an incoming aircraft.¹⁹⁵ In the 25 minutes between evacuating and the all-clear signal of the first report, the unattended fire spread quickly, adding to the difficulty of the search and rescue operations. News coverage that confirmed both Twin Towers had collapsed, killing thousands, including hundreds of rescue personnel. This increased the sense of urgency. Rumors persisted throughout the day that the State and Treasury Departments and even Camp David in Maryland were also attacked.¹⁹⁶

The command structure—a mixture of civilian emergency response, federal law enforcement, and the military—eventually brought some order to the chaos. First responders initiated the Incident Command System, a standardized command-and-control framework used to coordinate multiagency emergency response operations. This meant primary authority for fire suppression and search and rescue operations fell to the incident commander, Arlington County Assistant Fire Chief James Schwartz, until his superior, Edward P. Plaughner, arrived at 1100. Local and federal police worked with the Pentagon's Defense Protective Service to secure the area. Once it was clear the incident was a terrorist attack, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrived around 1000, declared the crash site a crime scene, and began gathering evidence and intelligence and coordinating victim identification. The military provided assets,

¹⁹¹ Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon*, 19.

¹⁹² Vogel, *The Pentagon*, 443; and Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 82–83.

¹⁹³ Vogel, *The Pentagon*, 445–47.

¹⁹⁴ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004), 41; and Vogel, *The Pentagon*, 447.

¹⁹⁵ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 11th Public Hearing, “Staff Statement Number 14: Crisis Management” (19 May 2004) (statements led by commission chair Thomas H. Kean), accessed 2 January 2026, https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/archive/hearing11/9-11Commission_Hearing_2004-05-19.htm#four.

¹⁹⁶ Vogel, *The Pentagon*, 447; Sutton narrative, Section #2 para. 1–2; and Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 62.



Looking at the E Ring from Washington Boulevard. In the morning, the lawn and roadway were a hive of activity as first responders, military personnel, and civilians aided each other in evacuating the wounded. Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DM-SD-02-03903.

but it did not have authority at the scene.¹⁹⁷

These command relationships led to friction when firefighters, attempting to prevent injury to individuals not trained or equipped for the conditions, ordered uniformed and civilian volunteers to leave the building.¹⁹⁸ In the moment, it was frustrating. Terrorists had targeted the Pentagon and the people inside the building because of what they represented. For military personnel, who had a sense of duty and, by instinct and training, confronted danger and protected others, being told to retreat was un-

settling. Moreover, their comrades were trapped inside.¹⁹⁹ Only in retrospect would it become clear that the emergency response at the Pentagon was a relative success, as assessed by the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, the federal body tasked with investigating and reporting on the 9/11 attacks. The committee attributed this to the rapid implementation of the Incident Command System, strong interagency professional relationships and mutual trust among the different agency responders, and the effective use of a regional response approach.²⁰⁰

When the volunteers shifted to supporting roles, they established three- or four-person

¹⁹⁷ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, "Staff Statement Number 14"; Craig Collins, "The Pentagon's 9/11 First Responders," Defense Media Network, 11 September 2019, accessed 2 January 2026, <https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/strength-honor-fortitude-pentagons-9-11-first-responders/>; and Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 52, 60–61, 77.

¹⁹⁸ Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 51.

¹⁹⁹ Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 52, 60.

²⁰⁰ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *9/11 Commission Report*, 314.



By extraordinary chance, photographer Cpl Jason Ingersoll captured an image of LCpl Dustin Schuetz, one of the Marines who helped rescue survivors from inside the building. By the afternoon, Schuetz was outside working as a litter bearer. Note that he is missing his utility blouse, which he had ripped in half earlier to use as a makeshift mask. The buses in the shot were from the Metro station on the other side of the Pentagon and pressed into service to shuttle the wounded to triage areas.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DM-SD-02-03924.

rescue teams. Pomrink brought up litters for the firefighters, while Schuetz and Vera assisted emergency crews from various agencies.²⁰¹ After gaining accountability for everyone in the Aviation Support Manpower section by the south parking lot, Sergeant Maurice Bease and his fellow Marines had made their way around the building and assisted first responders.²⁰² Many others had rushed to the impact point to assist, including Secretary of Defense Donald

H. Rumsfeld, who helped place the wounded on stretchers early during the search and rescue operations before going back to his office to coordinate with President George W. Bush and Vice President Richard B. “Dick” Cheney.²⁰³ For Sutton, assuming a supporting role allowed his adrenaline to subside and gave him a moment to take in the scene for the first time. “I was shocked,” he remembered. Helicopters and ambulances evacuated the wounded. There were “scattered aircraft parts littering the grass, and black smoke and flames billowing from the im-

²⁰¹ Allison, “Instincts Told Them to Flee,” 18; and Schuetz interview.

²⁰² Cpl Timothy Norris, “Remembering 9/11,” DVIDS, 12 September 2013, <https://www.beaufort.marines.mil/Offices-and-Staff/Directory/COMMSTRAT/News/Article/Article/524496/remembering-911/>.

²⁰³ Interview with Donald H. Rumsfeld by Dr. Alfred Goldberg and Dr. Rebecca Cameron, 23 December 2002, archived at History.Defense.gov.

pact point. People dashed about with looks on their faces with a mixture between shock, horror, disbelief, terror, and confusion.”²⁰⁴

RECOVERY OPERATIONS

Throughout the afternoon, Major Pantaleo, Captain Sutton, Sergeant Pomrink, Sergeant Bease, and Lance Corporals Schuetz and Vera worked tirelessly to assist with the rescue efforts. Pantaleo positioned stretchers and supplies and attempted to get into the Pentagon.²⁰⁵ Sutton’s rescue team also repeatedly attempted to enter the building, but the heat from the fire hampered operations. At about 1500, rescuers again prepared to recover victims when it was announced that the U.S. Army’s 3d Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) was expected within hours to assume litter-bearing duties. Many volunteers began to depart, while others waited for the Army to arrive.

Around the same time, Army engineers from Fort Belvoir, Virginia, specially trained in rescuing survivors from building collapses and stabilizing weakened structures, began searching for survivors. The fire was no longer out of control, but the roof continued to burn. The Pentagon’s vast scale and labyrinthine layout, which had earned the building the nickname “Puzzle Palace,” had complicated firefighters’ efforts to fully contain the blaze.²⁰⁶ By 1730, the engineers determined that no survivors remained in the areas they had inspected, and search and rescue operations transitioned to recovery.²⁰⁷

Around the same time, Schuetz and Vera left, exhausted and unsure what else they could do. There were 10 people in line behind them looking to help any way that they could. They

decided to go home, shower, rest, and return later that night.²⁰⁸ Sergeant Bease and his fellow Marines left too.²⁰⁹ Captain Sutton stayed until 0200 on 12 September, finally walking to his home in Crystal City, Virginia, after learning that his standby litter team would not be needed until 0800, when some believed the fire would be contained fully. An hour later, Sergeant Pomrink left.²¹⁰

Major Pantaleo remained at the Pentagon, where he was appointed executive officer of an ad hoc recovery team later known as the Initial Response and Recovery Mortuary Team. In time, the Army dispatched the 54th Quartermaster Company, its only dedicated active-duty mortuary affairs unit, and activated the 311th Quartermaster Company, a reserve unit from Puerto Rico.²¹¹ Pantaleo’s team comprised a mixed group of volunteers, ranging from Marines and soldiers to civilians.²¹² The FBI and Federal Emergency Management Agency oversaw all recovery efforts.²¹³

That evening, Pantaleo’s team established a base of operations approximately 200 meters from the impact point, consisting of two general purpose military tents and a refrigerated truck. They waited late into the night for clearance from structural engineers to enter the building.²¹⁴ Early the next morning, they began work that would last the next three days. Four-person crews carefully recorded the location and identification of remains and removed them with dignity. All remains were coordinated with the FBI and transported by the refrigerated truck to the bureau’s temporary forensics processing

²⁰⁴ Sutton narrative, Section #2 para, 1.

²⁰⁵ Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon*, 21.

²⁰⁶ Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 87, 90.

²⁰⁷ Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 96–97.

²⁰⁸ Schuetz interview.

²⁰⁹ Norris, “Remembering 9/11.”

²¹⁰ Allison, “Instincts Told Them to Flee,” 18.

²¹¹ Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 178.

²¹² Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon*, 22–23.

²¹³ Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 126.

²¹⁴ Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon*, 27–30.

COLONEL DONNA J. NEARY ON 11 SEPTEMBER

Colonel Donna J. Neary was in the process of retiring as a Marine reservist with more than 20 years of service on 11 September 2001. During her career as a Marine field and combat artist, she had deployed multiple times in support of military operations, particularly during the 1991 Gulf War. That morning, she was driving north on Interstate 95 to Bethesda, Maryland, for an appointment at the National Naval Medical Center (renamed the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in 2011). Neary had held a private pilot's license and noticed a commercial aircraft flying abnormally for aircraft arriving or departing Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. On 12 September 2001, she described what she saw to a colleague the day before:

I was listening to the horrible news on the radio about the planes going into the World Trade Center and was just south of the Beltway on I-95 going north on an area of high terrain that allowed a good view of the "DC basin" ahead of me. There, flying from my left side and very low (just above treetops) was a large passenger plane, flying across my vision towards my right side. It then made a very sharp turn, banking so steeply that the top of the aircraft & full wingspan was visible, and flew back across the front of me towards my left again. It then disappeared below the trees and a large fat white plume of smoke started rising from the ground. There was no wind and the white plume of smoke, which at first resembled a "mushroom" cloud but with a fatter stem and smaller cap, just kept getting bigger & bigger.

Neary exited the interstate and proceeded onto George Washington Boulevard. Traffic moved slowly past the burning Pentagon. Neary recalled that "by the time I got alongside National airport, where hundreds of people with luggage, plus flight crews, were standing and walking along the road, smoke from the Pentagon had turned thick [and] black, and the heat coming from the fire had generated a wind, blowing the smoke straight across the road I was on." Neary, like everyone else, looked at the scene as she drove past. "The smell of the smoke," she remembered, "was awful—very acrid."

Neary continued on to the medical center, where she found the hospital had established a staging area for incoming casualties and formed medical teams to be sent to the Pentagon or elsewhere as needed. Neary grabbed pencil and paper and removed the cast from her right hand to sketch the doctors and corpsmen preparing and waiting to be dispatched, preserving one aspect of the immediate military response to the Pentagon attack.

More of her art can be found at <https://www.donnaneary.com/>. Her work as a Marine combat artist is part of the Art Collection of the National Museum of the Marine Corps.



The staging area being prepared was a lobby area in the original part of the old hospital building. Chairs had been pushed to the side to make room for equipment, supplies, and potential casualties. In 12:30 / 12:35 (left), Neary has sketched medical personnel waiting for the call to deploy to the Pentagon and preparing intake computers for the expected influx of wounded to triage. In 11:45 (right), a long row of flags line the wall. The two figures together at the table harken to a statue called *The Unspoken Bond* by Peter Wilde (1995), which depicts a Navy corpsman tending to a wounded Marine. Nearby, a security guard with a rifle stands guard as medical personnel prepare the area for victims. Both works by Col Donna J. Neary, pencil sketch, National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

facility in the Pentagon's north parking lot before being transferred to the military's permanent mortuary facility at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware.²¹⁵

FLAG RAISING

Throughout Marine Corps history, combat flag raisings have come to symbolize courage, perseverance, and national resolve. Most famously, during the Battle of Iwo Jima, two separate flag raisings occurred atop Mount Suribachi: the first was spontaneous and used a modest-size flag; the second employed a much larger flag and, captured in an iconic photograph by Joseph J. Rosenthal, became a lasting emblem of American determination. The Pentagon witnessed a similar sequence of events. There were two flag raisings in the aftermath of the attack. The first, less-known raising took place in the evening and bore a distinctly Marine Corps connection. The second, the famous garrison flag draped over the side of the building on 12 September, has since become an enduring symbol of both the attack and American resilience.

In the evening on 9/11, Staff Sergeant Ronald Mix, assigned to Marine Corps University at Marine Corps Base Quantico, drove the 50 kilometers north on I-95 to the Navy Annex to assist at the Pentagon however he could. There, he met another Marine from Quantico, Sergeant Nathaniel Penn, who was a student at the Staff Noncommissioned Officer Academy. While near the Pentagon, the two men spotted an American flag on the ground. Staff Sergeant Mix and Sergeant Penn approached Army Major Michael J. Coughlin about raising the flag. Major Coughlin enthusiastically embraced the plan and coordinated with civilian authorities, who offered their support. Army Sergeant Major Leon Yarbough

located a large aluminum pole, and the two Marines and four soldiers secured the flag with zip ties and tape. Together, the military personnel and firefighters hoisted the flag atop a firetruck, creating what Major Coughlin believed to have been the first American flag to fly at the Pentagon after the 9/11 attack.²¹⁶

In short order, Mix and Penn retrieved the flag from the firetruck and, accompanied by an Army officer, carried it to members of Virginia Task Force 1, a team of Fairfax County, Virginia, firefighters conducting a survey of the collapsed portion of the E Ring from a man basket suspended by a crane. The Marines asked if the flag could be raised atop the Pentagon as a symbol of American resilience. The team leader immediately approved this request. With space for only three people in the basket, roles were assigned: a structural engineer would assess the roof's conditions, a hazardous materials specialist would secure the pole to the roof, and one of the Marines would maintain control of the colors throughout. The crane lifted the basket to the right of the collapsed area, and the small group secured the flag and anchored the pole to the Pentagon's roof. On the ground, the Army officer called to attention a large number of first responders and military personnel who had assembled around the crane. In unison, they saluted the flag, now flying high above the devastation.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ SSgt Ronald Mix, interview with Dr. Fred H. Allison, 13 December 2001, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Marine Corps Archives, hereafter Mix interview; and interview with Maj Michael J. Coughlin, in Capt Suzanne Summers, Sgt William Miller, and SPC Imelda Salazar, *The Role of the Army Reserve in the 11 September Attacks: The Pentagon* (Fort McPherson, GA: Office of Army Reserve History, Headquarters, U.S. Army Reserve Command, 2003), 57.

²¹⁷ Mix interview. Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, "September 11: Flag Raisings at the Pentagon," 10 September 2024, accessed 2 January 2026, <https://ffxfirerescue.wordpress.com/2024/09/10/september-11-flag-raisings-at-the-pentagon/>.

²¹⁵ Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 178.



The American flag flies atop the Pentagon on the morning of 12 September. Overnight, SSgt Ronald Mix and Sgt Nathaniel Penn, with the help of Fairfax County firefighters, raised the flag as a symbol of American resilience.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DD-SD-03-17490.

The next day, Major General James T. Jackson, the commander of the Army's Military District of Washington, saw the flag and wanted an even more imposing display. He requested the largest flag available be located and brought to the Pentagon. Assistant Fire Chief Schwartz agreed that firefighters would drape it over the building's west wall. The largest flag in the area was at Fort Myer, two kilometers away in Arlington. By early afternoon, the U.S. Army Band's 6-meter by 11-meter garrison flag was en route to the Pentagon.²¹⁸

There was a sense of urgency. President Bush was set to see the destruction firsthand and to thank emergency workers and servicemembers. Firefighters and soldiers went to the roof,

removed the flag that Mix and Penn had found and, with the President watching, unfurled the garrison flag over the side of the building near the impact point. Those assembled below stood at attention and spontaneously began singing "God Bless America."²¹⁹

Immediately afterward, Major Pantaleo noticed one of the President's aides nearby and asked if President Bush might say a few words to his exhausted team, who had had little sleep since the day before. The aide conveyed the request, and the President approached Pantaleo, taking his hand and asking, "Major, what do we have going on here?" Pantaleo quickly briefed the President on his team's work and then introduced each member. Bush shook their hands and

²¹⁸ Vogel, *The Pentagon*, 460–61.

²¹⁹ Goldberg et al., *Pentagon 9/11*, 104–5; and Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon*, 43.



The flag the Marines hoisted above the Pentagon inspired an even larger gesture, when the commander of the Army's Military District of Washington instructed the largest flag in the National Capital Region be brought to the Pentagon. On the afternoon of 12 September, soldiers and firefighters unfurled this garrison flag from nearby Fort Myer.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. P7244-27.

thanked them for the responsibility they had assumed and the care and dignity they brought to their task, which was vital to the families of the victims and the nation. His words and encouragement lifted the spirits of the weary team, giving them the strength to continue their difficult work late into the night.²²⁰

RECOVERING THE MARINE CORPS STANDARD

Before the sun rose on 13 September, Pantaleo and his team donned white coveralls and ventured back into the Pentagon. The deeper they moved into the building, the more grueling the work became. When the aircraft struck the Pentagon, it dragged walls and the contents of offices in its wake. The remains the team encountered far into the destroyed areas bore signs of severe and catastrophic trauma. During a brief pause in operations, Pantaleo and two men he had become close to in the last two days, firefighters Eric M. Jones and Army Staff Sergeant Christopher D. Braman, took a moment to rest. It was then, for the first time, that they noticed the scarlet-and-gold Marine Corps standard standing in Peter Murphy's office on the fourth floor.²²¹

After learning that section of the Pentagon would be demolished the next day, Pantaleo devised a plan. Soon, he was rising above the rubble in the same crane basket that had lifted the team who raised the American flag over the Pentagon on the night of 11 September. The crane operator positioned him close enough to reach out and retrieve the color. Remarkably, despite only being meters from an airliner crash, a jet

fuel inferno, a structural collapse, and countless secondary fires, the standard was undamaged, marked only by a layer of soot. Everything else in the office was thrown about and burnt, yet the flag stood tall.²²²

Once on the ground, Major Pantaleo addressed a crowd that had gathered, including several congressional leaders. "They couldn't destroy this flag," he said, "and they can't destroy this country."²²³ When Speaker of the House J. Dennis Hastert (R-IL) asked he what he intended to do next, Pantaleo replied that he was going to walk the color up to the Navy Annex, where Headquarters Marine Corps had established itself in its old offices, and hand it to the Commandant. The Marines around him let out a spirited "Oorah!" "Well then," Hastert said with a nod, "carry on, Marine."²²⁴

Accompanied by Jones, Braman, and Marine Captain Jared Hansbrough, Pantaleo marched the flag across the lawn and up the hill. Assistant Commandant General Michael Williams met the group at the main entrance to the Navy Annex.²²⁵ He thanked Pantaleo and spun around to hand the standard to Peter Murphy. "Sir," he said, "I believe this belongs to you."²²⁶

The Marine Corps color from Murphy's office subsequently became a powerful symbol of resilience, courage, and the enduring spirit of those who serve. Just three months after the attacks, they traveled to outer space aboard Space

²²⁰ Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon*, 45; and Eric M. Jones, "Hell's Heroes: A Personal Memoir of September 11," *GW Magazine*, Fall 2002.

²²¹ Jones, "Hell's Heroes"; and Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon*, 52–53.

²²² Jones, "Hell's Heroes"; and Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon*, 55–58.

²²³ As quoted in a statement by Senator Byron L. Dorgan (D-ND), in *Congressional Record—Senate: Proceedings and Debates of the 107th Congress, First Session 147*, no. 120 (14 September 2001), S9460.

²²⁴ Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon*, 60.

²²⁵ Carol Morello and Steve Vogel, "190 Believed Dead in Pentagon Attack," *Washington Post*, 14 September 2001; and Deana Hamlin, "Stafford Resident Pens 9/11 Book," *Stafford County Sun*, 7 September 2011.

²²⁶ Pantaleo, *Four Days at the Pentagon*, 66–67.



The Marine Corps standard that Maj Dan Pantaleo recovered from the Pentagon was undamaged apart from soot. Today, it appears at the National Museum of the Marine Corps as part of a 9/11 exhibit along with other items from the Pentagon, including a segment of the building's façade (foreground).
Courtesy of Jose Esquilin, Marine Corps University Press.

Shuttle *Endeavour*.²²⁷ Today, it is preserved as a centerpiece of the 9/11 exhibit at the National Museum of the Marine Corps.

²²⁷ "Flags for Heroes and Families," NASA, 7 September 2011, accessed 3 January 2026, <https://www.nasa.gov/image-article/flags-heroes-families/>.

CONCLUSION

On 17 December 2001, Secretary of the Navy Gordon R. England, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Vernon E. Clark, and Assistant Commandant Williams hosted an award ceremony in the Pentagon Center Courtyard to honor the



The National 9/11 Pentagon Memorial opened on 11 September 2008. Its 184 illuminated benches commemorate each life lost, arranged based on the victims' ages and oriented according to where they died: benches bearing the names of those inside the Pentagon face the building, while those with the names of passengers and crew aboard American Airlines Flight 77 face away from it. Department of Defense photo (USN) 080904-N-LL432-030.

Department of the Navy heroes from the 9/11 attacks. The leaders recognized 85 awardees, including Navy and Marine Corps civilian and military personnel. Lance Corporals Schuetz and Vera and Staff Sergeant Ronald Mix received the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for their actions, while Captain Sutton received the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal.²²⁸

The story of Marines at the Pentagon on 9/11 is, above all, part of a larger story of ordinary people performing extraordinary acts in the face of unimaginable tragedy. Rescuers confronted fire, darkness, structural collapse, and exposure to hazardous chemicals such as asbestos and jet fuel. During several grueling days, they worked tirelessly in unstable conditions to save lives and recover the fallen, returning only to their regular duties once the immediate danger had passed.

It is difficult to determine how many Ma-

rines were at the Pentagon that day, as approximately 20,000 people worked in the building. Remarkably, no Marines were killed. The attack, however, claimed the lives of 70 federal employees, 33 sailors, 22 soldiers, and all 59 passengers and crew aboard American Airlines Flight 77. The actions of Marines at the Pentagon on 9/11 and in the days after exemplify the Corps' enduring ethos of courage, honor, and selfless service. From those who ran toward the smoke and flames to rescue the wounded to those who entered the rubble to recover the fallen, Marines demonstrated decisive action and unwavering commitment to others and to their duty. Their deeds, alongside those of civilians, firefighters, and fellow servicemembers, stand as a testament to extraordinary service in extraordinary circumstances. The courage and resilience they displayed should continue to inspire Marines today and serve as a lasting reminder that honor and determination endure even when the world around them is in flames.

²²⁸ Jerome W. Mapp, "Department of the Navy Honors Pentagon Heroes," Navy News Service, 27 December 2001. http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=488.

A MORNING UNLIKE ANY OTHER

Lieutenant Colonel Robert J. Darling, USMC (Ret.)

Marine Major Robert J. Darling sat glued to the TV monitor in his office at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. He was incredulous. An aircraft had just plowed into the World Trade Center's South Tower and exploded in a gigantic ball of flaming gasoline. He heard someone exclaim, "My God, did you see that? I can't believe it!" Someone else yelled, "There's a full-blown terrorist attack right before our eyes in New York City."

In minutes, Darling heard the intercom system blast, "Evacuate the White House complex! All personnel are to evacuate the White House complex immediately." But Darling could not leave his post as the airlift operations officer responsible for the logistical support for the President of the United States, who was traveling and would certainly need him in this crisis.

As the White House and Eisenhower Executive Office Building were evacuated, Darling headed underground toward the President's Emergency Operations Center, known as the "PEOC." This is his story of "a morning unlike any other."

As a Marine Corps officer assigned to the White House Airlift Operations department, I was an integral part of the logistics arm of the White

House Military Office (WHMO). Our mission was to support the safe and timely travel of the President, Vice President, first family, and other designated VIPs who worked in direct support of the White House by prepositioning helicopters, secure phones, Secret Service vehicles and other special equipment, utilizing the heavy-lift assets of the Department of Defense. Essentially, I was a glorified travel agent, and I loved every minute of it.

On Sept. 11, 2001, my alarm went off at 5:20 a.m. and then again at 5:30 a.m. After forcing myself out of bed, I picked out a clean suit and got dressed. Military personnel assigned to the White House wear business attire to work rather than military uniforms, so that it is less like a military base and more like the home of the first family.

On Wednesdays, we were permitted to wear our military service uniforms. For Marines, that usually meant wearing the "Charlie" uniform—the green trousers and tan short-sleeved shirt. In the winter months, we switched to a long-sleeved tan shirt with a tie, called the Bravo uniform. The reason we were permitted to wear our uniforms on Wednesday was a mystery, but it was a welcome opportunity to display ourselves as the fighting men and women

The original article appeared as LtCol Robert J. Darling, USMC (Ret.), "September 11, 2001: A Morning Unlike Any Other," *Leatherneck*, September 2011, 18–21.



Maj Bob Darling is welcomed to the White House airlift operations center by President Bill Clinton's dog, Buddy, in 2000.

Courtesy of LtCol Bob Darling, USMC (Ret.).

of America's Armed Forces, proud to serve both our country and our President.

By 6 a.m., I was dressed and in my car, heading to Washington and the White House from my home in Stafford, Va., a suburb about 30 miles to the south.

My first stop was the "slug line." What other cities call "ride sharing" and "carpooling" is known in Washington, D.C./the Virginia suburbs as "slugging," an informal, self-monitoring system that is free and not only moves thousands of commuters to work every day, but does so faster than the bus, Metro, or train systems.

In no time at all, I had the two passengers I needed to be able to drive in the High Occupancy Vehicle lanes. They were both female civilians

who worked at the Pentagon. They hopped into my car, greeted me with a grateful "hello," and we were off.

As soon as I heard the click of their seat belts, I turned up the volume on my radio, pulled out of the commuter lot and joined the madness on Interstate 95 North. One of my passengers read her newspaper; the other stared out the window, probably pondering the day ahead.

My day was supposed to be fairly straightforward and ordinary. President George W. Bush was at the Emma E. Booker Elementary School in Sarasota, Fla., on a trip designed to spotlight education and reading, and all I had left to do was make sure the Air Mobility Command had everything in place to bring the presidential

gear home the moment the President was safely aboard Air Force One on his way back to Washington that afternoon.

I exited the highway near the Pentagon, which is a city unto itself. On any given morning, literally thousands of people head toward the building on foot from the enormous parking lots that surround it. They come by car, by subway or by public transportation, and they represent all walks of life and many different levels of responsibility. As a member of the military family, I always thought of them as unified by their mission: to defend America.

7:20 a.m.

I pulled over to let my passengers out, told them both to have a nice day and carefully made my way out of the parking lot.

I crossed over the Memorial Bridge and then, a few blocks later, parked along the Ellipse, the much-photographed park between the Washington Monument and the White House. I walked to the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, otherwise known around town as the EEOB. It is the only building on the west side of the White House campus.

I passed through security and made my way to the Airlift Operations Office on the fourth floor.

8:10 a.m.

We all gathered around and looked up at the large, white magnetic board on the back wall that displayed all the special assignment air missions, or SAAMs, that were either being executed or planned. Each VIP was represented by a different colored magnet. Each magnet had a number and a destination.

We didn't know that at that very moment, four groups of terrorists were bearing down the

East Coast to our financial capital and to our political capital.

8:46 a.m.

And so it began.

At approximately 8:46 a.m., American Airlines Flight 11 tore into the 96th floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

Like most Americans who are old enough to remember Sept. 11, 2001, I will carry with me the events of that day for the rest of my life—they are seared into my memory. I watched them unfold from deep within our government's nerve center—inside the White House bunker. I saw and heard firsthand the reactions and responses of our nation's leaders as the day passed in all of its minute-by-minute terror, with each event raw, unvarnished and unfiltered by the speculations of news anchors.

The news of the first airplane slamming into the World Trade Center reached the Airlift Operations Office at about 8:50 a.m., and, like much of the country, we turned on CNN to get the details. We all stood in front of the television, speculating as to how and why an aircraft would have hit such a huge and prominent landmark on a crystal-clear morning. Had the pilot had a heart attack? Had some sort of massive aircraft technical failure occurred?

At approximately 9:03 a.m., while staring at the TV, I commented to the others in the room as another airliner came into view. "OK, so what's this moron doing?" No doubt trying to get a close-up view of the hole in the building, I thought.

All of a sudden, to my horror and total disbelief, the airliner careened into the South Tower at what looked like full power, smashing with such fury that it looked as if the building wanted to fall over right then and there.

Everyone watched in shock, absolutely stunned, as the inferno and billowing smoke poured from New York's signature monuments to its financial supremacy. We were wrenched from our private thoughts only when someone shouted, "There's a full-blown terrorist attack happening right before our eyes in New York City!"

Just about then, Dennis Stump, our deputy director, called out, "Attention, everyone! Heads up. I want each of you to stand by for the probability of a lot of high-level, White House-directed airlift requests that might start coming in support of the first responders in New York."

When tragedy strikes on a national level and emergency supplies have to get to a disaster site immediately to save lives, the White House usually steps in on behalf of another government agency, such as FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency], and orders the DOD [Department of Defense] to take action and coordinate the special-assignment air missions necessary to support them.

As Stump was talking, the deafening noise of a low-flying, approaching airliner drowned out his voice as it overflew the EEOB and White House. We paused for a moment, staring at each other before running for the window. After having just watched the destruction in New York in real time, to say we were unnerved would be an understatement. A flyover like this was extremely unusual, because the airspace over the White House is classified as prohibited airspace, meaning no one is allowed to fly over it—ever.

We now had the first inkling that this attack might not just be on New York, but on our nation's capital as well.

Within minutes, CNN announced more breaking news and switched its attention from the World Trade Towers in New York City to re-

ports of a large explosion and significant fire at the Pentagon.

9:45 a.m.

What happened next was even more unbelievable. The building's intercom suddenly came to life and ordered all personnel to evacuate the White House and the adjoining Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

"Evacuate the White House complex! All personnel are to evacuate the White House complex immediately! . . . Evacuate the White House complex! All personnel are to evacuate the White House complex immediately!"

When in our history was the last time something like that ever happened? Maybe when Dolley Madison rushed from the White House, carrying out whatever she could as the British closed in on the city? Things were happening so fast that my mind raced to catch up and process this series of incredible events.

As we secured our workspaces and prepared to leave the building, I quickly grabbed Colonel Mike Irwin, USAF, our director of Airlift Operations. We discussed the possibility that the President wouldn't be coming back to Washington that day, and as the designated Airlift Operations officer responsible for his logistics that week, I felt I couldn't evacuate and leave. If he wasn't coming back to D.C., where would he go? What would he need? How would we get it to him? It was my job to figure that out, and I wasn't willing to walk away from that responsibility, no matter what was happening outside.

Colonel Irwin agreed, and with that, he ordered me to grab the Airlift Operations planning binder and to head for the White House basement to the President's Emergency Operations Center to start coordinating military airlift assets to support the President's movements.



A portion of the Pentagon collapsed when the fire from the impact of American Airlines Flight 77 weakened parts of the western wall.

Courtesy of PH2 Robert Houlihan, USN.

Grim-faced Secret Service agents were taking up positions in and around the White House to include the Ellipse to the south and Lafayette Park to the north. I paused for a split second at the surreal sight of the mass exodus before me and then quickly focused on getting to the White House basement. I entered the West Wing under the white awning, flashed my military credentials to the armed agents at the entrance and bounded down the stairs at nearly a full run.

Arriving at the entrance, I picked up the phone, called the duty officer inside and requested access. The heavy steel door opened.

As I entered, I immediately saw a very small contingent of WHMO personnel diligently answering phones and taking notes. No sooner had I announced to the duty officer that I was there

to coordinate military airlift assets for the President than I saw one of the Vice President's military aides. He was frantically answering phones and giving orders to other personnel.

"Hey, Bob," he yelled, "forget whatever it is you're planning on doing and help me answer the phones. They're ringing off the hook."

9:52 a.m.

I put my Airlift Operations binder down in a corner of the room and immediately grabbed the nearest ringing phone, which turned out to be a direct, secure line between the Situation Room, located in the West Wing of the White House, and the PEOC.

"Major Darling, here. Can I help you?"

During the next 24 hours I stood side by



The Sikorsky VH-3D helicopter, also known as Marine One when the president is aboard, is assigned to Marine Helicopter Squadron One (HMX-1), headquartered at Marine Corps Air Facility, Quantico, VA. Courtesy of LtCol Bob Darling, USMC (Ret.).

side with the Vice President, a national security advisor, and other high-level White House staffers as America struggled to come to grips with the magnitude of the worst attack on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor.

Historic events such as the near shoot down

of United Flight 93 as it approached a target in Washington, D.C., at more than 500 mph; the scramble to kill an unidentified bogey aircraft approaching the White House from the west only to find out at the very last moment that it was a medical evacuation helicopter on



Then a major, Bob Darling directly served the George W. Bush presidency.
Courtesy of LtCol Bob Darling, USMC (Ret.).

the wrong frequency heading to save lives at the Pentagon; the credible source and the threat to President Bush onboard Air Force One; moving our strategic nuclear forces to Defense Condition 3 (DEFCON), and the concerned call from Russian President Vladimir Putin; and of course, the horrific moments of watching the Twin Towers collapse, the devastation at the Pentagon, and the emotional toll it all had on the President as he was informed that the death toll could be as high as 40,000 Americans; as well as the moment al-Qaida was implicated in the attack and how President Bush informed his Cabinet to prepare America for war; and other untold events unfolded while we were inside the White House bunker.

What I witnessed during those 24 hours was unprecedented crisis leadership from our nation's top officials as they recognized the scale, coordination, and devastation of the attacks against us. I was struck by their decisiveness to take lives of those unfortunate enough to be under the control of suicidal terrorists, in order to save scores of innocent lives on the ground. They weren't just politicians; they were brave Americans who, when faced with the worst reality imaginable, rose to the challenge of our time to protect our America.

I was proud of their courage, and I was proud to stand among them.

The next day, I returned home to my family and hugged my wife. I knew that our war against

terrorism and radical extremism would be a long fight. I was emotional over the thought that my service to our country wouldn't be enough to guarantee endless freedom for my children, but that someday they too would most likely have to join ranks to continue to protect and defend the country we love and our American way of life.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, I've retired from active-duty service, but continue to watch with pride as America's servicemen and women wearing the uniforms of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard have stepped forward to be counted as warriors in democracy's defense.

I drive by the Pentagon often, and I never forget to thank God for what it stands for: the power and might of the greatest nation on earth. The ground at American Flight 77's site of impact is consecrated soil now. The memorial erected there is an elegant testament to the sacrifice of the 184 men and women on board the

plane and in the Pentagon. As I pass by its outer walls, I remember them, and I silently promise them I will never forget their sacrifice.

I think of the heroes of United Airlines Flight 93, who would not let the terrorists win and who may have saved unknown numbers of lives in the nation's capital with their selfless, spontaneous and collaborative acts of bravery. I hope I would have that much courage if faced with the same decision.

And I think of all our fellow countrymen and citizens of foreign nations who perished in the World Trade Center and the first responders—the firefighters, police, New York City Transit workers, and ordinary citizens—who braved a fiery hell itself to save others after American Airlines Flight 11 and United Flight 175 were plunged into the North and South towers.

As a Marine, I am proud to have played even a small role in the events of that transformational September day. And I will never forget.

ADDRESS TO THE NATION ON THE 11 SEPTEMBER ATTACKS

President George W. Bush

Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes, or in their offices; secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers; moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror.

The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong.

A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.

America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining.

Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature. And we responded with the best of America—with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbors who came to give blood and help in any way they could.

Immediately following the first attack, I implemented our government's emergency response plans. Our military is powerful, and it's prepared. Our emergency teams are working in New York City and Washington, DC, to help with local rescue efforts.

Our first priority is to get help to those who have been injured, and to take every precaution to protect our citizens at home and around the world from further attacks.

The functions of our government continue without interruption. Federal agencies in Washington that had to be evacuated today are reopening for essential personnel tonight and will be open for business tomorrow. Our financial institutions remain strong, and the American economy will be open for business, as well.

The search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts. I've directed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement

THE PRESIDENT ON 9/11



President George W. Bush returns to the White House aboard Marine One with the intent of addressing the nation.
Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. P7113-04.



President George W. Bush was visiting a second-grade class at Emma E. Booker Elementary School in Sarasota, Florida, when the attacks on the World Trade Center occurred. He delivered a brief address from the school around 0930, confirming that terrorists had attacked the country, and he immediately left to board Air Force One and return to Washington, DC.¹ While the President was on his way to the airport, American Airlines Flight 77 hit the Pentagon. Minutes after he took off, United Airlines Flight 93 went down at Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

Due to concerns that the President could be targeted, Air Force One diverted at 1010 and set a course for Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana. In the meantime, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, still at work inside the Pentagon, increased the state of military readiness to Defense Condition 3 for the first time since 1973. After landing at 1145, President Bush recorded an address to the nation from a conference room at Eighth Air Force headquarters. With the aircraft refueled and his traveling party pared down to essential personnel only, the President headed to Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, to establish command and control from U.S. Strategic Command's underground command center. He landed at 1450 and held a secure video teleconference with senior national security leaders 20 minutes later, beginning the meeting by saying, "We're at war." The President ended the discussion by overruling reluctant aides and declaring he was returning to Washington.

He departed Offutt Air Force Base shortly after 1630 and landed at Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland, two hours later, where he boarded a VH-3D Sea King, call sign "Marine One." The crew was composed of aircraft commander Major Edward Spicknall, copilot Major Damien M. Marsh, and crew chief Sergeant Travis M. Boes. At their approach to the White House, the Pentagon came into view. The President stared out the window at the rising smoke. "The mightiest building in the world is on fire," he said. "That's the face of war in the 21st century."

Marine One touched down on the South Lawn at 1854, and the President immediately met with his national security team. After receiving intelligence updates and being briefed on measures taken, he spent the next hour preparing and rehearsing an address to the nation. It was an important speech, meant to project calm and reassure Americans that the government remained fully operational and the national security structures were still intact. It also sought to define the attacks as acts of war and signal American resolve to allies and adversaries for what could be a long and difficult struggle. Approximately 80 million Americans watched the presidential address from the Oval Office at 2030 on 11 September 2001.

¹ All times are in Eastern Standard Time.

Left: Crew chief Sgt Travis M. Boes salutes President Bush while aircraft commander Maj Edward Spicknall and copilot Maj Damien M. Marsh (obscured) look on.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. P7109-10.



At 2030 on 11 September, approximately 80 million Americans watched President George Bush's address that was meant to project calm and reassure the country. Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. P7144-22.

communities to find those responsible and to bring them to justice. We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.

I appreciate so very much the members of Congress who have joined me in strongly condemning these attacks. And on behalf of the American people, I thank the many world leaders who have called to offer their condolences and assistance.

America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war against terrorism. Tonight, I ask for your prayers for all those who grieve, for the children whose

worlds have been shattered, for all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened. And I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us, spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me."

This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace. America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day. Yet, we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.

THE FLIGHT TO GROUND ZERO

Sara W. Bock

For the elite group of Marines selected to transport the President of the United States aboard Marine One, the famed olive green, “white top” helicopter attached to Marine Helicopter Squadron One (HMX-1), some flight paths become second nature, and many sights—like the New York City skyline—are routine to the point of becoming nearly unremarkable.

But in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, when hijackers rammed two 767 jetliners into the World Trade Center’s twin towers, another into the Pentagon, and made a fourth failed attempt that ended with a crash in a remote location in Pennsylvania, a Sept. 14, 2001, flight to the southern tip of Manhattan for one crew of HMX-1 Marines was atypical, to say the least.

Their mission was identical to that of every other Marine One flight: to get the President where he needed to be safely and on time. On this day, though, things were markedly different. President George W. Bush’s destination was Ground Zero, and the nation’s wounds

were fresh from the inconceivable tragedy that claimed the lives of nearly 3,000 people. America would be forever changed, and the country’s response to the day’s events had only just begun.

The mood onboard was solemn, and the view from above was sobering as the crew took in the sight below from an unbelievable vantage point. For the pilot, co-pilot, crew chief and security guards who ensured Marine One’s safe landing that day at the Downtown Manhattan Heliport, the pall of smoke over New York, visible from many miles away, is forever etched into their memories.

Until now, their story has largely gone untold; for them, this comes from a deep respect for those who tragically lost their lives that day, and a strongly held belief that they didn’t do anything remarkable—that in that moment, they were just Marines doing their job.

Like all Americans who were alive on 9/11 and were old enough to comprehend the events that transpired that Tuesday morning in 2001, the Marines involved recall without hesitation exactly where they were and what they were doing when they first heard that the nation was under attack.

This original article appeared as Sara W. Bock, “The Flight to Ground Zero: Sept. 14, 2001, Presidential Transport Remains Etched in the Minds of HMX-1 Marines,” *Leatherneck*, September 2018, 38–45.

Security guards Corporal Liberty Steiner and Corporal Alfredo Cerna, a married couple, had both just returned home from working the night shift. (Their unique role at HMX-1 was not to guard the commander-in-chief, that's reserved for Secret Service, but to guard the perimeter of each landing site and make sure the aircraft was secure at all times.) Their attempts to fall asleep were thwarted by the incessant ringing of their telephone. They quickly packed bags and headed back to the HMX-1 hangars at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., to stage their gear and wait for tasking.

Staff Sergeant Joe Fijalkowski, a crew chief assigned to Marine One, had the day off after working all weekend and was at home with his 9-month-old son when he turned on the TV and began watching in disbelief.

Major Phil Fickes, who would co-pilot the flight on Sept. 14, was driving to Washington, D.C., for a meeting and heard the coverage of the World Trade Center attacks on the radio. He was still on the road when the third hijacked plane hit the Pentagon, and he could see the smoke from the 14th Street Bridge as he crossed the Potomac.

Sitting behind his desk at HMX-1 headquarters, signing paperwork, was the squadron's commanding officer, Colonel Steve Taylor, who would pilot Marine One on the flight to Ground Zero. It was a clear, blue, sunny day on Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., he recalls, when one of the squadron's Marines showed up in his office with the news that the first plane had hit the north tower.

Assuming it had been some sort of freak accident, Taylor continued working for a few minutes before heading down to the ready room, where a group of HMX-1 Marines had gathered around the television. He entered the room just

in time to watch the second plane hit the south tower. Taylor immediately called a meeting of the squadron's department heads and ordered that every helicopter be "preflighted" and crews assigned so that they would be prepared in the event of being called to assist in a mass-casualty scenario. The squadron, which not only had responsibility for presidential transport but also served as the primary operational test and evaluation unit for Marine assault support helicopters, mobilized immediately.

"You never know how you're going to react until you're put in that situation . . . and you go on automatic. It's what you train for," said [Corporal] Steiner of the squadron's response, crediting the Marine Corps with preparing them for even the most unthinkable of situations.

And while that call never came, another call came in a few days later: one that would bring these five Marines together to take part in a pivotal moment in American history.

After being shuttled around the country as a safety measure, President Bush, who was in Florida at the time of the attacks, returned to the White House on the evening of Sept. 11, where he delivered a televised address from the Oval Office. The next day, he met with his national security team and toured the damage at the Pentagon. Then, on the 13th, the call came to HMX-1: President Bush would travel to New York City the following day. Taylor quickly put together a detachment of Marines, of which he would personally take the lead, and the group left Quantico in the afternoon, bound for McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey.

"The flight to McGuire was unusual. Other than fighters, tankers and Airborne Warning and Control System, we were the only other aircraft in the air that day," said Taylor. "I never had imagined that we would be flying to New York, with



GySgt Joe Fijalkowski captured this aerial view of the southern tip of Manhattan during the 13 September 2001 rehearsal flight for President George Bush's arrival in New York the following day. He and other crew members recall being shocked to see how much smoke continued to pour out of the World Trade Center site days after the attacks.

Courtesy of GySgt Joe Fijalkowski, USMC (Ret.).

all air traffic grounded, and the skies of our nation being patrolled by fighters," he added, saying that the environment felt similar to what one might expect in a combat situation and certainly not on domestic soil.

On any other day, the northeast corridor from Quantico to New Jersey would have been busy and hectic, filled with air traffic, said Taylor. There was something particularly eerie about knowing they were virtually alone in the sky, and their interactions with air traffic controllers were atypical and somber.

"I don't think anybody ever really said it, but it was sort of implied . . . [that] this is an other-worldly kind of situation," said Taylor of the dialogue during the flight.

After a quick landing at McGuire to refuel,

they took off again, headed to the city for a rehearsal flight to ensure that they were prepared for the President's arrival the following day. The decision was made to land at the Downtown Manhattan Heliport, also known as the Wall Street pad, chosen for its proximity to Ground Zero, which would allow for the shortest possible route for the presidential motorcade.

As the Marines approached New York City on Sept. 13, not only were they able to rehearse the next day's movements, [they were] also [able] to begin processing the devastation as they witnessed it firsthand.

"It wasn't New York anymore," said Fijalkowski, now a retired gunnery sergeant who continues to work at HMX-1 as a civilian, the lead engine mechanic for Marine One. "The



GySgt Joe Fijalkowski photographed this image as Marine One flew over Ground Zero on 13 September 2001. He and the other members of the crew recall that this sight, witnessed firsthand, is permanently “seared” into each of their memories.

Courtesy of GySgt Joe Fijalkowski, USMC (Ret.).

World Trade Center was such a dominant piece of the picture, and once we got up there, it was just flat.”

They passed the Statue of Liberty, went north up the East River, turned west over lower Manhattan to the Hudson River, and then flew south along the Hudson.

“As we flew over the site, I was most aware of the fact that we were looking at the graves of what was believed to be more than 5,000 people,” said Taylor. The significance of that moment is not lost on him—or the rest of the crew—even now, 17 years later. After scouting out the site, they made landings on the pad, departed, and returned to McGuire.

“There was, I’ll say, somewhat less pressure, because this was just the rehearsal. The President wasn’t with us and wasn’t until the next morning,” said Taylor. “So, we were able to kind of

absorb those things, see them, deal with them, however we each did, to get our job done.”

President Bush had declared Friday, Sept. 14, as a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance. After a morning Cabinet meeting and remarks at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., early in the afternoon, he boarded Air Force One headed for McGuire. Mayor Rudy Giuliani and New York’s Governor George Pataki met the President there and the trio boarded the “white top” VH-3D Sea King. Before heading to the landing pad, Marine One flew over Ground Zero, allowing President Bush to view the scene from the air.

It had been three full days since the planes hit the towers, and the skyline remained hardly visible through the cloud of smoke that continued to fill the air.

“It was absolutely surreal,” recalled Fickes,



Marines with HMX-1 stand with New York first responders in front of Marine One at the Downtown Manhattan Heliport, 14 September 2001. Courtesy of Col Steve Taylor, USMC (Ret.).



Aboard Marine One, President George Bush converses with New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, left, and New York Governor George Pataki as they tour the World Trade Center disaster site from the air, 14 September 2001.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. P8950-19.

who co-piloted Marine One that day and retired from the Corps as a lieutenant colonel last year. “I remember landing on the Wall Street pad and seeing all the first responders that had come off the scene to provide protection and crash/fire rescue for our aircraft and the other support aircraft who were with us. They hadn’t slept in three days probably, and they’d lost lots of buddies and they had the thousand-yard stare in their eyes, they were covered in dust, and it was just a very sobering moment.”

The Downtown Manhattan Heliport, with a small landing pad in the East River, was swarming with New York police, firefighters, and Port Authority. Their presence was standard procedure for a presidential landing, but there were more people than usual, and the tone was completely different.

As HMX-1 security guards, Corporal Steiner and Corporal Cerna had been dropped off on the pad prior to the President’s landing. For Cerna, a New York native, his observations that day hit close to home. Most striking to him was the number of first responders waiting at the pad.

“They looked like they were really traumatized. They’d gone through something really bad,” said Cerna. “When they saw us there, and the helicopters got there and the President got there, they were really happy to see us there. From the time I got there, I couldn’t believe what they’d gone through—it was like nothing I’d ever seen my entire time in the Marine Corps.”

There was one particular observation Steiner made that still stands out in her mind today. Firefighters and police officers had written their social security numbers in permanent marker on their arms, so they could be easily identified if, while searching for survivors among the debris, they didn’t make it out alive.

“It’s been so long, but it hasn’t,” said Steiner with emotion in her voice. “It’s still raw and real.”

Despite any feelings of shock and dismay, however, their training kicked in and took over,

enabling the Marines to remain focused on getting the job done.

After Marine One and CH-46 Sea Knight support helicopters from HMX-1 made their landings on the pad, President Bush exited the aircraft and saluted Fijalkowski and Steiner. It made an impression on Steiner that, despite how preoccupied he must have been, the President didn't miss the salute. "You'd think that would have been the last thing on his mind," she said.

For Fijalkowski, whose job as crew chief aboard Marine One was multifaceted as he was responsible for maintaining the aircraft as well as being the "ceremonial," often-photographed Marine in dress blues who stands outside the aircraft as the President enters and exits, the police and fire presence that day was unlike what he'd observed during every other New York landing.

"There's usually police and fire over there and it's usually a really jovial moment, but you could tell that the mood was totally different. Everybody was quiet and somber," said Fijalkowski, describing the exhaustion on the faces of the first responders, who were coated in a layer of ash. And the President, who according to Fijalkowski was normally very upbeat during Marine One flights, appeared emotional and subdued as he, Giuliani and Pataki greeted the first responders and boarded the motorcade to ground zero. The Marines shut down the helicopters and began to wait for the President's return, speaking with the police officers and firefighters who had assembled at the heliport.

"As we began to talk to them, it was apparent that most of them had been working at the World Trade Center site since the attack," said Taylor. "They had been desperately digging for many hours, but by Friday there didn't seem to be much expectation that they would find many more survivors."

What was originally planned as a three-hour visit turned into six, as the President visited with families of victims of the World Trade Center attacks and spent time showing his support for those who had worked tirelessly for nearly four days, moving concrete and steel and risking their own lives in the harrowing search-and-rescue mission. With a bullhorn in hand, President Bush would deliver a speech to first responders that would arguably become one of the defining moments of his presidency.

"I can hear you! The rest of the world hears you, and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon!" he shouted from atop a pile of rubble. Captured on camera, the moment is now an iconic part of American history and a harbinger of things to come. It was dark when the motorcade arrived back at the Wall Street pad, and Marine One lifted off quickly once the President was on board.

"As we took off, we made another circle around the site," recalled Taylor. "By now it was bathed in the bright lights that had been set up to allow the recovery efforts to proceed during the night. The lights starkly highlighted the scene, and it was once again, a very harsh reminder of the tragedy that had taken place there."

It was a quiet flight back to McGuire, with hardly any discussion on the radios or in the cockpit, recalled Taylor.

"On that day I think we all felt like we were a part of our nation's history. We empathized with our fellow citizens; we supported the President on what was a difficult day for all Americans; we were angry at what had happened to our country," said Taylor. "Most satisfying to me was that throughout the response to 9/11, the men and women of HMX-1 responded with the calm professionalism they have been known for throughout the history of the squadron."



This iconic photograph depicts President George Bush's impromptu speech to firefighters and rescue workers as he stood atop the rubble of the collapsed World Trade Center at Ground Zero, 14 September 2001. Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. P7365-23A.

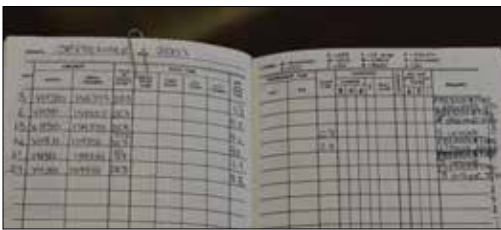
Established in 1947, HMX-1 began as an experimental unit tasked with testing and evaluating military helicopters for possible use by the Marine Corps. Ten years later, in 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, on vacation in Rhode Island, was urgently needed at the White House, and an HMX-1 helicopter transported him back to Air Force One in seven minutes, a ride that would have taken two hours by motorcade. Since then, rotary-wing transport of the President, vice president and other important personnel became an essential element of HMX-1's mission, and Marine One's frequent landings on the South Lawn of the White House a common sight.

He didn't think much of it at the time, but Fickes acknowledges that in retrospect, the

flight to Ground Zero was a unique opportunity to experience history in what he considers an unfortunate way. In his life after the Corps, he teaches young children who were born after 9/11, and he's been amazed to find that many of them don't have an understanding of what happened that day in 2001.

"I sometimes find myself talking about it, not my own experience, but just that day and how it changed our country, only I think more so because of my experience that day with the President. I want them to understand how important that day was," said Fickes.

A post-9/11 America has placed great demands on its Marine Corps, and from HMX-1 to the infantry and everywhere in between, Marines have answered the call of duty with a stead-



During a visit with *Leatherneck* magazine, 5 April 2018, Joe Fijalkowski shows his logbook page from September 2001, which documents the flight to New York on 13 September and the presidential flight the following day.
Courtesy of Nancy S. Lichtman.



Nearly 17 years after he served as crew chief aboard President George W. Bush's first post-9/11 flight to Manhattan, GySgt Joe Fijalkowski (Ret.) surveys a Marine One helicopter at HMX-1, Quantico, VA, 1 June 2018. Fijalkowski now works as a civilian for the presidential transport squadron, where he is the lead engine mechanic for Marine One.
Photo by Abigail Wilson.

fast determination to do what they do best: get the job done. The Marines who flew to Ground Zero on Sept. 14 insist that they don't deserve any accolades for their involvement—that they

were simply doing their job—but there's no denying that for all, it's one day in the Marine Corps they'll never forget.



Col Donna J. Neary painted *Liberty Rising* in response to the terrorist attacks on 9/11. She depicts Lady Liberty rising out of the debris and rubble of the World Trade Center. The 1834 quote, “God grants Liberty only to those who love it, and are always ready to guard and defend it,” appears in the background, attributed to Congressman, Senator, and Secretary of State Daniel Webster (1782–1852).
Reproduced with permission from the artist.



On the Tarmac-Kandahar by SSgt Michael D. Fay.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.



CHAPTER TWO

Call to Action

Henry Himes

The attacks of 11 September 2001 marked a new era in the nation's history and initiated a profound change for the Marine Corps. What first appeared to be an attack from the shadows was, in fact, part of a broader campaign by the radical Islamic terrorist organization al-Qaeda against the United States and its allies—a campaign that already included the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1998 U.S. embassy attacks in East Africa, and the 2000 bombing of the guided-missile destroyer USS *Cole* (DDG-67). The 9/11 attacks blurred traditional distinctions between combatant and noncombatant, as civilians and military personnel alike became deliberate targets. They also underscored the increasingly transnational character of modern war, in which stateless actors operated across borders and sought mass casualties to advance a radical ideological agenda.

At the national level, the U.S. government, determining that the attacks warranted a military response, moved swiftly. President George W. Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld directed emergency measures, including elevating U.S. defense condition levels, initiating homeland air defense operations, activating and deploying U.S. forces, and preparing and authorizing offensive military and covert

operations against al-Qaeda and associated forces. On 18 September, Congress authorized the President to use “all necessary and appropriate force” against those responsible for the attacks.¹ Two days later, Bush addressed a joint session of Congress, outlining an open-ended campaign that would become the Global War on Terrorism. He pledged to target not only al-Qaeda but also state sponsors of terrorism and any nation providing safe haven to terrorist groups.² Combatant commands raised force protection conditions, initiated contingency planning, and began deploying forces worldwide as the nation transitioned to a wartime footing.

Within this broader national response, Marine Corps leadership recognized the magnitude of the moment. On 12 September 2001, Commandant of the Marine Corps General James L. Jones issued *All Marine Corps Activities message (ALMAR) 041/01*, declaring the nation had entered “a new reality” defined by “a new form of open warfare” against the United States. General Jones noted that the Marine Corps had not been idle in the face of rising terrorist threats during the preceding decade, having already undertaken organizational changes and expanded antiterrorism and force protection measures. He viewed the 9/11 attacks as a clear indication that the United States had entered a sustained conflict that would demand precisely the kind of expeditionary capabilities that the Marine Corps

had spent the preceding years refining.³ His assessment would prove prescient in the decades that followed.

Even before the Marine Corps issued *ALMAR 041/01*, Marines at every level were already responding. Initiative and instinct took over, and individual Marines at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon ran toward the danger to aid the wounded and assist first responders. Marine Forces Reserve activated emergency preparedness liaison officers to assist the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Members of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 321 (VMFA-321), watching the attacks unfold on television, independently reported to their unit at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland and prepared aircraft. They and other squadrons were called on to fly combat air patrols in defense of the national capital as part of Operation Noble Eagle, a security effort across the country to avert follow-on attacks at airports, military installations, and other critical infrastructure. In responding to the attacks, Marines demonstrated initiative and rapid decentralized institutional action, both grounded in a shared understanding of mission and purpose. Together, they defined the Marine Corps’ response to 9/11.

This dynamic soon became evident in the Corps’ subsequent organizational adaptations. Within weeks of the attacks, Marine leaders established the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (Anti-Terrorism) (4th MEB [AT]) under the command of Brigadier General Douglas V. O’Dell Jr. Designed to provide enhanced anti-terrorism and force protection capabilities, the brigade integrated a new antiterrorism battalion

¹ Authorization for Use of Military Force, Pub. L. No. 017-40, 115 Stat. 224 (2001).

² George W. Bush, “Address before a Joint Session of the Congress of the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11,” 20 September 2001, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George W. Bush, 2001*, book 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003), 1140–44.

³ Gen James L. Jones, *All Marines Message (ALMAR) 041/01, A New Reality*, 12 September 2001, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, hereafter Marine Corps Archives.

alongside existing units, including the Marine Security Battalion, the Marine Corps Security Force Battalion, and the Chemical Biological Incident Response Force (CBIRF). The creation and employment of the 4th MEB (AT) highlighted the Corps' ability to rapidly establish, task organize, and deploy specialized forces in response to unprecedented threats.

Meanwhile, President Bush focused on Afghanistan's Taliban regime, which provided al-Qaeda and its leader, Osama bin Laden, with a secure base of operations. The United States demanded the Taliban cease harboring the terrorist organization and surrender its leaders to American authorities. When the Taliban refused, they became a primary target in the administration's military response. Afghanistan's landlocked location meant U.S. forces were not prepositioned nearby, and conventional operations required complex negotiations for access to airspace and bases. Recognizing the need for rapid, decisive action before al-Qaeda or the Taliban could strengthen their positions, Bush authorized the deployment of U.S. special operations forces into Afghanistan, initiating Operation Enduring Freedom.⁴

Simultaneously, the Marine Corps' forward-deployed expeditionary forces demonstrated their traditional strengths of speed, flexibility, and global reach. As U.S. Central Command began operations against the Taliban

and al-Qaeda, the requirement emerged for a force capable of operating deep inside southern Afghanistan. The Marine Corps answered with Task Force 58, a naval expeditionary task force under the command of Brigadier General James N. Mattis. Formed by combining two amphibious ready groups (ARGs) and their embarked Marine expeditionary units (MEUs)—the USS *Peleliu* ARG/15th MEU (Special Operations Capable) (SOC) and the USS *Bataan* ARG/26th MEU (SOC)—Task Force 58 executed a long-range, ship-to-shore helicopter assault to seize Forward Operating Base Rhino and conducted follow-on operations against enemy forces. This opening phase of the Global War on Terrorism demonstrated how amphibious and expeditionary capabilities remained vital in a new era of conflict.

The events that followed the 9/11 attacks revealed that the Marine Corps was prepared in mindset, organization, and culture to respond to crisis. Individual Marines acted instinctively, the Corps organized new units with speed and purpose, and forward-deployed forces executed complex operations from the sea together with the Navy. The documents and accounts that follow illustrate how the Marine Corps responded to the nation's call to action immediately, decisively, and across the full spectrum of operations.

⁴ George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation Announcing Strikes against Al Qaida Training Camps and Taliban Military Installations in Afghanistan," 7 October 2001, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George W. Bush, 2001*, book 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003), 1201–2.

ALMAR 041/01: A NEW REALITY

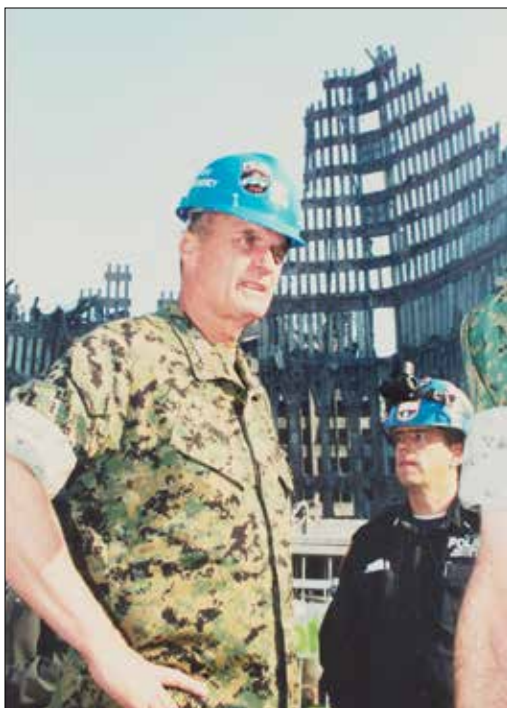
32d Commandant of the Marine Corps General James L. Jones

An All Marine Corps Activities message (ALMAR) is a means for Headquarters Marine Corps to communicate directly and quickly with every Marine on matters of Service-wide importance. While other message types announce administrative or policy changes, an ALMAR is typically brief, time-sensitive, and used to convey a decision or mark a major event. On 12 September 2001, Commandant General James L. Jones issued ALMAR 041/01, titled A New Reality. Released less than 24 hours after the attacks, the message informed Marines on the Corps' immediate actions and, more importantly, signaled that the Service was prepared to meet what promised to be a fundamentally different kind of war.

R 122300Z SEP 01 ZYW
FM CMC Washington DC//CMC//
TO ALMAR
BT
UNCLAS//N02300//
ALMAR 041/01
MSGID/GENADMIN/CMC Washington
DC//
SUBJ/A New Reality//
RMKS/1. The recent terrorist attacks on our nation highlight the new reality of warfare. The

very visible attacks against icons of our democratic nation and our citizens no longer represent a simple violation of international law. As was evidenced so graphically both in New York City and Washington, a new form of open warfare was declared against America, directly targeting civilian and military personnel and our institutions alike. Our commander in chief has stated we will respond to this act of war, and we will prevail. As we respond to this tragedy, our focus, as always, is to mission first and people always. In line with this commitment, I would like to offer my condolences to those who have suffered the loss of loved ones. I would like to voice special thoughts and prayers for our comrades-in-arms in the Army and Navy who appear to have borne the brunt of the attack at the Pentagon. While the process of accounting for all personnel, active duty, reserve, veteran, and civilian is not yet complete, our Corps appears, thus far, to have been spared any loss of life in Washington. I am not as optimistic with respect to the attack in New York City. Scores of emergency response personnel and the general public are bound to be members of the "Marine Family."

2. The very public display of this new form



Days after the attacks, Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen James L. Jones visited Ground Zero, later calling it an “emotional day.” He then addressed a Marine Corps organization in downtown New York City, telling them, as he did in *A New Reality*, that the Marine Corps was being presented with a global challenge.

Marine Corps Archives, Marine Corps History Division.

of warfare comes as no surprise to Marines. Our focus on developing anti-terrorism and force protection (AT/FP) capabilities across our force continues our tradition of innovation and transformation. The threats we so visibly faced have fully validated the reorganizations we have undergone in the past few years, especially in the Marine Corps Security Force Battalion and our Fleet Anti-Terrorist Security Team capabilities. Our more recent efforts to incorporate AT/FP skill sets in all deploying Marine Corps units has proven prescient in addressing the latest threat

to our national security. While our expeditionary culture remains the centerpiece of our warfighting capability, the added ability to effectively deal with terrorism is critical today and will remain one of our core capabilities for the foreseeable future.

3. Our expeditionary culture has once again proven valuable to our nation, and we are poised to respond to the ongoing disaster relief operations in New York City. In conjunction with the Navy, we have once again demonstrated the value of the Navy–Marine Corps team in responding across the full spectrum of capabilities that our nation demands. In line with the special bond between sailors and Marines, I have offered the full commitment of Marine Corps capabilities in support of any naval mission, ashore or afloat. Commanders are directed to reinforce this commitment by seeking out their Navy counterparts and reinforcing this offer of assistance wherever it may be needed. While this support includes the full range of our capabilities, your focus should remain on our ability to support the AT/FP capabilities we can provide.

4. While we have previously discussed in depth the potential for asymmetric attack, we have, through the myriad actions and reactions that transpired on 11 Sep 01, experienced this paradigm shift in a most personal fashion. In order to continue our tradition of innovation we must capture the lessons we have learned regarding this emergent form of warfare. Commanders are directed to compile appropriate issues and their potential impact for the future, and submit them through their advocates for incorporation into the Marine Corps Expeditionary Force Development System. Reality is that what we have faced in the past 24 hours is not a single, isolated event. Yesterday’s attack is the most visible manifestation of a war for which we

have prepared through organizational change, and for which our expeditionary capabilities will be highlighted and in great demand.

5. The manner in which we react over the days and months ahead will once again highlight our readiness and adaptability to meet the na-

tion's needs across the spectrum of operations. It will also visibly reinforce that we are always ready and always faithful.

Semper Fidelis,
J. L. Jones, General, US Marine Corps,
Commandant//

MARINE AVIATION'S RESPONSE TO 9/11

Fred H. Allison

The attacks of 11 September 2001 presented Marine Aviation with an unfamiliar mission. Marine squadrons, with functions ranging from close air support (CAS) to antiair warfare, were designed for employment within Marine Air-Ground Task Forces in expeditionary operations. Few contemplated their use in defense of the American homeland, a mission that statutorily belonged to the U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard. Within hours of the attacks, however, Marine fighter squadrons were armed and airborne over American cities and territories. That improvised response marked only the beginning of Marine Aviation's role in the events that became the Global War on Terrorism. In the weeks and months that followed, the Corps' fighter squadrons transitioned from defending the homeland to striking targets in Afghanistan, while rotary-wing and transport squadrons took on the work of projecting and sustaining a ground force deep into a landlocked country. Together, they demonstrate the flexibility of Marine Aviation and the enduring utility of the air-ground team that stands at the center of Marine Corps doctrine.

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FIGHTER SQUADRONS AND OPERATION NOBLE EAGLE

After hearing the news of the attacks, Marine Reservists assigned to Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 321 (VMFA-321) "Hell's Angels" rushed to Andrews Air Force Base on the outskirts of Washington, DC. VMFA-321 was an F/A-18 Hornet squadron under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Robert A. Ballard. Marine mechanics and ordnance personnel immediately loaded squadron aircraft with 20mm cannon rounds and AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles that were borrowed from their neighbors, the 121st Fighter Squadron of the District of Columbia Air National Guard. By early afternoon, they were ready to fight. Pilots briefed and stood by to fly combat air patrols and awaited coordination between higher commands and the Northeast Air Defense Sector.

Rules of engagement authorizing pilots to shoot down any unidentified aircraft that penetrated the Washington area arrived from North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), the military organization responsible for defending North American airspace. The



VMFA-314 was one of the Marine fighter squadrons that responded to the attacks, embarking aboard USS *John C. Stennis* (CVN-74) to fly air defense missions. It returned to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, San Diego, CA, on 29 September but reembarked aboard *John C. Stennis* on 28 October for a cruise in which it would support Operation Enduring Freedom. Here, one of the squadron's F/A-18s prepares to launch from *John C. Stennis* during the cruise in April 2002.

Department of Defense photo (USN) 020415-N-4768W-086.

order had originated with Vice President Richard B. "Dick" Cheney, but the situation was so without precedent that it produced confusion. Shooting down a civilian airliner was not a mission that Marine aviators had trained for or even considered, but it was now a distinct possibility, with images of collapsing skyscrapers and a gaping hole in the Pentagon fresh in their minds. Ballard related the steps his aviators would take: "We would have fired the gun at the engines [to] get the engines to blow up. If it blows up, the wing falls apart, making the jet unflyable. If that doesn't work, fire the missile at the engines; that'll certainly blow it up. At that point, if that doesn't work, you do what you gotta do—ram them if you have to. Don't let them hit the target."⁵

⁵ Fred H. Allison, "VMFA-321 'Hell's Angels': District of Columbia Defenders Decommissioned," *Leatherneck*, May 2005, 30–33.

Many of the Marines of VMFA-321 came from miles away. They remained with the squadron through the day and spent the night there, sleeping in offices and maintenance bays. The next day, they flew in defense of the capital. Major William H. Swan led the first section of F/A-18s off the runway at 0845. Because the Federal Aviation Administration grounded all air traffic the previous day, the skies were eerily silent. Below, the Pentagon was emitting dark smoke. In all, VMFA-321 flew 10 sorties on 12 September.⁶

In the western United States, news of the terrorist attacks reached Marines shortly before 0600 local time. Major John M. Jansen, the executive officer of VMFA-314, was in his temporary quarters at Naval Air Station (NAS) Fallon,

⁶ Allison, "VMFA-321 'Hell's Angels,'" 33.



LtCol James L. Stalnaker, commander of VMFA-314. In the days after the attacks, he and his squadron flew air patrols from *John C. Stennis* in support of Operation Noble Eagle. Official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

Nevada. He was getting ready for another day of Navy classroom instruction about carrier operations. The “Black Knights” had joined Carrier Air Wing 9 (CVW-9) in anticipation of a scheduled deployment aboard the aircraft carrier USS *John C. Stennis* (CVN-74) in February 2002. Watching the North Tower of the World Trade Center smoking on the news, he called out to his squadron commander, Lieutenant Colonel James L. Stalnaker, who happened to be walking by: “Come watch!” As they stared at the television screen, another airliner plunged into the South Tower. Jansen exclaimed, “I think we’ve got ourselves a shooting war here! Those sons of bitches! It’s got to be Bin Laden!”⁷

⁷ Col James L. Stalnaker, interview with Fred H. Allison, 7 March 2003, transcript, 51, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, hereafter Marine Corps Oral History Collection, hereafter Stalnaker interview.

The commander of CVW-9 directed Stalnaker, his senior squadron commander, to lead eight F/A-18s flown by the most experienced aviators in the air wing, Navy and Marine alike, to the carrier at sea. Stalnaker later recalled flying over the empty Southern California skies as the “quietest flight ever.” In the days that followed, his makeshift carrier air group flew air patrols over Southern California from *Stennis* in support of Operation Noble Eagle, the presidential-directed defense of the United States.⁸ The Marine Corps’ F/A-18 training squadron, Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 101 (VMFAT-101), based at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar, California, similarly flew combat air patrols in support of NORAD.

The first Marine Aviation deployments in response to the terrorist attacks occurred much farther west. In the Western Pacific, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1st MAW), commanded by Major General James E. Cartwright, scrambled units to protect U.S. interests in the region. Cartwright sent one of his fighter squadrons, VMFA-212, to Guam. The “Lancers” deployed within hours of the terrorist attacks, which had occurred at about 2100 Japan Standard Time. After the sun rose, the Marines flew their F/A-18s nonstop to Guam from their home base at MCAS Iwakuni, Japan, supported by KC-130 Hercules transport/tanker aircraft of Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 152 (VMGR-152), the “Sumos,” which provided aerial refueling and carried squadron troops and gear. After their arrival, the Marines of VMFA-212 immediately began flying air patrols over Guam,

⁸ VMFA-314 Command Chronology (ComdC), 1 July–31 December 2001, Marine Corps Archives, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, hereafter Marine Corps Archives; and Stalnaker interview, 55.



One week after the attacks, VMFA-232 arrived in Guam for a scheduled six-month deployment and took over the Marine Corp' contribution to Operation Noble Eagle mission from VMFA-212. They would go on to deploy in support of Operation Enduring Freedom twice aboard USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68) followed by a ground-based deployment to Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 2010, as depicted in Alex Durr's *VMFA-232*. National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

their F/A-18s armed with air-to-air missiles.⁹

VMFA-232, home-based at MCAS Miramar, arrived at Iwakuni on 14 September to begin what was originally planned as a six-month Western Pacific deployment. Four days later, Major General Cartwright ordered the "Red Devils" to Andersen Air Force Base on Guam to assume the Noble Eagle mission from VMFA-212. Marine Air Control Squadron 4 (MACS-4), based at Okinawa, also deployed tactical air operations center and air traffic control de-

tachments to the base.¹⁰ In addition to defending Guam, VMFA-232 flew as part of 1st MAW's theater engagement plan, which entailed flying from island to island across the Western Pacific to demonstrate an abiding American presence to friendly nations. The mission predated 9/11, but the attacks gave it new significance and urgency. In September alone, Marines flew in two- and four-plane elements throughout the region, "often over open water without navigational aids," showing the American flag at remote Pacific airfields. Their World War II forefathers would have

⁹ Maj David W. Kummer, "VMFA-212 Moonlanders," *Leatherneck* 95, no. 5 (May 2012): 32–36; VMFA-212 ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2001, Marine Corps Archives; and VMGR-152 ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2001, Marine Corps Archives.

¹⁰ Marine Air Control Squadron 4 ComdC, July to December 2001, 11 January 2002, Marine Corps Archives.



On 9/11, aviators across the Marine Corps were conducting the ordinary rhythms of training and administrative tasks. LtCol Raymond C. Damm Jr., commander of VMFA-251, was in NAS Oceana for predeployment training and had to hurry back to MCAS Beaufort. Quickly, Marines in the squadron found themselves deploying not for a routine cruise but for war, serving with Carrier Air Wing 1 on board USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71) during the opening months of Operation Enduring Freedom. Official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

recognized many of the places: Saipan, Tinian, Yap, Palau, Iwo Jima, Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines.¹¹

On the East Coast of the United States, unit deployments initiated before the terror attacks took on a new purpose. Lieutenant Colonel Raymond C. Damm Jr., commanding officer of VMFA-251, and his executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas S. Clark III, departed MCAS

Beaufort, South Carolina, early on the morning of 11 September, before the attacks began, to Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana, Virginia. The “Thunderbolts” were part of CVW-1, which was scheduled to deploy in days aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71) for a Mediterranean cruise. After landing at NAS Oceana, a sailor greeted the Marines with news of the attacks. The scheduled precruise briefings began but ended quickly when a Navy officer ordered all officers to return immediately to their ships and home bases. Damm and Clark had difficulty obtaining clearance to fly back to MCAS Beaufort, as the airways had been shut down. They were finally cleared to fly home by a route well offshore. Soon after landing, Damm gathered his squadron and addressed them on the day’s events and their implications for the impending cruise: “If this isn’t enough to get you focused on your job, and motivated to do everything right,” Damm said, “if today’s events don’t make you angry, then nothing will!”¹²

The immediate response of Marine fighter squadrons to the attacks demonstrated the flexibility and readiness of the force. Within hours, squadrons had adapted to a mission outside their doctrine, coordinated with joint and national command authorities, and established combat air patrols with Navy, Air Force, and Air National Guard squadrons over American cities and territories stretching from the Atlantic seaboard to the Western Pacific. The speed of that response reflected decades of training for expeditionary operations in austere and uncertain environments, conditions they confronted in the aftermath of 9/11.

¹¹ VMFA-232 ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2001, Marine Corps Archives; and Col Peter C. Reddy, interview with Fred H. Allison, 2 August 2010, tape recording, Marine Corps Oral History Collection.

¹² LtCol Raymond C. Damm Jr., interview with Fred H. Allison, 17 March 2002, transcript, 37–39, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, hereafter Damm interview; and Fred H. Allison, “‘Thunderbolts’ Strike First Marine Corps Blows against the Taliban,” *Leatherneck*, November 2002, 29.

MARINE AVIATION IN OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM'S AIR CAMPAIGN

The attacks set in motion a debate within the U.S. government about how and where to respond militarily. Once national leaders concluded Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda was responsible, President George W. Bush was determined to respond forcefully against the terrorist organization and any group that harbored it, remarking that a weak response was equivalent to no response. "Let's hit them hard," he said."¹³ The difficulty was gaining access to Afghanistan, where al-Qaeda had planned the attack and the Taliban government was providing the group sanctuary. The country was landlocked, far from any U.S.-friendly land bases, and more than 600 kilometers from the north Arabian Sea, where aircraft carriers could operate. Military operations would be extremely challenging from a logistics perspective. As Army General Tommy R. Franks, commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) noted, "The long poles of this operation will be access and sustainment. Any operation we conduct in Afghanistan will be dependent on airlift . . . thousands of tons a day."¹⁴

CENTCOM planners did not think that a Marine expeditionary unit (MEU)—or any sizeable ground unit, for that matter—had the capability to deploy ashore over an extended distance into Afghanistan and sustain itself once there. General Franks, perhaps aware of Marine Corps doctrine that estimated only a 320-kilometer amphibious capability for a MEU, one-half the distance required, asserted: "No doubt

about it guys—[Afghanistan] is definitely landlocked. We can't make use of the Marines' amphibious capabilities. Whatever the final shape of the operation, it'll depend on airlift." Brigadier General John G. Castellaw, the senior Marine officer at CENTCOM and deputy commander of Marine Forces Pacific, challenged Franks's view and advocated for a more active Marine role in the impending operation.¹⁵

The 15th MEU under the command of Colonel Thomas D. Waldhauser became a potential player in the American response. The MEU had departed the West Coast of the United States on 13 August 2001 as part of the USS *Peleliu* (LHA-5) Amphibious Ready Group and was in port at Darwin, Australia, when the attacks occurred. It rapidly left port but otherwise proceeded with scheduled missions, including a stop at East Timor to support the ongoing humanitarian and stabilization operations there. With Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 163 (HMM-163 [Rein]), the "Ridge Runners," as its aviation combat element, the MEU was a capable force.

By early October, the 15th MEU was on station off the coast of Pakistan in the northern Arabian Sea for a possible noncombatant evacuation of Americans due to pro-Taliban sympathies. The distances involved in conducting an evacuation in Pakistan's interior required aircraft with an extended range capability. The marriage of CH-53E Super Stallion heavy-lift helicopters and KC-130s provided a long reach, which had been demonstrated on more than one occasion in the previous decade. Instead of the standard two-plane KC-130 detachment, however, Colonel Waldhauser requested and received four KC-130s from VMGR-352. Led by Major Brian L. Magnuson, this detachment from the "Raiders" had departed MCAS Miramar on 23 September

¹³ Col Nathan S. Lowrey, USMCR, *U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001–2002: From the Sea*, U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism series (Washington, DC: History Division, United States Marine Corps, 2011), 26.

¹⁴ Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 25.

¹⁵ Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 34.



Members of the 15th MEU arrive at Shahbaz Airbase, Pakistan, via a CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter on 22 October 2001. The Marines provided perimeter security for Air Force combat search and rescue personnel operating from the airbase during the opening days of Operation Enduring Freedom. Department of Defense photo (USAF) 011022-f-4884r-004.

and arrived at Shaikh Isa Air Base, Bahrain, on 5 October.¹⁶

In the meantime, U.S. Department of Defense and CENTCOM strategists were formulating a course of action in Afghanistan. The logistical difficulties of operating in landlocked Afghanistan made air strikes the only realistic means of attack, at least initially. Forward air controllers (FACs) who were part of special operations units embedded with friendly Afghan forces, primarily the Northern Alliance, would need to control the strikes to minimize civilian casualties and collateral damage, strictures that veteran aviators who had flown missions in the Balkans throughout the 1990s found familiar. Before air strikes could begin, however, a search and rescue (SAR) capability had to be in place to

retrieve downed airmen over southern Afghanistan. Army and Air Force units had already established a base at Karshi-Khanabad Air Base in southeastern Uzbekistan to cover northern Afghanistan operations, so the 15th MEU was given the SAR mission for operations in the south.¹⁷

To support it, the *Peleliu* ARG embarked pararescuemen and three MH-53J Pave Low III heavy-lift helicopters from the U.S. Air Force's 20th Special Operations Squadron. On 7 October, a security force of Marines from the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, loaded into four CH-53Es of HMM-163 (Rein) and moved into Shahbaz Airfield outside of Jacobabad. With the security force and SAR capability inserted, the amphibious ready group set about establishing a logistics flow from sea. CH-46 Sea Knight medium-lift helicopters shuttled materials and personnel from *Peleliu* to the coastal town of Pasni, where KC-130s from VMGR-352 picked up cargo and

¹⁶ Maj Brian L. Magnuson, interviews with Fred H. Allison, 29 October 2002 and 16 August 2010, sound recordings, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, hereafter Magnuson interview, 29 October 2002, or Magnuson interview, 16 August 2010; and Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 31.

¹⁷ Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 40–44.

flew it inland to Jacobabad.¹⁸ Marine Air Control Group 38 (MACG-38) from the 15th MEU established air traffic control at both locations. The base at Pasni quickly became a critical logistics and support hub, and the forward SAR capability it supported would underpin the air campaign over southern Afghanistan that was about to begin.¹⁹

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) began on 7 October with a combination of Navy Tomahawk cruise missiles, Air Force long-range bombers operating out of Diego Garcia and the continental United States, and carrier-based strike aircraft. Marines of VMFA-251 aboard *Theodore Roosevelt* soon joined the effort, becoming the first Marine Corps unit to strike targets during the operation. The carrier had departed Operation Bright Star off the Egyptian coast and transited the Suez Canal. VMFA-251 crews moved all aircraft into the carrier's hangar deck, and Marines established a perimeter defense on the flight deck to respond to any potential attack on the ship from the shore during the passage.²⁰ By mid-October, *Roosevelt* was in the north Arabian Sea. Shortly before midnight on 17 October, nearly 250 kilometers off the Pakistani coast, eight aircraft launched into the dark, among them two VMFA-251 F/A-18s flown by Lieutenant Colonel Damm and Captain Simon M. Doran. Each Hornet carried a pair of 2,000-pound joint direct attack munitions (JDAMs), which they dropped on a bridge 1,500 kilometers away that Taliban



Ordnancemen on board *Theodore Roosevelt* arm an F/A-18 Hornet from VMFA-251 with an AIM-120 advanced medium-range air-to-air missile. Official U.S. Marine Corps photo.

fighters were using to move supplies.²¹ It was the first blow the Marine Corps struck against the Taliban.²²

Operations were intense from the outset. Captain Doran, for example, logged nearly 60 hours of flight time in the latter half of October alone, more than 37 hours of which was at night. Throughout its Afghanistan tour, which stretched into March 2002, VMFA-251 flew 682 combat sorties and dropped 486 bombs.²³ This deployment also set a Navy record of 159 consecutive days at sea between port calls.

The operation depended heavily on CAS, a skill at the core of Marine tactical aviation. The FACs who directed the strikes were a throw-back to an earlier era, but the precision with

¹⁸ Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 46–49.

¹⁹ Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 108; MSgt Terrence M. O'Neill, interview with Fred H. Allison, 30 October 2002, sound recording, Marine Corps Oral History Collection; Schulte interview; and Maxwell interview.

²⁰ Damm interview, 39–40.

²¹ Damm interview, 45–48.

²² Allison, " 'Thunderbolts' Strike First Marine Corps Blows against the Taliban," 29.

²³ Capt Simon M. Doran, interview with Fred H. Allison, 18 March 2002, transcript, 19, Marine Corps Oral Collection, hereafter Doran interview; LtCol Simon M. Doran, email to author, 20 January 2011; and Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 54.

which munitions could now be delivered was a twenty-first-century creation. Laser designators and GPS-guided munitions allowed strike aircraft to identify and hit targets with confidence while remaining at altitude, safely above enemy antiaircraft fire.²⁴ After Coalition air strikes destroyed predetermined targets, FACs controlled air strikes from the ground, confirming positive identification of the target before aircrews released their weapons.

The relationship between VMFA-251 aircrews and ground controllers provided from a variety of organizations was fluid, and circumstances sometimes demanded that a pilot take on both roles simultaneously. During one mission, a section led by Major Brantley A. Bond had been cleared to attack an armored unit by a ground controller. When his wingman's targeting pod malfunctioned, Bond took the lead, put a bomb within 20 feet of a Taliban tank, and then became an impromptu airborne FAC, directing other strike aircraft to scatter armored vehicles that followed. Fifteen Taliban armored vehicles were destroyed, and Bond received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions.²⁵

In mid-December, VMFA-314 arrived in theater aboard *John C. Stennis* to provide air support for OEF. The carrier air wing, CVW-9, took up flying night operations, which allowed *Theodore Roosevelt's* air wing to focus on day operations.²⁶ VMFA-314 and the rest of

CVW-9 soon integrated into OEF operations. In this arrangement, the two carriers could be put on complementary schedules, and aircrews and mechanics could adopt a more sustainable combat routine than had been possible with one carrier supporting round-the-clock operations.

The crews of the 15th MEU's aviation combat element and the carrier-based fighter squadrons together represented the breadth of Marine Aviation's contribution to the opening phase of OEF. The logistical foundation that the 15th MEU laid at Jacobabad and Pasni extended American reach deep into landlocked Afghanistan and ensured that downed airmen could be recovered. Flying from carriers in the north Arabian Sea, Marine aviators struck Taliban infrastructure, provided CAS to special operations forces on the ground, and helped establish the conditions that would make a ground campaign possible. Together, these efforts reflected what Marine aviation could bring to bear across the spectrum of operations, from strike missions at altitude to the unglamorous but essential work of moving men and material across vast distances.

MARINE AVIATION AND TASK FORCE 58

As Marine fighters pounded Taliban positions from carriers, plans came together to introduce conventional ground forces into southern Afghanistan to complement the special operations forces already operating there. Brigadier General James N. Mattis, commanding general of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade, which, like CVW-1 aboard *Theodore Roosevelt*, was participating in Exercise Bright Star, anticipated going to war. He told his planners to look beyond

²⁴ Tim Ripley, "The Right Call," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 4 November 2009.

²⁵ Maj Brantley A. Bond, interview with Fred H. Allison, 11 April 2002, sound recording, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, hereafter Bond interview; and Allison, " 'Thunderbolts' Strike First Marine Corps Blows against the Taliban," 31.

²⁶ Because of the length of these missions, this did not necessarily mean it was good for *Theodore Roosevelt* aviators, since a mission that began in the afternoon typically included a night landing aboard the carrier, which is probably the most demanding task in aviation.

the exercise and “start thinking about what we are going to do to go kick some ass.”²⁷ The Joint Chiefs of Staff saw a narrowing window to undermine the Taliban’s command and control and bring about its early collapse. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force General Richard B. Myers, and General Franks agreed that an assault around Kandahar, the Taliban’s spiritual stronghold, was worth pursuing.²⁸ The success of the 15th MEU’s long-distance move into Jacobabad had demonstrated that Marines could project force deep inland and sustain themselves with organic aviation assets. By mid-October, a deep amphibious operation was back on the table, and a potential base in southern Afghanistan had been identified. Camp Rhino, a former United Arab Emirates hunting camp, had a few buildings, a wall around the compound, and a 2,000-meter hard dirt runway, long enough to accommodate fixed-wing aircraft. An Army pathfinder team and Army Rangers had already parachuted into Rhino on 19 October. During a two-hour raid, they occupied the base, killed or ran off any enemy, and reconnoitered the area. The Rangers then departed on a mission to Kandahar, where they executed a raid on Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar’s residential compound.²⁹

These efforts were part of ongoing operations in southern Afghanistan and Pakistan conducted by an umbrella coalition command known as Task Force Sword. The 15th MEU’s aviation combat element was already supporting these special operations forces with a detachment of AV-8B II Harrier ground-attack aircraft embarked as part of HMM-163 (drawn from Marine Attack Squadron 311 [VMA-311]).

VMA-311 got in the fight on 3 November and flew both interdiction and CAS missions in support of Task Force Sword. They soon found a valuable partner in the Italian Navy, who arrived with their own Litening targeting pod-equipped Harriers in December 2001 aboard the carrier ITS *Giuseppe Garibaldi*. The pod’s superior magnification allowed pilots to scan the terrain and identify targets from high altitude, a capability that benefited the Italians and Americans.³⁰

With special operations forces established in southern Afghanistan and Marine Aviation supporting them as part of the larger coalition air effort, CENTCOM determined the moment had come to insert a conventional ground force into southern Afghanistan. Brigadier General Mattis was given command of Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58, composed of the 15th and 26th MEUs, which would establish a forward operating base at Camp Rhino and then press toward Kandahar. Marine Aviation would be central to every phase of that operation.³¹

Once the 26th MEU arrived in the north Arabian Sea, Task Force 58 had the combat power it needed. Key to the Camp Rhino assault was the MEU’s CH-53Es and KC-130s, along with an AV-8B detachment from VMA-223. The “Bulldogs” went into action first, striking Taliban positions on Thanksgiving Day, 22 November.

²⁷ Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 67.

²⁸ Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 79–80.

²⁹ Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 58–60.

³⁰ Lon O. Nordeen, *Harrier II: Validating V/STOL* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 148; Montgomery and Amidon interview, 14–15; and Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 296–97. Northrup Grumman Corporation worked with Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, an Israeli corporation that had initiated development in 1995, to produce the Litening II pod in 1999. The Air National Guard were the first U.S. military organization to acquire it in 1999, and its General Dynamics F-16 Fighting Falcon fighter aircraft used it during Operation Southern Watch. The Marine Corps acquired the Litening II pod in 2001 but had yet to deploy it for combat. All the pilots of Marine Attack Squadron 311 who the author spoke with in 2002 remarked on the Litening II’s capabilities and the need to acquire it for the Marine Corps.

³¹ Jim Mattis and Bing West, *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead* (New York: Random House, 2019), 58–60.



An AV-8B Harrier from VMA-311 returns to USS *Peleliu* (LHA-5) from a mission, 13 October 2001. Department of Defense photo (USN) 011013-N-1523C-011.

The strikes marked the beginning of months of intensive operations for the detachment.³²

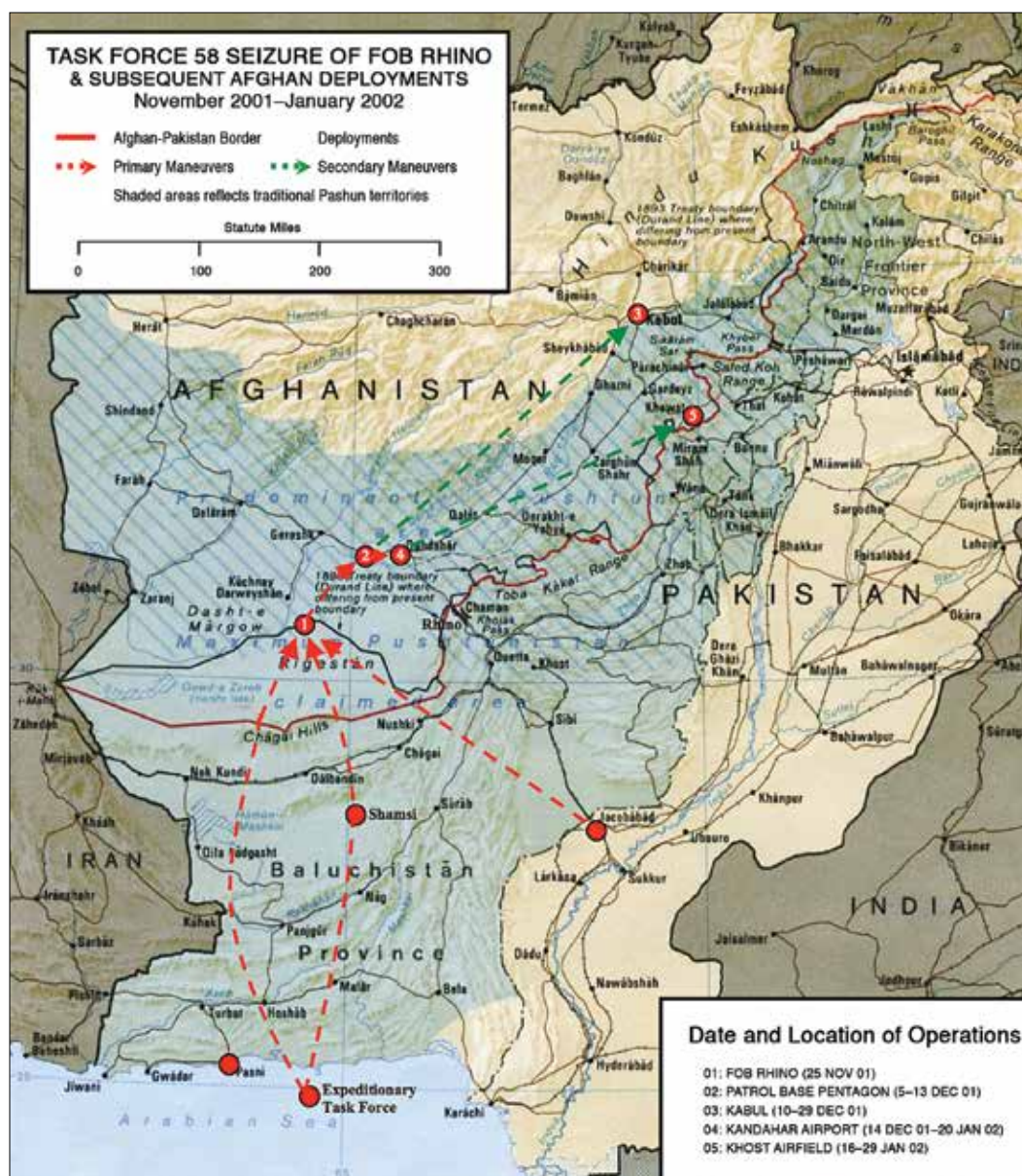
To facilitate the rapid buildup of troops at Camp Rhino, intermediate bases were established at Pasni and Shamsi, Pakistan, the latter more than 322 kilometers south of the base. Marines of HMM-163 established a forward arming and refueling point at Shamsi while infantry from the 15th MEU began staging ashore in the days before the assault. The assault plan called for six CH-53Es—three each from the 15th MEU's HMM-163 and the 26th MEU's HMM-

365, the "Blue Knights"—escorted by four AH-1W SuperCobra attack helicopters and three UH-1N Twin Huey utility helicopters, with six KC-130s providing tanking and troop lift. The first wave into Camp Rhino would consist of 161 combat-loaded Marines from Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines.³³

In the afternoon of 25 November, the escort contingent of AH-1Ws and UH-1Ns departed *Peleliu* and flew north toward Shamsi to refuel before continuing to the Afghan border, where they would meet the CH-53s and escort them into Camp Rhino. As the sun lowered into the Arabian Sea, two flights of three

³² LtCol Kevin M. Devore, interview with Fred H. Allison, 25 April 2002, sound recording, Marine Corps Oral History Collection; and Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 (HMM-365) Command Chronology (ComdC), 1 July–31 December 2001 and 1 January–30 June 2002 (Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA), pt. 2.

³³ Capt Jay M. Holtermann, "The 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit's Seizure of Camp Rhino," *Marine Corps Gazette* 86, no. 6 (June 2002): 41–42; and Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 103–4, 113–14.



Map 1. 15th MEU (SOC) seizure of Forward Operating Base Rhino and 26th MEU (SOC) follow-on operations, November 2001–January 2002.

Map adapted from Nathan S. Lowrey, *U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001–2002: From the Sea*, U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism series (Washington, DC: History Division, United States Marine Corps, 2011), 112.

CH-53s each lifted off *Peleliu's* deck loaded with combat Marines and turned north into the dark. Four AV-8B Harriers orbited north-west of Rhino as part of a larger coalition air

umbrella standing by to respond to any threat. The first flight of CH-53s refueled from a KC-130 over the mountains near the Afghan border; the second flight, plagued by a faulty



A KC-130 from VMGR-352 prepares to taxi while another Hercules from VMGR-252 takes off on a mission to transport 26th MEU Marines.

Department of Defense photo (USMC) 020212-M-7370C-140.

refueling hose, pressed on to Rhino with the fuel it had and a smaller margin of safety and tactical flexibility. The southern Afghan desert, featureless and low-contrast even in bright moonlight, made for treacherous night-vision goggle flying, and the dust that enveloped each helicopter on landing compounded the danger. A beacon guided the pilots to the landing strip. KC-130s followed close behind the helicopters, making steep corkscrew approaches to minimize exposure to enemy fire. Marines from Marine Wing Support Squadron 373 (MWSS-373) then arrived to work on airfield maintenance and set up a tactical airfield fuel dispensing system. By the end of the night, 403 Marines and four fast-attack vehicles were on the ground at Camp Rhino, having been lifted more than 600 kilometers from amphibious

shipping, a vertical envelopment that validated Marine maneuver doctrine.³⁴

The buildup at Camp Rhino continued during the days that followed, with most of the 15th MEU deploying ashore from amphibious shipping. The aviation force at Rhino grew to include all of HMM-163, constituting the 15th

³⁴ Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 115–16, 162–65; LtCol Alison J. Thompson, interview with Fred H. Allison, 3 February 2011, summary, Marine Corps Oral History Collection; and Capt Jacob M. Matt, interview with Fred H. Allison, 8 August 2002, sound recording, Marine Corps Oral History Collection; Magnuson interview, 29 October 2002; Magnuson interview, 16 August 2010; Holtermann and Cracknell interview, 15–17; and “Operation Enduring Freedom: CTF 58 Narrative Summary Operations in Afghanistan, 27 October 2001 to 26 February 2002” (Alfred M. Gray Marine Corps Research Center, Quantico, VA), 31–32, hereafter CTF 58 Narrative Summary. The air traffic at Camp Rhino and in southwestern Afghanistan was greater than air traffic managed by much larger units at other locations, such as the U.S. Air Force’s 134-person Airlift Control Element at Kandahar. Holtermann, “The 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit’s Seizure of Camp Rhino,” 43.

MEU's aviation combat element, and the 26th MEU contributing detachments. In the meantime, a four-aircraft detachment from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361, the "Flying Tigers," arrived to augment the 15th MEU with heavy lift capabilities.³⁵ Sustaining the force at Rhino initially fell to the task force's six KC-130s, which flew 242 sorties during the first 10 days of operations. KC-130s bore the burden alone at first, as Air Force refueling aircraft were incompatible with the Marines' expeditionary fuel system at Rhino. Flying exclusively in darkness because of the enemy threat and Pakistani political sensitivities, crews typically flew two missions per night, shuttling fuel and cargo from Pasni into the rugged interior of Afghanistan.

Camp Rhino was, without qualification, expeditionary. The base sat more than 600 kilometers from the amphibious ready group, and virtually everything needed to sustain the force, including basic necessities, had to be flown in over a supply chain that stretched back to the United States. The dirt runway produced tremendous dust clouds that threatened safe aircraft operations, particularly for helicopters, whose pilots could lose visual reference to the ground and horizon in the critical final seconds of landing. After dark, with little lighting anywhere in Afghanistan, rotary-wing operations became perilous. The talcum-like dust infiltrated components and ground them down with alarming frequency. On 28 November, Air Force C-17 Globemaster III military transport aircraft, capable of carrying four times as much as a KC-130's useful load, began flying into Rhino and accelerated the buildup of combat power. The heavy transports brought supplies but also

problems: their weight pounded the dirt runway into knee-deep powder. Navy Seabees arriving on the earliest C-17 flights worked hard to stabilize the surface.³⁶

Despite the best efforts of the airmen and Seabees, brownout conditions persisted and took a steady toll on aircraft. On 5 December alone, an AH-1W suffered a hard landing, a CH-53E lost an engine to debris ingestion, and a taxiing Air Force C-130's crew became disoriented in the dust and clipped a CH-53E's rotor.

The Taliban, as it turned out, posed less of a threat than the environment. Task Force 58 Marines had their first encounter with the enemy the day after the initial assault, when a section of AH-1W Cobras on an armed reconnaissance flight forward of Rhino coordinated an attack on a Taliban convoy that included Soviet-era armored personnel carriers by Navy Fighter Squadron 102's F-14B Tomcat fighter aircraft from USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN-70).³⁷ In subsequent days, rotary-wing aircraft from HMM-163 and HMM-365 flew assault support, logistics, and reconnaissance patrols as Marines probed kilometers out from Rhino in search of the enemy. Aviation elements were also called on for more urgent work. On 5 December, an Air Force B-52 Stratofortress strategic bomber dropped a 2,000-pound JDAM on the wrong coordinates 8 kilometers north of Kandahar, killing 7 and wounding 38 U.S. and friendly Afghan troops. Two Marine CH-53Es, escorted by two AH-1Ws, went 175 kilometers north to evacuate the wounded, taking them to Rhino for initial treatment before making the 600-kilometer flight to amphibious ships in the Arabian Sea.³⁸

Task Force 58 Marines and coalition special

³⁵ HMM-361 ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2001, Marine Corps Archives.

³⁶ Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 124–25.

³⁷ Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 120–21.

³⁸ Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 141–42.



An AH-1W SuperCobra flies overhead while a light armored vehicle prepares to go on patrol near Kandahar.

Department of Defense photo (USN) 011228-N-2383B-509.

forces conducted operations north of Rhino and west of Kandahar, including efforts to interdict Route 1, the main Afghanistan highway down which Taliban fighters were expected to flee westward from the city. HMM-163 and HMM-365 crews sustained far-flung ground detachments with food, fuel, ammunition, and water; maintained a persistent presence overhead; and worked with airborne early warning and control system (AWACS) and Joint surveillance target attack radar system (JSTARS) aircraft as airborne FACs for strike jets.³⁹ In some cases,

³⁹ HMM-365 ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2001, pt. 2, 6.

these strike jets were Marine F/A-18s, whose pilots considered CAS for fellow Marines their most important mission. The Marines of VMFA-251 aboard *Theodore Roosevelt* were aware that “the ante got pushed up” when the Marines went ashore.⁴⁰ Lieutenant Colonel Damm, the squadron’s commander, remarked, “This is what I’ve been living for. This is why I’ve been going on cruises for 10 years, to get an opportunity to support Marines on the ground.”⁴¹

The Taliban surrendered Kandahar to anti-Taliban Afghan leader Hamid Karzai in early December. The Marine movement into the city began on 13 December with a convoy composed of 44 light armored vehicles and high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles from the 15th and 26th MEUs. Under the close escort of AH-1Ws and AV-8Bs, the convoy moved into the city and secured the Kandahar International Airport.⁴² As the convoy rolled into the airport and Marines off-loaded to secure the area, helicopters from HMM-163 and HMM-365 arrived simultaneously. CH-53Es carried the 26th MEU’s Company I, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, and support personnel. KC-130s arrived the next day, navigating a runway that coalition bombs had cratered.⁴³ With the runway now partially operable, the buildup of Marine strength from the 26th MEU accelerated, and Seabees repaired the runway for C-17 use.⁴⁴ When Gul Agha Sherzai, the new governor of Kandahar Province, rolled into town in a ceremonial parade to assume his office, Marine AH-1Ws provided overhead parade escort.

The seizure of Kandahar was the culmina-

⁴⁰ Damm interview, 9; and Bond interview.

⁴¹ Damm interview, 9.

⁴² Lowrey, *From the Sea*, 179–81; and CTF 58 Narrative Summary, 45–47.

⁴³ Maj Joseph L. Layko, interview with Fred H. Allison, 26 June 2002, summary, Marine Corps Oral History Collection.

⁴⁴ CTF 58 Narrative Summary, 46; and Lowrey, 263–64, 269–70.



A Marine directs a CH-46E Sea Knight to park at a forward operating base in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Department of Defense photo (USN) 011230-N-2383B-507.

tion of the campaign that had begun on 7 October. During the weeks that followed, Marine Aviation had been a critical part of accomplishing what General Franks had once considered

beyond its reach, inserting, transporting, and sustaining a substantial conventional ground force deep into a landlocked country over distances that stretched the limit of troops and ma-

chines alike. The air-ground integration that had long defined Marine Corps doctrine proved its worth in the mountains and deserts of Afghanistan, where helicopters, Harriers, KC-130s, and carrier-based fighter squadrons together enabled Task Force 58 to seize Camp Rhino, advance to Kandahar, and establish the coalition foothold that a larger and more enduring presence would require.

CONCLUSION

The terror attacks of 11 September 2001 challenged Marine Aviation with a mission it had not trained for and had not expected. The defense of the American homeland belonged, by statute and doctrine, to others. Yet within hours of the attack, a Marine fighter squadron was airborne over Washington, prepared to defend the capital. That mission expanded, for a time, to include other parts of the United States and its territories, but this was, in a sense, the exception. What followed in the skies over Afghanistan was what Marine Aviation was built for: to enable expeditionary operations in support of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force from sea-based or austere forward locations, albeit in much deeper operations than had ever been accomplished before.

The months that followed the attacks bore that out across every dimension of Marine Aviation. Fighter pilots struck Taliban targets from aircraft carrier and amphibious assault ship decks. Helicopter crews, operating from Navy amphibious ships hundreds of kilometers offshore, inserted combat forces deep into the Afghan interior. Transport crews sustained troops in an inhospitable environment. Together, the Navy–Marine Corps team delivered American combat power to the doorstep of a landlocked country on the other side of the world, proving that the sea is not a barrier but a highway. While these operations required a high degree of improvisation, none of the squadrons' accomplishments in the early Global War on Terrorism operations were accidental. Marine Aviation exists to support Marines on the ground, and the aviators, crews, and maintainers who served in the wake of the attacks were the inheritors of a tradition stretching back generations. In the wake of 9/11, it employed the capabilities built under one set of expectations in bold and creative new ways that not only validated its doctrines but also demonstrated the inherent flexibility and synergy of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force and the Corps writ large as an air-ground team.

THE 4TH MARINE EXPEDITIONARY BRIGADE (ANTI-TERRORISM)

Major General Douglas V. O'Dell Jr., USMC (Ret.)

Major General Douglas V. O'Dell Jr. was commissioned in the Marine Corps in July 1971 and served as an active-duty Marine officer until July 1974, when he transferred to the Marine Corps Reserve. In August 2000, he became vice commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Atlantic, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Europe, and U.S. Marine Corps Forces South. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, he was assigned as commanding general of the Marine Corps' new antiterrorism unit, the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (Anti-Terrorism). Below, Major General O'Dell shares his recollections about the brigade's activation, training, and operations.

During the years following separation from my initial period of active duty in August 1974, I led a bifurcated life. As a civilian, I pursued a career in investment management but gave equal, if not greater, priority to my service as a reserve officer in our Corps. My civilian corporate firm supported this dual commitment, including a nine-month activation for Operation Desert Storm. By pursuing both paths, I prospered be-

MajGen O'Dell wishes to acknowledge the following officers for their invaluable assistance in compiling this overview: MajGen James Lariviere, LtCol Joseph Alexander, and Col John Kelly.



Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

yond my greatest expectations. In spring 1999, I was selected for brigadier general. I quickly realized that I could not balance my responsibilities as a partner in a major international financial firm with my Marine Corps obligations, so I chose my true vocation. In late fall 2000, I announced my plan to retire from the investment profession. My business partners chose a retirement event date to coincide with the annual global partners meeting, which was scheduled for the evening of 10 September 2001 at



BGen Douglas V. O'Dell Jr., commanding general, 4th MEB (AT), uncases the colors during the brigade's reactivation ceremony aboard Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, NC, 29 October 2001. Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DM-SD-03-09745.

corporate headquarters in Houston, Texas. The next morning, I awoke to an emergency phone call instructing me to turn on my television and watch the drama unfolding in New York City. At that moment, I knew life as I had known it—as we all had known it—was changed forever. Eight days later, I was assigned to command the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (Anti-Terrorism) (4th MEB [AT]).

HISTORY AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE 4TH MEB

The brigade traced its lineage to the 4th Brigade, U.S. Marine Corps, a distinguished unit

composed of the 5th and 6th Regiments and the 5th and 6th Machine Gun Battalions that defeated numerically superior and seasoned German forces in the Battle of Belleau Wood in 1918. Following service in the occupation of the German Rhineland in 1919, the brigade relocated to Quantico, Virginia, where it deactivated. It was reactivated in 1964 as the 4th Marine Amphibious Brigade (MAB) and conducted numerous exercises and operations throughout the Caribbean and Atlantic regions until its deactivation in February 1988. Reactivated again as the 4th MEB in August 1990, it deployed to the North Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, and the Persian Gulf. From September 1990 to March 1991, the



Sgt Benjamin Heimerl stands his post as USS *Cole* (DDG-67) is towed out to sea two weeks after terrorists bombed the destroyer while it was in the port of Aden, Yemen.
Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DM-SD-06-05186.

MEB participated in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. It deactivated on 16 June 1992 and remained so until 29 October 2001, when it was reactivated at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, as the 4th MEB (AT), with Commandant of the Marine Corps General James L. Jones in attendance.

The cumulative impact of decades of terrorist attacks against U.S. interests drove the establishment of the 4th MEB (AT). Major attacks on U.S. facilities and personnel occurred at the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, in October 1983; the World Trade Center in New York City in February 1993; the ar-Riyadh residential compound in Saudi Arabia in November 1995; Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in June 1996; the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in August 1998; and on the guided-missile destroyer USS *Cole* (DDG-67)

in the port of Aden, Yemen, in October 2000. These attacks prompted extensive Department of Defense and congressional investigations that identified significant deficiencies in intelligence, security, and training. The inquiries revealed failures ranging from the inability to deliver timely intelligence to tactical commanders, the absence of organic intelligence within security forces, inadequate deterrence and defensive measures against evolving threats, and insufficient specialized antiterrorism training.⁴⁵ Together, these conclusions highlighted the need for a dedicated, integrated, and proactive force that was visibly ready, alert, and capable of detecting, de-

⁴⁵ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004), 71–203. See, in particular, Department of Defense, *USS Cole Commission Report: Executive Summary* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2001).

terrering, and defeating terrorist threats. The 4th MEB (AT) was the Marine Corps' attempt to address these enduring vulnerabilities.

To accelerate operational readiness of the brigade, the headquarters of the 8th Marines was designated as the interim command element, with the regimental commander serving as deputy brigade commander. The necessary staff work began weeks before the brigade reactivated. During the first week of October, an operational planning team met for several days at the Littoral Warfare Training Center aboard Camp Lejeune. A team composed of the 8th Marines staff and representatives from II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF), 2d Marine Division, 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, 2d Force Service Support Group, Marine Corps Forces Atlantic, Marine Corps Training and Education Command, Marine Corps Systems Command, and Headquarters Marine Corps developed the brigade's key organizational and operational documents. These included the brigade mission statement, mission essential task list, mission performance standards, table of organization, and table of equipment.⁴⁶

The 4th MEB (AT) command element spent much of November assuming command and control of the brigade's elements. The MEB's designated mission of antiterrorism meant it differed markedly in composition from a traditional brigade-level Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF). Rather than forming around a conventional maneuver structure, the brigade was assigned three existing commands. These included the Marine Security Guard Battalion, which had long been responsible for protecting 151 United States diplomatic missions world-

wide. The Marine Corps Security Force Battalion—responsible for safeguarding critical U.S. naval assets and facilities at home and abroad, a mission that evolved from former Marine Barracks and shipboard detachments—was a natural fit in the brigade. The CBIRF, established in 1996, had the mission of responding to the growing threat of weapons of mass destruction within the homeland and, when required, overseas.

The 4th MEB (AT) also assumed command and control of the Air Contingency Marine Air-Ground Task Force (ACMAGTF), which meant providing a standing MEB-level command element and a ground combat element. The ACMAGTF was a rotational force sourced from II MEF units and prepared to deploy by strategic airlift on short notice in support of Joint Forces Command's contingency requirements. During the second half of November 2001, the brigade coordinated with all the ACMAGTF elements to prepare personnel and gear, which included Combat Service Support Detachment 20, Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 269, and detachments from the 2d Marine Division, II MEF, and the Marine Liaison Element. The brigade assumed these duties the first week of December 2001.⁴⁷

In addition to incorporating existing units, the 4th MEB (AT) added a new maneuver support element, the anti-terrorism battalion, which was planned to be specifically organized, trained, and equipped for the brigade's antiterrorism mission. The 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, was designated as the antiterrorism battalion in the interim until a permanent battalion was organized, trained, and equipped. Drawing on lessons learned from past terrorist

⁴⁶ 4th MEB (AT) Command Chronology (ComdC), 1 July–31 December 2001, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, hereafter Marine Corps Archives.

⁴⁷ 4th MEB (AT) ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2001, Marine Corps Archives.

attacks, the antiterrorism battalion built on the core infantry skills of Marine infantry battalions while instilling an “AT mindset” that enabled individual Marines to recognize attack indicators and act decisively. Through training in terrorist tactics, reconnaissance and surveillance, surveillance detection, countersurveillance, marksmanship, and urban operations, the battalion could deploy independent, task-organized units from platoon to battalion size. These units were capable of operating in complex urban environments while minimizing civilian casualties.

TRAINING

From 19 to 20 November, we held a brigade commander’s conference aboard Camp Lejeune. The primary purpose was to advance the staff work required for continued development of the MEB. The working groups included members of the brigade staff, the antiterrorism battalion, the CBIRF, the Marine Security Guard Battalion, the Marine Corps Security Force Battalion, and II MEF. They addressed a wide range of topics necessary to develop a reactivated and redesignated unit, including communications, force modules, mission essential task list, training and readiness, exercise and employment plan, table of organization, and table of equipment.⁴⁸ This staff work further developed the 4th MEB (AT) concept. The mission of the brigade was to provide designated supported commanders with rapidly deployable, specifically trained, and sustainable forces capable of detecting and deterring terrorist activity, defending facilities, and conducting incident response to terrorist attacks worldwide. As a standing command whose principal function was the conduct of antiterrorist operations, the MEB integrated

under a single commander and staff all essential elements required for mission execution, leveraging both existing and emerging technologies to achieve economy of force. Like all MAGTFs, the 4th MEB (AT) could task organize organic units and various other ground, air, and support elements into a single force. It possessed capabilities that exceeded those of conventional Marine Corps units in the conduct of antiterrorism operations, however, through a tailored combination of specialized personnel, equipment, training, and tactics.⁴⁹

After assuming command, I believed training had to be part of our daily routine. In issuing my leadership philosophy, I asked brigade leaders to embrace the following motto: Let no 4th MEB Ghost say they died because you failed to train them or their leader.⁵⁰ From the earliest days following the brigade’s activation, the 4th MEB (AT) staff, in coordination with its maneuver support element staffs, designed and executed a series of tactical exercises without troops to sharpen planning skills and validate assumptions for antiterrorism operations. These exercises allowed the brigade to operate in largely unfamiliar terrain, integrate new terminology, techniques, and procedures, and build the proficiency and confidence necessary for success in high-risk missions. By embedding rigorous, realistic training at every level, we ensured that both leaders and Marines were prepared to act decisively under pressure.

Building on this foundation, one of the brigade’s first training events was the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab-sponsored experiment

⁴⁸ 4th MEB (AT) ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2001, Marine Corps Archives.

⁴⁹ 4th MEB (AT) ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2001, Marine Corps Archives.

⁵⁰ BGen Douglas O’Dell, “4th MEB Philosophy of Command,” undated, enclosure 1, “Anti-Terrorism Battalion Annual Campaign Plan (FY 2005),” 4 November 2004, attached to 4th MEB (AT) ComdC, 1 January–30 June 2004, Marine Corps Archives.



Marines from the 4th MEB (AT) man an M240 medium machine gun from a position overlooking Pier Papa in the harbor of Charleston, SC, during Exercise Harbor Shield, 22 April 2002.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DF-SD-04-05024.

in urban security operations, Project Metropolis, conducted in North Little Rock, Arkansas, from 12 to 23 February 2002. The exercise provided Company K, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, with valuable experience executing security operations in a realistic urban environment. Participation by local citizens, police forces, and the mayor's staff enhanced the realism and prepared the MEB staff for potential urban operations in response to terrorist threats.⁵¹

The most significant of the early exercises took place at the Port of Charleston, South Carolina, from 17 to 25 April 2002. Driven by concerns that hostile nonstate actors might attempt to introduce a weapon of mass destruction into a U.S. urban port via commercial shipping, the 4th MEB (AT) developed, coordinated, and exe-

cuted Harbor Shield with the U.S. Coast Guard. The exercise's principal success lay in the integration of the Coast Guard, state and local law enforcement, and other first responders to counter unconventional terrorist threats.⁵²

OPERATIONS

While we trained, we were called on to execute tasks unique to the brigade's capabilities. The first occurred less than a month after the brigade activated. In November 2001, an Incident Response Force (IRF) of 165 Marines and sailors from the CBIRF deployed to Capitol Hill at the request of the Capitol Police in response to an anthrax attack on the Philip A. Hart Senate Office Building. Several civilian contractors estimated that it would require at least six weeks to take samples in office spaces for chemical and biological contaminants. The IRF completed the mission in 72 hours during the Thanksgiving holiday recess, enabling Congress to return to normal operations with minimal disruption.⁵³

The 4th MEB (AT) received its first be prepared to deploy order two weeks later, on 6 December. At the time, Marine KC-130 Hercules cargo aircraft were flying humanitarian assistance into Afghanistan from Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, and the brigade was tasked with augmenting the U.S. Air Force's 75th Security Squadron at the base. On 11 December, Staff Sergeant Randy R. Radford led a 15-Marine detachment

⁵¹ 4th MEB (AT) ComdC, 1 January–30 June 2002, Marine Corps Archives.

⁵² 4th MEB (AT) ComdC, 1 January–30 June 2002, Marine Corps Archives; and Cpl Zachary A. Crawford, "Coasties and Marines 'Shield' Charleston," Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, 20 April 2002, <https://www.lejeune.marines.mil/News/Article/Article/511441/coasties-and-marines-shield-charleston/>.

⁵³ 2dLt Paul C. Cabellon, "CBIRF Takes the (Capitol) Hill," Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, 3 December 2001, <https://www.lejeune.marines.mil/News/Article/Article/511637/cbirf-takes-the-capitol-hill/>.



Marines of Task Force India, 4th MEB (AT), en route to the U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, 5 July 2002. Department of Defense photo (USN) 020705-N-3580W-040.

to Turkey.⁵⁴ This initial deployment tested the brigade's ability to rapidly mobilize and operate alongside joint forces.

The brigade received a second be prepared to deploy order one day after the first, directing the 4th MEB (AT) to provide security for the U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. The brigade formed a task force around Company L, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines, reinforcing it with critical intelligence and communications assets. Task Force Lima, under the command of Captain Farrell J. Sullivan, departed Camp Lejeune on 23 December. In Kabul, the task force relieved elements of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) on 29 December, facilitating the reestablishment of the embassy

and providing security for the diplomatic mission. By late spring 2002, the brigade had completed two rotations of the Kabul mission and established sustainable operational routines. During this period, the deployment length was extended from 90 days to 6 months, and task force composition was refined to incorporate lessons learned and better employ high-demand intelligence assets.⁵⁵

During the same period, the brigade was tasked with developing a concept of operations to respond to any emergent threat to the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah. Planning and coordination involved state and local authorities, federal law enforcement, and private security organizations. Although the anticipated

⁵⁴ 4th MEB (AT) ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2001, Marine Corps Archives.

⁵⁵ 4th MEB (AT) ComdC, 1 July–31 December 2001, Marine Corps Archives.



BGen Douglas V. O'Dell visits his troops in Bagram, Afghanistan.
Courtesy of MajGen Douglas V. O'Dell Jr., USMC (Ret.).

threat did not materialize, the effort proved valuable and directly informed the brigade's later support to high-visibility national events, including successive State of the Union addresses and the 2005 presidential inauguration.

On 6 September 2002, the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines, became the antiterrorism battalion. Additional organizational changes marked key steps in the brigade's transition to a more permanent unit. Among these changes was the return of the 8th Marines headquarters to the 2d Marine Division, resulting in a permanent MEB headquarters composed primarily of active component Marines and heavily augmented by reservists. During the ensuing two years, the brigade executed the full range of missions envisioned at its creation, including Marines from the Marine Corps Security Force Battalion reinforcing Marine Security Guard Detachments at U.S. embassies throughout the Middle East and rescuing the president of Haiti during a violent

uprising in February 2004 that threatened his life.

I commanded the 4th MEB (AT) until September 2004. By that time, the brigade had matured into a cohesive, fully functional organization, maintaining a constant state of readiness to respond to contingencies requiring antiterrorism capabilities. The staff had developed deep expertise and institutional knowledge in planning and executing complex security operations. The brigade's maneuver elements continued to provide forces for the Marine Security Guard Battalion mission in Kabul, while also deploying to Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, to serve as Task Force Horn of Africa, and to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, to provide security for the naval base there. The CBIRF, with its specialized expertise in chemical, biological, and weapon of mass destruction response, stood ready to respond to potential contamination incidents across a wide range of operational environments.

CONCLUSION

From the moment I was assigned as the prospective commanding general of the 4th MEB (AT) on 19 September 2001 to my change of command in September 2004, I was fully immersed in what proved to be the most rewarding three years of my four decades of service. I was surrounded by some of the best men and women any Marine could ever hope to serve with, especially at such a critical juncture in the history of our nation and our Corps. The professional talent assigned to the 4th MEB (AT) contributed to the Marine Corps' counterterrorism and rapid-response capabilities, helping to lay the groundwork for United States Marine Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) and producing eight general officers, including a future Commandant.

After reflection, the lasting impact of the 9/11 era on the Marine Corps has been the professional growth of our junior enlisted leadership, which has validated the concept of the “strategic corporal” that Commandant General Charles C. Krulak espoused nearly three decades ago.⁵⁶ Further, this has given birth institutionally

to MARSOC, which has positively impacted recruiting and retention efforts while also making the Marine Corps more relevant in this generation of warfighting at the small-unit level, emphasizing new ways of organizing, training, and equipping the Force.⁵⁷ This is the way ahead in an otherwise increasingly uncertain world.

⁵⁶ Gen Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three-Block War,” *Leatherneck*, January 1999, 14–17.

⁵⁷ The 4th MEB deactivated in February 2006 as part of a reorganization. The Security Force Battalion, Anti-Terrorism Battalion, and Chemical-Biological Incident Response Force went to II MEF. The Security Guard Battalion went to Marine Corps Combat Development Command, and Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command assumed command of the Foreign Military Training Unit.

TASK FORCE 58

COMMAND CHRONOLOGY

Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58 Staff

Command chronologies are official historical reports that Marine units submit to Marine Corps History Division. They document the activities of units down to the battalion and squadron level, most commonly in six-month reporting periods. Established in 1965, the command chronology program continues today and constitutes the vast majority of permanent records that the Marine Corps retains. For that reason, they are a vital resource to confirm the lineage and honors of a unit, prepare the official history of the Marine Corps, and even support individuals' Department of Veterans Affairs claims.

Presented here is an abridged account of Task Force 58, drawn from the narrative section of the unit's command chronology. It documents the formation of the task force under command of Brigadier General James N. Mattis, its integration of the 15th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units (Special Operations Capable), and its deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. It reflects not only how the Marine Corps responded to 9/11 but the rapid force generation and immediate operational employment of a Marine Air-Ground Task Force during a crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Marines and Sailors of 15th Marine Expedition-

ary Unit (MEU) Special Operations Capable (SOC) closed Forward Operating Base (FOB) Rhino in southern Afghanistan during the first week of January 2002 and reconstituted aboard the *Peleliu* Amphibious Ready Group in the Northern Arabian Sea. At the same time, several members of the Task Force 58 (TF 58) staff disembarked USS *Peleliu* [LHA-5] while others left FOB Rhino for "temper tents" at Naval Support Activity (NSA) Bahrain. Brigadier General [James N.] Mattis, a small TF 58 staff, and Marines from the 26th MEU (SOC) continued to conduct airfield security operations, detainee security operations, and sensitive site exploitation missions from Kandahar Airport while planning and preparing for on-order combat missions.

The commanding general tasked those staff members returning to Bahrain with collecting operational data, writing a command chronology [and] a classified narrative summary, and documenting the lessons learned during TF 58's operations in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Pertinent documents were collected, cataloged by date, and then archived electronically and in binders. After appointing Major

Michael Mahaney as the principal author, the TF 58 staff, liaison officers from the 15th and 26th MEUs, and a Marine Corps historian met daily to review the documents, discuss the events, and outline a plan for historical documentation. Minutes of the discussions were forwarded to the commanding general and his staff at Kandahar, Afghanistan, for comment.

This account is told from a TF 58 perspective. Its intent is to capture relevant operational data and present the information in a readable format that will contribute to future operations. Others will write the comprehensive histories of operations in southern Afghanistan, and higher, adjacent, and subordinate commands will certainly have their own stories to tell.

FORMING, 27 OCTOBER TO 5 NOVEMBER 2001

Following terrorist attacks on both the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, President [George W.] Bush and his National Security Council developed a global military campaign against terrorism. They quickly identified Osama bin Laden, reported to maintain close ties to the Taliban and al-Qaeda organizations, as having played a key role in the terrorist attacks. These organizations were principally situated in Afghanistan, which lies within the U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM's) area of military responsibility. After receiving additional confirmation of al-Qaeda's involvement in the terrorist incidents and fostering favorable diplomatic, political, and military conditions for a prolonged campaign, America's military response became clear.

During the months of September and October, CENTCOM developed plans for sustained overt and covert military operations against the Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorist organizations in



BGen James N. Mattis, commanding general, Task Force 58, the first Marine to command a naval task force in combat.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DM-SD-02-06293.

Afghanistan. Offensive military operations commenced on 7 October, with intense air and missile strikes that would continue throughout the succeeding months. U.S. Special Forces were committed early in the campaign to assist various Opposition Groups and to provide target designation for coalition air strikes. Members of Task Force Sword conducted the first American ground offensive action of the war on 19 October, raiding Mullah [Mohammad] Omar's Kandahar residence and a remote desert airstrip that would become known to the world as FOB [Forward Operating Base] Rhino.

Although the combined air and special forces operations were successful in helping to shape the battlefield, Taliban forces continued to control a majority of Afghanistan and key leaders within the al-Qaeda organization remained

untouched. By late October, it became apparent that a sustained ground presence would be necessary to destroy the al-Qaeda network and overthrow the Taliban. Despite the potential for employing Marine forces within the CENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR), no official guidance was issued at this time.

During this same period, from September to October 2001, Marines from the 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade (1st MEB) were participating in [Exercise] Bright Star 01/02, a multi-national military exercise in Egypt. While there, Brigadier General James Mattis, commanding general of 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade, was also designated as the commanding general for both Combined Joint Task Force Consequence Management (CJTF CM) and Marine Forces Central Command-Forward (MARCENT-Forward).⁵⁸ Shortly thereafter, members of his staff formed a CJTF CM quartering party and departed Egypt to lay the groundwork for follow-on forces' arrival at Camp Doha, Kuwait. At the conclusion of Bright Star, General Mattis, his aide First Lieutenant Warren C. Cook, and two MEB planners, Lieutenant Colonel Clarke R. Lethin and Major Michael P. Mahaney, "side-stepped" from Egypt to NSA Bahrain on 27 October. . . .

A small operational planning team was formed on 30 October, to collect information and to conduct initial mission analysis of potential amphibious missions. . . . Although the 15th MEU (SOC) was the only amphibious force in the AOR at this time, it was speculated that the 26th MEU (SOC) might become available in the near future. After joining Fifth Fleet on 28

September, the 15th MEU (SOC) had deployed forces ashore to provide security for Combat Search and Rescue aircraft at the airfield in Jacobabad, Pakistan, commencing 7 October. The 26th MEU (SOC) had recently participated in Bright Star and was operating within the European Command AOR conducting a port visit in Souda Bay, Crete, and preparing for a training exercise in Albania.

General Mattis next traveled to Camp Doha, Kuwait, to assess conditions [there] and to meet with members of the CJTF CM advance party on 30 October. . . . While at Camp Doha, General Mattis received a phone call from Colonel John B. Kiser at the MCE [MARCENT Coordination Element] that Vice Admiral Charles W. Moore, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, and Commander, Fifth Fleet, was requesting his presence in Bahrain. This recall was precipitated by a CENTCOM planning order, directing the commencement of planning for amphibious raids into Afghanistan.

At Camp Doha on 30 October, General Mattis conducted an initial commander's estimate of the potential amphibious operation. . . . After returning to Bahrain, General Mattis met with Vice Admiral Moore. Admiral Moore played a critical role in defining command relationships that would continue throughout the duration of the operation by designating General Mattis as the sole commander for TF 58. By doing so, Admiral Moore entrusted more than 8,000 Sailors and Marines from the *Peleliu* and *Bataan* (arrival anticipated) ARGs to a Marine Corps brigadier general. Following their meeting, Admiral Moore directed his staff to request the 26th MEU's presence and relief of the 15th MEU security element in Jacobabad, Pakistan. . . .

On 1 November, NAVCENT [U.S. Naval

⁵⁸ Combined Joint Task Force Consequence Management was an initiative by U.S. Central Command to create an initial response force at Camp Doha, Kuwait, to assess, secure, and assist nations in handling biological, chemical, or nuclear emergencies that might arise in its area of responsibility.



MARCENT Compound-NSA Bahrain by SSgt Michael D. Fay, USMC.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

Forces Central Command] issued its warning order for raids in Afghanistan. “Conduct a minimum of three to five raids into Afghanistan over a 30-day period,” Admiral Moore told General Mattis. General Mattis continued to refine his staff guidance. In order to bring staff and units together as a team, he intended small-scale raids against targets near the southern border using the limited number of CH-53E [Super Stallion heavy-lift helicopters] available. His intent was to start by focusing on the “low-hanging fruit” first, using “easier” targets to develop the fighting skills of the MEUs conducting very long-range operations. These “easier” targets would be the first, because we would have surprise on

our side on the first raid(s). These targets would be tactical raids with strategic-political implications. The commanding general’s initial intent was to establish tactical positions, defend quickly, and leverage the power of Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) aviation and theater Close Air Support (CAS) assets to defeat enemy forces attempting to attack Marine forces. The General wanted to “create chaos, denying the enemy their sense of security.”

Following the stand up of TF 58 on 2 November and less than three days after their arrival in Bahrain, General Mattis and his staff began to actively plan for combat missions in southern Afghanistan. As they continued to de-

velop a concept of operations brief for Admiral Moore, the decision was made not to composite the MEUs. A supported-supporting relationship would be established between the MEUs. While one MEU executed a mission, the second MEU would conduct detailed planning for the follow-on mission. It was decided that the TF 58 staff would conduct the operational planning for the MEUs. In essence, the TF 58 staff would develop plans, validate targets, [and] give mission-type orders to the executing MEU, while focusing on the next mission.

On 3 November, General Mattis briefed Admiral Moore on TF 58's initial concept of operations in southern Afghanistan. The brief was well received, and Admiral Moore provided additional guidance. He emphasized the importance of bold action. Marines were not to conduct a "show of force"; they were to conduct raids that would quickly and decisively defeat Taliban and al-Qaeda forces. The Admiral stated, "Marines don't give themselves enough credit. A squad of Marines running through Kandahar would turn the tide." The Admiral was also interested in TF 58's ability to establish and sustain operations from a FOB in southern Afghanistan for a 30-day period. . . .

PLANNING, 6 NOVEMBER TO 24 NOVEMBER 2001

The first week in November was a busy one for the TF 58 staff. . . . On 7 November, General Mattis met with [Army] Major General [Dell L.] Dailey, commanding general of TF Sword.⁵⁹ This marked the beginning of a relationship that at times proved to be both essential and symbiotic throughout the operation. Although the two had

never met, General Dailey had been operating in southern Afghanistan for more than a month. He openly shared his thoughts on operations in Afghanistan. He made it very clear that both aircraft and Marines would be operating at the very edge of their performance envelope. The dust in southern Afghanistan was so bad that his pilots had to maintain forward movement while taking off and landing to stay ahead of the dust cloud. He also mentioned that "if you establish a FOB at Rhino, the enemy may not even come, because you are Marines." This prediction would eventually prove true. . . .

General Dailey also stated that the presence of Marines ashore would contribute to the loss of strategic power in the Taliban spiritual center of Kandahar and facilitate the enemy's defeat. . . . With close coordination, both agreed that such a move would be mutually beneficial: SOF [special operations force] units would conduct the "surgical" missions, while TF 58 would bring a "ball peen hammer" to the fight. . . .

Shortly after TF 58 was established, the staff realized that a call sign was needed to communicate with other units. Rather than pull a name from a list of unused call signs, the commanding general decided to choose a specific call sign and request[ed] to use it. Coincidentally, General Mattis and the staff were developing his mission statement for operations in Afghanistan. Because the commanding general intended to develop a sense of "chaos" within Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in southern Afghanistan, he decided this would be an appropriate designation for the task force. The request to use "Chaos" was submitted through NAVCENT to CENTCOM and approved on 19 November. . . .

Three concepts of employment were briefed to Admiral Moore on 3 November. These outlined employment options reflecting

⁵⁹ MajGen Dailey, USA, was in charge of Joint Special Operations Command and directed Task Force 11 (Task Force Sword) operations in southern Afghanistan.

different objectives, force packages, and durations of operation. The first option presented a short-duration raid, 6–12 hours long, employing a company-size element approximately 40 miles into Afghanistan, and 350 miles from the sea. The second option utilized a near-simultaneous raid concept, 24–36 hours long, with 2 companies operating on two different objectives. The final option presented a long-duration raid, 48–72 hours long, employing a battalion landing team (BLT) ashore.

These employment options reflected the guidance provided by Admiral Moore to conduct raids, General Dailey to consider establishing a longer-term presence ashore, and General Mattis to start with less-complicated concepts and conduct raids intended to draw the enemy out for attack by aviation assets. General Dailey also speculated again that even if the Marines seized a FOB inside Taliban-controlled territory, the enemy might not even take the offensive against them. Although no preference or guidance was given regarding which concept would be selected, the staff expected to employ all three options at some point during the operation. The plan was continually refined as additional information and intelligence became available and guidance was modified. Eventually, the mission was to change from conducting three to five raids to a mission of seizing a FOB in order to attack lines of communications (LOCs) leading into Kandahar.

Admiral “Willy” Moore’s personality contributed considerably to the success of TF 58’s operation in southern Afghanistan. It was the Admirals’ vision and his confidence in the ability of the Marines to cause chaos in southern Afghanistan. A bold thinker, unrestrained by doctrine or process, it was his enthusiasm that created the task force and enabled the Navy-



VAdm Charles W. Moore, USN, commander of the Fifth Fleet, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, and the theater’s Combined Maritime Force component. He ordered BGen James N. Mattis to take charge of all amphibious forces in theater and form Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58.

Nathan S. Lowrey, *U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001–2002: From the Sea*, U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism series (Washington, DC: History Division, United States Marine Corps, 2011), 79.

Marine team to conduct operations 350 miles inland. . . .

On 10 November, General Mattis delivered the TF 58 concept of operations brief to the Deputy Commander in Chief (DCINC) of CENTCOM and staff via VTC [video-teleconference] from Bahrain. He was told to continue developing plans for operations in southern Afghanistan, and TF 58 was instructed to prepare for seizing and holding a FOB. The TF 58 staff had already anticipated that requirement and continued to assess a desert airstrip known as Rhino, the airstrip General Dailey noted as most supportable for such an operating base. Rhino, a hunting camp with a 6,400-foot-long

dirt airstrip and associated buildings, had been a previous objective of theater special operations forces. Although the concept for the establishment of a FOB in southern Afghanistan was approved shortly following this brief, the initial plan would be refined until the TF 58 staff boarded USS *Peleliu* 10 days later. During this period, the objective would change many times. Initially, the objective was Rhino, but it was subsequently changed to Kandahar Airport, then Herat, followed by Shindand, and back to Rhino, necessitating late nights and dif-fused planning.

The challenge of becoming a single task force lay in integrating the strengths (personal-ity, equipment, and procedures) of each MEU into a common entity. This required the develop-ment of internal command relationships within TF 58, established early by General Mattis with the releasing of a “personal for” (P-4) message to both of the MEU and PHIBRON [amphibious squadron] commanders. After developing a har-monious relationship with his MEU command-ers, the General’s priority became developing a mutually supportive relationship between the two MEU commanders.

Although Marines follow common doctrine and procedures, MEUs were by design intended to be self-contained operational organizations. Their highly trained and exceptionally qualified commanders established SOPs [standing operat-ing procedures] for their organizations based on expected operations and their experience. TF 58 planners dealt with the issue of MEU individual-ity by designing operations that would preserve the unit integrity and capitalize on their well-honed procedures as much as possible, in each of the commands. For example, the 15th MEU was tasked with seizing and securing FOB Rhi-no, while the 26th MEU would flow through to

conduct raid, interdiction, and seizure missions from the FOB. The 26th MEU facilitated the co-ordination process by stationing a two-man liai-son team with the staff. . . .

The TF 58 staff moved aboard USS *Peleliu* on 20 November. The staff and members of the press pool traveled by Marine KC-130 [transport aircraft] from Bahrain to Pasni and from Pasni to the ship by helicopter. Once aboard, they received a formal confirmation brief from the 15th MEU staff in the wardroom that evening. The brief lasted approximately three-and-a-half hours and provided a comprehensive overview of the plan to seize FOB Rhino, showcasing su-perb, detailed planning of the most complex landing plan in anyone’s memory. D-day was es-tablished as 1700Z on 23 November 2001. . . . The Thanksgiving meal was served on board the ships on this day in anticipation of the upcoming operation.

On 21 November, as USS *Bataan* [LHD-5] closed on the *Peleliu* ARG, key PHIBRON 8 and 26th MEU staff members were cross-decked from USS *Bataan* to USS *Peleliu*. The purpose of this movement was to reinforce the integrated nature of TF 58 and to continue coordination planning between the three staffs. After Gener-al Mattis issued his guidance to the assembled staffs, they broke into operating groups and continued to conduct close coordination and plan refinement. General Mattis conducted a separate visit to *Bataan* to address the Navy and Marine officers on board. . . .

Pasni, located on the coast of Pakistan, provided both access from the sea and the air. Movement occurred from the ARG to a beach landing site under the cover of darkness for sub-sequent ground movement to Pasni airfield, ap-proximately an hour drive away. Upon arrival at the airfield, the Pakistanis placed restrictions on



Aboard USS *Bataan* (LHD-5) on 11 December 2001, LCpl Andrew Avant, Sgt Gary Bass, and two sailors raise a flag that flew over Ground Zero. *Bataan* and its amphibious ready group, carrying the 26th MEU, were sailing to rendezvous with the *Peleliu* ARG to support Operation Enduring Freedom. Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DN-SD-02-02601.



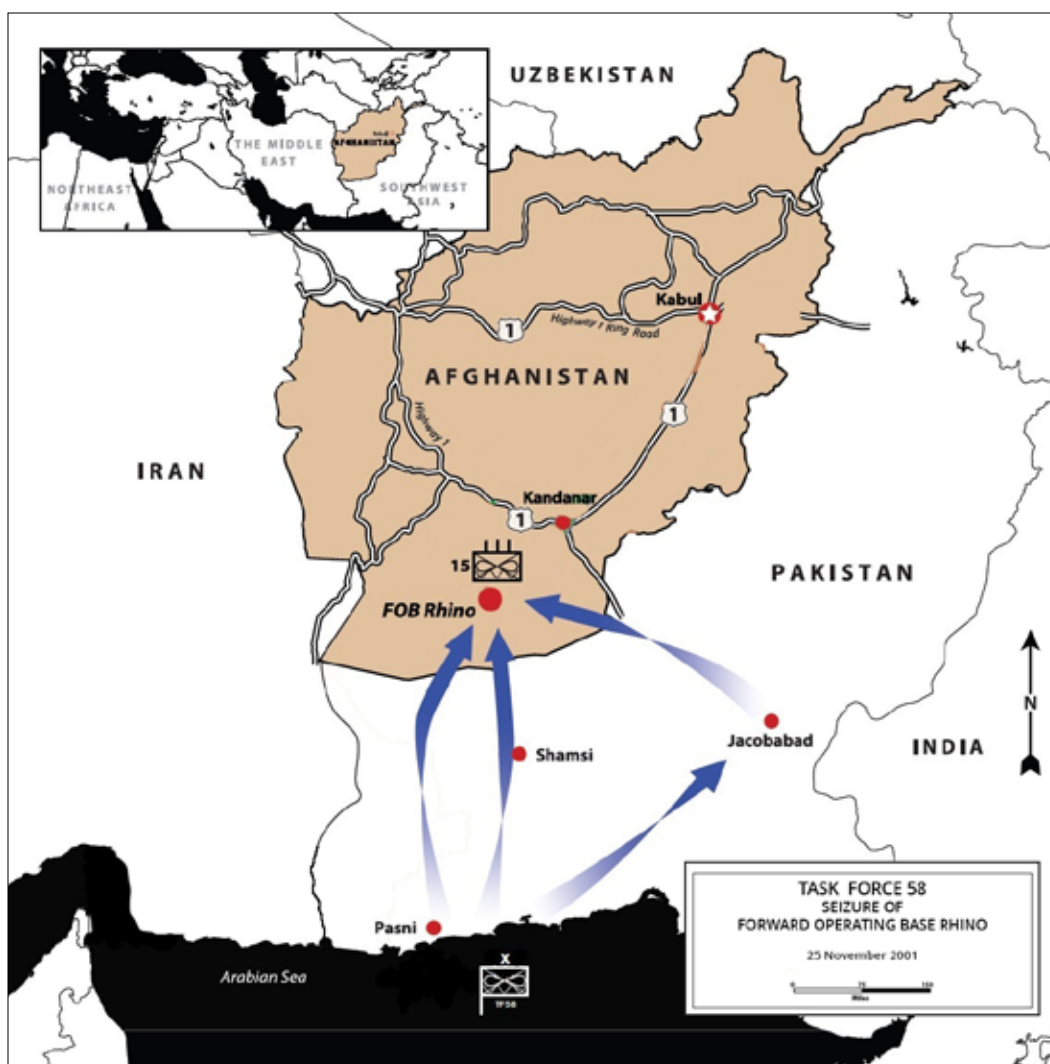
Light and shadows on the flightline by John Deckert.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

the amount of equipment allowed at Pasni at any given time and required that personnel ashore maintain a low profile during the day (initially many of them remaining confined inside hangars). . . .

Shamsi, approximately 90 nautical miles north of Pasni, would provide a critical forward refueling point and staging area for Marine helicopters and personnel en route from the ships to southern Afghanistan. Jacobabad served as the KC-130 staging and refueling site and would be used to pre-stage assault troops for the mission. Although D-day would slide to 25 November, the conditions were set for the commencement of the operation on 23 November 2001.

EXECUTION, 25 NOVEMBER TO 25 DECEMBER

On 25 November 2001, Marines from TF 58 commenced operations to seize FOB Rhino. [Army] General Tommy R. Franks, the CINC [commander-in-chief], stated, “The purpose of the Forward Operating Base is to give us a capability to be an awful lot closer to the core objectives we seek.” Although the operation was originally named Swift Freedom by CENTCOM, within a week, General Franks directed that the Marine operation ashore would not be referred to as a separate operation but as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, the general term for the overall war against terrorism.



Map 2. Task Force 58 seizure of Forward Operating Base Rhino, 25 November 2001.
Courtesy of National Museum of the Marine Corps, adapted by Marine Corps University Press.

Six CH-53Es (three each from the 15th and 26th MEUs) launched from USS *Peleliu* at 1300Z and 1345Z. The first three helicopters conducted night aerial refueling with Marine KC-130s en route to the objective, 350 nautical miles away. The three helicopters in the second wave would have difficulty conducting aerial refueling. The CH-53Es flown by HMH-163 [Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 163], the

“Evil Eyes,” and AH-1W SuperCobra [attack helicopters] were the first aircraft in the landing zone. The helicopters carried Company C (-) reinforced, as well as the commanding officer of Battalion Landing Team 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Bourne, and his jump command post (CP). [U.S. Navy] SEALs had inserted into Rhino on 21 November, and with the change in D-day, had been

conducting surveillance and reconnaissance on the objective for four cold days. In keeping with the previously coordinated deconfliction with TF Sword in time and space, the timing of the operation coincided with a scheduled operational pause for TF Sword. TF 58 conducted a battlefield handover (BHO) with TF Sword while SEALs maintained continual communications with the *Peleliu* ARG. The SEALs would send back real-time photographs of Rhino to the staffs' computers on board *Peleliu*. P-3 [Orion Anti-Surface Warfare Improvement Program] AIP aircraft from [U.S. Fifth Fleet's Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Force] TF 57 provided continual intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance on Rhino throughout the night and on all subsequent nights with TF 58 riders on board.⁶⁰ Intelligence support for the assault had been superb. The trend for intelligence excellence would continue throughout the operation.

The assault force linked-up with the SEALs at Landing Zone Rhino and then proceeded to secure the area and clear the runway for the introduction of follow-on forces. Once the runway was lit by USAF Special Tactics Squadron (STS) personnel and declared KC-130-capable, additional rifle companies from BLT 1/1 flew in on Marine KC-130s from Jacobabad, Pakistan, where they had been pre-positioned. The first KC-130 to land on the dirt airstrip was flown by a VMGR-352 [Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352] detachment aircrew, landing an hour-and-a-half after the insert of the assault force. Marine KC-130s and their courageous crews established and maintained the air bridge into

Rhino. During the following weeks, their efforts provided the bulk of the flights into and out of the forward operating base. A total of 403 Marines and 4 Interim Fast Attack Vehicles (IFAVs) were inserted on the night of D-day.

Company A, embarked on KC-130s, soon joined Company C in the defense of Rhino. They split the objective, with Company C securing the western half and Company A securing the eastern half. Continuous fire support was provided by a section of the BLT's 81mm mortar platoon. CAS was provided by four AH-1W and three UH-1N [Twin Huey] helicopters, four AV-8B Harrier [ground-attack aircraft] from each MEU, and additional abundant Combined Force Air Component Commander fixed-wing aircraft. In accordance with the concept of operations, an engineer platoon cleared the buildings at the compound, while the reconnaissance platoon and scout snipers established observation posts extending the defensive perimeter around Rhino. The TF 58 and the 15th MEU staffs monitored the events on D-day from the landing force operations center aboard USS *Peleliu*. The TF 58 staff deployed a forward observation post into Rhino on D+1. Consisting of General Mattis; a communications team lead by Major Scott [F.] Stebbins, the TF 58 Communications Officer; and [Navy] Lieutenant [Clifford A.] Smith, the [U.S. Navy] Seabee liaison officer, the forward observation post established communications connectivity to the TF 58 staff aboard *Peleliu*. The TF 58 jump command post remained aboard *Peleliu*, maintaining connectivity with TF 58 main staff located in Bahrain. The jump command post remained poised aboard *Peleliu* to go ashore as needed. Eventually, the TF 58 staff would operate from four sites during the operation: Kandahar, Rhino, USS *Peleliu*, and Bahrain.

Shortly after the American flag was raised at

⁶⁰ The P-3C Anti-Surface Warfare Improvement Program included enhancements in sensors, communications, displays and controls, survivability and vulnerability, and weapons capability. The enhanced sensors came to be valuable intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platforms in desert operations during the Global War on Terrorism.

Rhino, it was ordered down. The order to take the flag down came from [CENTCOM headquarters in] Tampa, the rationale behind it the source of widespread speculation among the Marines. As General Mattis conducted his daily walks around the perimeter, this was the most frequently asked question and the most difficult to answer.

During the initial 48 hours of the operation, Marine combat power increased rapidly. While aboard USS *Peleliu*, [Air Force] Captain [Michael J.] Flatten, USAF STS, had established a reputation as a solid advisor, aggressively carrying out his duties in support of TF 58. . . . During the next weeks, Captain Flatten orchestrated operations at the “Rhino International Airport,” coordinating hundreds of fixed- and rotary-wing flights under terrible flying conditions, at night, in and out of the FOB. . . . For Marines who served at Rhino, sunset will be remembered by the roar of KC-130s and C-17 [Globemaster III large military transport aircraft], at a constant tempo, until dawn brought peace and quiet again. . . .

On D+1, JSTARS [Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System] aircraft detected several enemy BMPs [Soviet-era tracked amphibious infantry fighting vehicle] to the northwest of FOB Rhino. After an airborne forward air controller confirmed their identification, Navy F-14 [Tomcat fighter aircraft] from USS *Theodore Roosevelt* [CVN-71] and Marine AH-1Ws from FOB Rhino attacked the vehicles. Rather than slow the high tempo of air operations into FOB Rhino, this engagement emphasized the requirement for C-17 aircraft and their ability to support the rapid buildup of LAV [light armored vehicle] combat power.

The first wave of C-17 aircraft arrived at FOB Rhino on 28 November, transporting Sea-



Marines with 15th MEU (SOC) raise the first American flag in Afghanistan on 26 November 2001. U.S. Central Command would later order the flag removed.

Department of Defense photo (USMC) 011125-M-4912C-006.

bees from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 133. The aircraft were part of a squadron that specialized in operating on dirt landing zones. As part of the air detachment at Guam, the Seabees had flown by C-5 [Galaxy large military transport aircraft] to Diego Garcia before transloading to C-17s in theater for the final leg into Rhino. Immediately after landing, the Seabees began grading the airstrip. The decision to insert Seabees vice additional combat power had been debated among the staff, but Lieutenant Clifford Smith provided his expertise and influence during the discussion. His input was critical to



U.S. Air Force C-17A Globemaster III transport aircraft were vital to flowing personnel and equipment into FOB Rhino.

Nathan S. Lowrey, *U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001–2002: From the Sea*, U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism series (Washington, DC: History Division, United States Marine Corps, 2011), 100.

the decision to flow Seabees in early, ensuring continued buildup of combat power and sustainment. During the following days and weeks, the Seabees' rapid runway repair capability significantly enhanced TF 58's ability to not only maintain the airfield but also improve the overall condition of the forward operating base. . . .

Environmental conditions at Rhino were austere, and Marines manning fighting holes were subjected to difficult living conditions. The sand was similar in consistency to talcum powder, and when disturbed it created billowing clouds of dust that lingered for a quarter of an hour before settling down. The fine dust created by the previous evening's sustainment flights

was pervasive, and Marines had to continually sweep the dust from their weapons, equipment, and workspaces. There was little in the way of vegetation and, intermingled with the rocks and debris, small patches of dried sticks poked up through the sand. For all of the dust that endangered flight operations, grunts digging in on the perimeter had to dig through limestone in most cases. Daytime temperatures rose to 80 degrees [Fahrenheit], only to drop to 30 degrees at night. "There is ice in our canteens in the morning, and the parkas we have practically save our lives," stated a squad leader with Company A, BLT 1/1, 15th MEU (SOC). Rations had to be flown in each day, and, during the six weeks that



Teamwork by Morgan Ian Wilbur. U.S. Navy Seabees were integral to Marine success in southern Afghanistan, constructing airfields that enabled Task Force 58 to build up and sustain combat power. U.S. Navy Art Collection.

FOB Rhino was operational, the Marines dined on Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) and two liters of bottled water per day. . . .

The Marines quickly adapted to Afghanistan and settled into a way of life captured by a reporter from *Newsweek* magazine: “At night the grunts did virtually anything to keep themselves awake and entertained. Shivering in the

cold 30-degree cold, they sang lewd songs, talked about how ready they were to kill and pondered the discos and clubs they would head out to when they returned home as heroes.” On 29 November, as the buildup of personnel and equipment continued at Rhino, CINCCENT and NAVCENT notified the TF 58 staff that a force cap was being placed on the number of Marines

and Sailors allowed at FOB Rhino. Initially set at 1,000, then 1,078, the cap was later increased back to 1,100 and then 1,400. This contrasted sharply with TF 58's original concept for operations at Rhino, which called for the 26th MEU to arrive shortly after the 15th MEU secured the FOB and move quickly against Kandahar's LOCs [lines of communication]. It also created additional force protection issues by hindering the Marines' ability to quickly reinforce forces currently ashore in southern Afghanistan. With the ships 350 miles away, a shipborne reserve was not capable of intervening in a timely manner. The emplacement of the force cap denied the commander the ability to maintain an operational shock absorber.

When the force cap was imposed, the 15th MEU was completing its insertion of combat power into Rhino, and the 26th MEU was staging equipment and personnel at Pasni, Pakistan, in preparation for the follow-on flow. The force cap caused a pause in operations, stopping the buildup of combat power in southern Afghanistan. The 15th MEU had to prioritize personnel and equipment, sending 102 of its members back to USS *Peleliu*. Although the cap did not apply directly to special operations forces and coalition forces that intended to operate from Rhino, it influenced their flow into the FOB indirectly. Because the coalition forces required Marine logistics support, a decrease in the assets available to TF 58 subsequently reduced the number of coalition forces that we could sustain. The force cap did not apply to naval forces in Pakistan. The cap did, however, force TF 58 to develop an impromptu retrograde plan for returning staged personnel and equipment to the ARG. The majority of the 26th MEU's personnel and equipment were retained aboard USS *Bataan*. Many subordinate commanders spent inor-

dinate amounts of time focused on swapping out men who were needed at Rhino, flying them out of dusty, dangerous Rhino to replace them with other Marines whose skills were more urgently required. . . .

After seizing the forward operating base, TF 58's mission planning included lines of communication interdiction operations along Route 1, a key road situated to the north of Rhino connecting Lashkar Gah with Kandahar. TF 58 directed the interdiction of Route 1 and included mobile assets from the 26th MEU. Requests were sent to CENTCOM through NAVCENT for relief from the force cap. TF 58 required additional forces to be able to continue FOB security and to send a significant combat force north to conduct the lines of communication interdiction. The request for relief from the force cap was eventually approved, and a new ceiling was established at 1,400 Marines and Sailors ashore in southern Afghanistan. This happened only after [Army] Major General Warren C. Edwards, Deputy CCFLCC [Coalition Forces Land Component Command], a constant voice and fighter for the Marines, forcefully intervened. CENTCOM then issued confusing guidance contrary to the OpOrder [operations order], stating that TF 58's only role was to seize a forward operating base (not interdict lines of communication), further complicating the situation. The same day that CTF 58 was told by CENTCOM that the Marines' sole job was to seize Rhino, he received a FRAGO [fragmentary order] to interdict Route 1 in order to isolate Kandahar.

Supplies, equipment, and personnel continued to be airlifted into Rhino each night. The high volume of air traffic caused extraordinary degradation to the dirt airstrip, and the Seabees were required to conduct intensive 24-hour runway maintenance to keep the airfield opera-



Map 3. 15th MEU Route 1 interdiction mission, 4–14 December 2001.
 Courtesy of National Museum of the Marine Corps, adapted by Marine Corps University Press.

tional. As conditions worsened, the Seabees had to fly in additional equipment, road graders and compactors, and personnel, further complicating the force cap issue. . . .

TF 58 received the order to execute the lines of communication interdiction operation along Route 1 on 3 December. Although the intent was to block Taliban and al-Qaeda forces traveling along Route 1, the CFLCC refined his

guidance during the upcoming days to “prevent/deny the escape” of Taliban and al-Qaeda forces from Afghanistan. This priority mission would consume the 15th MEU operations for the next 10 days. . . .

Reconnaissance elements led the way to Route 1, followed by 15th MEU LAVs on 4 December. The 75-mile, 19-hour motor march across the uncharted desert proved to be difficult

and time consuming. Some vehicles had 80,000 tactical miles on them before beginning the journey and had to be “coaxed” throughout the trip. Four vehicles simply broke down, requiring towing. Additional fuel beyond the original estimates was also required. The interdiction force overcame these obstacles and moved toward the site chosen for establishing a tactical patrol base west of Kandahar.

TF 58 forces at FOB Rhino received additional mission tasking on 5 December. An Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) team and special operations forces, operating with OG [Operational Group] Karzai to the northeast of Rhino, requested TF 58 helicopter support in evacuating combat casualties. Although the casualties were initially reported as having been received during an ongoing enemy mortar attack, it eventually became clear that they occurred during a fratricide incident involving CAS. Because the incident occurred during daylight hours, TF 58 had reservations about sending helicopters into what it was initially told was an ongoing firefight. As details became clear, several CH-53E and AH-1W helicopters were launched in support of the ODA team. The 15th MEU shock trauma platoon, which had arrived at Rhino the evening before and had conducted a mass casualty drill, readied themselves for the receipt of casualties. When the helicopters arrived, Marines helped transport the wounded to the aid station. . . .

Thirty-nine casualties were brought to FOB Rhino for triage. Nineteen U.S. personnel were transferred to an Air Force C-130 Joint Medevac Aviation Unit and flown to theater Level III medical facilities. Twenty Afghan casualties (one killed in action) were taken by CH-53E helicopter to *Peleliu* and *Bataan*. One of the helicopters had to return to FOB Rhino due to a FODded

engine. . . .⁶¹ The patients were transferred to another CH-53E that departed immediately for the ships. More than 100 hours were logged in USS *Peleliu*’s 4 operating rooms, where 36 life- and limb-saving procedures were performed. Aboard USS *Bataan*, two surgeons conducted 29 surgical procedures in a 29-hour period, and all surgeries were completed within 60 hours of arrival. . . .

It was a busy night for the Marines of TF 58 on 6 December. At approximately 1645Z, security forces at Rhino observed light flashes to the north and northwest of FOB Rhino. After P-3 aircraft orbiting overhead confirmed individuals loading vehicles, BLT 1/1 engaged suspected enemy positions with 81mm mortars. An LAV patrol was sent out to investigate, but no equipment or personnel were found. The Marines in Rhino remained at a heightened state of alert throughout the evening, and remaining flights into Rhino were cancelled.

Shortly after the enemy sighting, a UH-1N helicopter burst into flames near the airfield. The pilots became disoriented in brownout conditions while launching in support of [an] LAV interdiction mission along Route 1 and crashed. All crew members survived due to the quick thinking and rescue efforts of fellow Marines. As flames engulfed the aircraft and ammunition began to cook off, ordnance personnel from the aviation combat element and Marines from MEU Service Support Group 15 struggled and succeeded in moving a fuel truck that had been parked only 15 feet away. Throughout this incident, the BLT employed mortars and MK-19 [grenade launchers] in defense of the perimeter.

Later that evening, at 2350Z, Marines along Route 1 engaged in a firefight. P-3 aircraft reported the movement of up to six vehicles to-

⁶¹ Acronym used in aviation for foreign object debris.



Map 4. Task Force 58's seizure of Kandahar International Airport, 14 December 2001.
Courtesy of National Museum of the Marine Corps, adapted by Marine Corps University Press.

ward the interdiction site where the ambush was set. After the column stopped momentarily, one vehicle sped toward the Marines' concertina wire roadblock. The truck stopped when it became tangled in the wire, and the Marines immediately opened fire, causing the vehicle to burst into flames. Marines confirmed seven enemy dead. One of the individuals, on fire, had attempted to flee and was quickly dispatched by a Marine sniper. After the explosion, the other

enemy vehicles attempted to move into a position north of the road, perhaps trying to move past the ambush site. Major [Timothy J.] Oliver, the TF 58 P-3 observer, saw up to 30 individuals dismount from the vehicles and begin to form a skirmish line. CAS aircraft, quickly directed onto the target by the P-3, and a Marine forward air controller (call sign "Neck") destroyed all of the vehicles, one of them immediately after the skirmish line remounted. The following day, vil-

lagers reported that it was an enemy convoy, and they estimated 120 casualties. The P-3 detected no movement along Route 1 between Lashkar Gah and Kandahar on succeeding nights. . . .

During the preceding weeks, CFLCC and CFMCC [Combined Forces Maritime Component Command] told the Marines to be prepared to receive detainees and provide temporary holding facilities until arrangements could be made to transfer them elsewhere. TF 58 staff afloat was tasked with preparing a CONOP [concept of operations] for the handling of detainees afloat and the prioritization of U.S. Fifth Fleet assets (landing helicopter assault, landing helicopter dock, and aircraft carrier) to receive high-value detainees. The first of many detainees arrived at Rhino on 7 December. He was an American citizen named Johnny Walker [Lindh], who had been captured while fighting for the Taliban. The decision was made to secure Johnny Walker at FOB Rhino until he could be transferred to the *Peleliu* ARG. Upon arriving at Rhino, Walker immediately received medical attention. Under a 24-hour guard, his sanitation needs were met, and medical personnel evaluated his condition twice a day. He was given two MREs per day, later raised to three, and all the water he wanted. . . . Walker was transferred to USS *Peleliu* on 14 December.

As OG [special operations and anti-Taliban] forces continued to make progress against Taliban and al-Qaeda forces throughout Afghanistan, U.S. government officials began preparing to reopen the U.S. embassy in Kabul, which had been closed since 1997. On 7 December, CFLCC directed TF 58 to provide a security force to assist the Department of State in this endeavor. General Mattis assigned the mission to the 26th MEU, which rapidly planned a superb operation. Two days later, Captain [James] P. McDonough

and elements of Battery K, 3d Battalion, 10th Marines, departed the ARG for Bagram Airfield, located approximately 25 miles north of Kabul. British forces and a small contingent of soldiers from the U.S. [Army's] 10th Mountain Division were also operating in the area. The airfield was heavily mined, and just days prior to the arrival of the security force a British soldier had been injured by a mine.

Marines from the 26th MEU flew into Bagram Airfield on 9 December for subsequent link-up with Department of State personnel and elements of TF Bagram, 10th Mountain Division, for further transport to the embassy in Kabul. The Marines arrived at night and, after coordinating with TF Bagram, moved via buses to the embassy compound in Kabul. The Marines quickly established security at the embassy compound and during the following days continued to increase security and prepare the embassy for the introduction of Department of State personnel. Captain McDonough captured the significance of the occasion: "As soon as we raise the flag, this will become the most valuable piece of property here. We're on U.S. sovereign territory, and we'll protect it as such." The Marines of TF 58 continued to provide security at the embassy until relieved by members of [the] 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (4th MEB), led by Captain [Farrell J.] Sullivan, on 27 December.

At this time, the OG forces enjoyed continued success throughout much of Afghanistan, and the overall situation began to shift rapidly. As the enemy's hold over the Kandahar region began to deteriorate, TF 58 was tasked to occupy the city's airport in conjunction with OG forces operating in the area. TF 58 had been considering such an operation since November and had assessed the feasibility of both seizure and



Post #1, Kabul, by SSgt Michael D. Fay, USMC.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.



Marines from Company A, 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, conduct a mounted patrol near Kandahar on 17 January 2002. Their light armored vehicle-25 (LAV-25) is armed with a 25mm chain gun and a 7.62mm machine gun.

Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DM-SD-02-06492.

secure missions. Although the original concept was to employ the 26th MEU as the main effort, it was now evident that assets from both MEUs were required. The 15th MEU would lead the operation by using its LAV force, then conducting the interdiction mission along Route 1 west of Kandahar, while the 26th MEU contributed a heliborne infantry company, additional LAVs, and helicopter support. In addition to the military operation, the TF 58 staff had to consider coordination with OG forces in the area. These forces maintained positions around Kandahar, and their assistance in moving to and occupying Kandahar was essential. . . .

Until this time, the 15th MEU had been conducting the lines of communication interdiction

mission north of Rhino along Route 1, while the 26th MEU had been conducting screening operations west of the forward operating base. Now, LAVs from the 15th MEU held in place, waiting for those from the 26th MEU (TF Sledgehammer) to join them. TF Sledgehammer consisted of LAVs and Combined Anti-Armor Team HM-MWVs [high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles] from the 26th MEU. The plan called for TF Sledgehammer to proceed north along the Helmand River through the town of Lashkar Gah, then east to Route 1 to their linkup with the LAV company under Major [Thomas J.] Impellitteri. This movement involved a lengthy journey across desert and potential hostile territory. Those moving forward were refueled and



Map 5. Operation to reopen the U.S. embassy in Kabul, 8–10 December 2001.
 Courtesy of National Museum of the Marine Corps, adapted by Marine Corps University Press.

resupplied in the field, while 15th MEU personnel and equipment not involved in the Kandahar movement returned to Rhino.

General Mattis's forward observation post joined the combined LAV force on 13 December, shortly after the link-up 800 meters south of Route 1, 40 miles west of Kandahar. As evening drew close, the LAV-led convoy linked up with Army special forces/OG fighters and then pro-

ceeded east to the city completing a cold, four-hour passage through the battle-scarred city of Kandahar. The trip to the airport occurred without incident, and after the assault force secured the east end of the runway, Company I, BLT 3/6, 26th MEU, flew in on CH-53E helicopters to bolster security. AH-1Ws, AV-8Bs from USS *Bataan*, and other coalition close air support aircraft provided on-call close air support through-



Marines from the 26th MEU leave the flightline and walk past the terminal of Kandahar Airport. Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DM-SD-02-07436.

out the mission. The CFLCC commander and his staff observed the movement via a real-time feed from an [MQ-1] Predator [drone aircraft].

By morning of 14 December, TF 58 had established their second forward operating base in Afghanistan. Marines from the 26th MEU then began the onerous task of cleaning and repairing the runway for Marine KC-130 aircraft. On 15 December, following a short pause due to what appeared to be ground fire in the vicinity of Kandahar (which turned out to be small-arms fire in celebration of the end of Ramadan), the first of many Marine KC-130s landed at Kandahar Airport. After multiple airfield opening and assessment teams declared the runway safe, the first C-17 arrived on 18 December (a total of five U.S. Air Force airfield assessment teams would eventually pass through Kandahar). . . .

As planning for an SSE [sensitive site exploitation] mission in the vicinity of FOB Rhino neared completion, TF 58 was tasked with

planning a mission to attack enemy forces in the Tora Bora region, more than 200 miles north and to the east of Kandahar, in the mountainous border region adjoining Pakistan. The region had been the site of numerous engagements between Soviet and Afghan forces [during the Soviet-Afghan War]. The area had extremely mountainous terrain (14,000-foot mountains) and numerous caves that required inspection. As TF 58 planners began to develop and assess the requirements for the mission, they realized that Marines in desert utilities and boots at Rhino would require cold-weather equipment for the mission.

Although tentatively assigned another [CENTCOM] force cap limiting the number of Marines that could be sent north, a steady flow of 26th MEU forces from the *Bataan* ARG to Kandahar began in earnest. Most traveled from Pasni, Pakistan, to FOB Rhino to the Kandahar Airport. Although the number of Marines in

Afghanistan swelled significantly, it was clear that TF 58 required all of its combat power to accomplish the myriad missions it had been assigned, and higher headquarters refrained from mentioning the force cap again. . . .

It was during this time on 14 December that Marines from the 15th MEU conducted the SSE mission to the west of Rhino. Meanwhile, the Tora Bora mission was anticipated to be a major undertaking, and preparations continued in anticipation of an execute order from higher.

TF 58 and 15th MEU planners were kept quite busy by the pace of operations set in southern Afghanistan. They had just recovered Marines from an interdiction mission along Route 1, sent Marines forward to secure the airport at Kandahar, and were now planning for near SSE exploitation operations in both southern and northeastern Afghanistan. The 26th MEU was gainfully employed securing and opening Kandahar Airport. As the CBIST [Chemical Biological Intelligence Support Team] concluded operations in the vicinity of Kandahar Airfield, plans for the sites in the vicinity of Rhino along the Helmand River were finalized, and the focus switched to execution. TF 64 [Australian special operations forces] collaborated closely with the 15th MEU along with available CBIST personnel. TF 58 inserted TF 64 vehicles and equipment by helicopter, and the Australians conducted strategic reconnaissance, enabling the scheme to be modified up to the point of departure.

In concert with the CBIST, TF 58 was to search the region's eight villages for intelligence information and any evidence of radiological or chemical weapons. Planners from the 15th MEU had planned for the daylight helicopter insertion of a small platoon-size element of Marines in the vicinity of one of the eight villages. Lieutenant

Colonel [Asad A.] Khan, an Urdu speaker from the CENTCOM Pakistan Liaison Cell in Islamabad, accompanied the CBIST. The 15th MEU plan relied upon Lieutenant Colonel Khan's ability to communicate with the local villagers.

Under the cover of ground security forces, which included IFAVs [interim fast attack vehicles] and helicopter gunships, Marines and OG forces approached the village compound in a non-threatening manner and requested to speak to the village elder. While conversing with the elder and handing out cigarettes and candy, the Marines requested permission to conduct an escorted walk-through of the village compound. Following the first search, the Marines moved out on foot and repeated the process at the other seven compounds. Throughout the mission, crowds of curious onlookers, primarily children, met the Marines. The Marines had prepared for this and were able to hand out candy, fruit, pens, pencils, and paper. The children were keenly interested in the writing instruments and paper. Nothing unusual was discovered during the searches, and the mission was completed without incident. After being extracted by helicopter, the Marines returned to Rhino and continued to prepare for Tora Bora. Although well planned, TF 58 would never execute the Tora Bora mission, which was officially canceled on 9 January 2002. The use of Marines had been proposed by [General Franks] to "encourage" the OG forces to re-energize their operations and clean out Tora Bora completely. His plan worked, but the Marines were disappointed to miss the chance for a fight.

Considering the austere conditions, morale for the Marines and Sailors at Rhino and Kandahar was exceptionally high, and it reinforced their cocky, macho attitude. Numerous personalities visited both forward operating bases

during the Christmas holiday. The Commandant of the Marine Corps [General James L. Jones] and General [Michael W.] Hagee, CG I MEF [commanding general of I Marine Expeditionary Force], arrived at Rhino and Kandahar on 19 December, followed two days later by [General Franks]. General Jones and General Hagee toured the perimeter positions and spoke to assembled Marines throughout the night.

Following a visit with KC-130 detachment Marines and airmen at Jacobabad, [Franks] flew into Rhino on a C-17 and brought members of a USO show with him. Marines gathered in a huge warehouse that served as the billeting area, leaving space for [Franks] and his guests. Wayne Newton, Drew Carey, Neil McCoy, and two Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders spent approximately an hour at Rhino. The Marines and Sailors were thrilled to see all the celebrities, though the cheerleaders were most popular. . . .

Although on high alert, Christmas proved relatively uneventful for TF 58. Special food boxes were prepared by Navy Morale Welfare and Recreation in Bahrain, thanks to Admiral Moore's initiative, and were very well received by the Marines, Sailors, and coalition forces all over southern Afghanistan. (Hot holiday meals could not be provided due to the distances from the ships.) The ARG ships also prepared nonperishable food and treats, which they sent to the forces ashore. Major [Robert] "Brutus" Charette [Jr.], the TF 58 air officer, coordinated a Christmas day air show for the Marines. Two F/A-18 Hornets and two F-14 Tomcats from USS *Theodore Roosevelt* spent 20 minutes in the sky over Rhino performing complex and impressive maneuvers. When the show was over, the aircraft proceeded to their refueling rendezvous point and then continued on to their assigned target

in northern Afghanistan. Additionally, the President of the United States called Marines and Sailors serving in Afghanistan. . . .

TF 58 Sailors and Marines patriotically participated in two ceremonial flag raisings in Kandahar. Marines from both the 15th and 26th MEUs raised a flag that New York City firefighters had previously flown over the ruins of the World Trade Center to honor the country and pay tribute to those who perished in the tragic events of 11 September. Then on 1 January 2002, Marines again ceremoniously raised the American flag in Kandahar, but this time alongside the Afghan national flag. General Mattis stated, "This symbolic gesture solidifies the close, working relationship we have established with the Afghans here." Governor Shirzai proclaimed, "Peace, unity and friendship" when referring to the colors flying high. This joint effort was indicative of the task force's efforts to disassociate ourselves from the Soviet Army's recent occupation. We were not doing things to Afghanistan, but with Afghanistan. The TF 58 staff started planning for the reembarkation and reconstitution of 15th MEU forces aboard the ARG well prior to Christmas. As the New Year arrived, the 15th MEU had nearly completed their reembarkation aboard the ARG, and the focus would become Kandahar Airport and the 26th MEU.

CONTINUING OPERATIONS, 13 DECEMBER 2001 TO 26 FEBRUARY 2002

In Kandahar, with the situation and facilities improving daily, General Mattis pressed hard to close dusty, dangerous Rhino. Eventually, permission was given to close FOB Rhino and transfer all Marine operations to the Kandahar Airfield. . . . While the 15th MEU focused on re-



Map 6. Forward Operating Base Rhino closure and repositioning of forces, 24 December 2001–4 January 2002. Courtesy of National Museum of the Marine Corps, adapted by Marine Corps University Press.

embarkation, the 26th MEU continued to build forces and improve security in Kandahar. The 26th MEU repositioned the bulk of its forces in Kandahar for anticipated operations in the vicinity and to the north. In mid-December, CFLCC notified TF 58 to be prepared to receive detainees at Rhino and eventually at Kandahar. . . . High-value detainees were quickly transferred to the brig on board *Peleliu* for segregation and

interrogation. . . . Rhino was an austere environment and not a suitable site to hold detainees. . . . Once the Marines occupied Kandahar, detainee security became the responsibility of the 26th MEU. While the runway was being repaired and sufficient security was in place at the airport, the Marines and Seabees began construction of a temporary holding facility for detainees, converting a rubbish- and ord-

nance-strewn compound into an austere detainee camp. This task was complicated by the fact that Kandahar Airport had severe limitations on the space available for use due to extensive unmapped minefields emplaced around the airport during the Soviet occupation.

On 19 December the first enemy detainee had been delivered to Kandahar. By 21 December, a short-term holding facility at Kandahar had been constructed to support 200 detainees; this would eventually be increased to a maximum capacity of 500 by the indefatigable, hard-working Seabees. As soon as the facility opened, the International Committee of the Red Cross was welcomed to ensure complete compliance with the Geneva Convention. They conducted intensive daily visits with prisoners and met routinely with CTF 58 [General Mattis]. . . .

While there was a debate at higher levels regarding the detainees' legal status, General Mattis dictated that they would be treated in accordance with [the] Geneva Convention's rules for treatment of prisoners of war. . . . The bulk of the detainees arriving from facilities in Pakistan and northern Afghanistan occurred in late December and early January. TF 58 struggled with balancing security requirements for the airfield, mission tasking for sensitive site exploitation, and the security and medical requirements for the detainees. Eventually, a U.S. Army military police unit would assist the Marines in the detention security and running of the short-term holding facility. . . . During the first week in January, TF 58 received guidance from CFLCC to prepare to move detainees to a holding facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. . . .

The media, in particular the Cable News Network [CNN], provided the viewing public with insight into the conditions and morale of the TF 58 forces at the airport. Reporter Bill Hem-

mer interviewed numerous Sailors and Marines and allowed many of them to send greetings home to their families and loved ones. The inner courtyard of the airport had a nightly crowd of 50 or more lined up to greet their loved ones back in the States. The media coverage that he provided was positive and beneficial for TF 58 personnel and the viewing public worldwide. Despite the fact that CNN was due to leave after the holidays, the ratings for the programming were so high that they remained at Kandahar for several more weeks. CNN was at the airport on 1 January to capture a joint flag raising ceremony as Marines and members of the Afghan government raised the U.S. and Afghan flags. As the flags went up at Kandahar Airport, the majority of the TF 58 staff, recently returned from Rhino and USS *Peleliu* to Bahrain, began organizing and preparing to capture the historical record of TF 58. Seven TF 58 staff members would remain in Kandahar with [General Mattis] to continue to support Navy-Marine operations in Afghanistan. . . .

[General Franks] had made the decision to conduct a relief-in-place between TF 58 and elements of the 101st Airborne Division, Task Force Rakkasan, as part of the original concept of operations in Afghanistan. The relief-in-place would entail a complete turnover of the security functions and capabilities at the airport and associated missions assigned to TF 58. The projected timeline for the relief-in-place was set for 10 January, but strategic lift prioritization and availability caused delays to the schedule. As soldiers took over a specific function, i.e., perimeter security, Marines became available to execute other taskings. To speed the process, TF 58 used one of its own KC-130s to transfer one of the 101st rifle companies from Jacobabad to Kandahar to assist effecting the relief process. . . .



A CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter from HMM-365 delivers Marines assigned to the 26th MEU (SOC) to an undisclosed mountaintop location in Afghanistan.
Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DN-SD-04-12762.

TF 58 received an order to begin planning for a mission in the Khowst-Gardez area of Afghanistan. Because the local ATF [anti-Taliban forces] commander in Khowst-Gardez did not defeat any forces in the area (he had just raised the anti-Taliban flag), numerous pockets of enemy forces remained. To meet [General Franks's] intent to prevent the escape of enemy forces, a significant force would be required for operations in the region. The area was in the vicinity and comprised of the same rugged terrain as Tora Bora. The cold weather gear that had been earmarked for the 15th MEU and the Tora Bora mission now would be required for the Marines of the 26th MEU. Mission planning included the use of LAVs to support the operation. This complicated the operation, as the Marines would

have to conduct a 40-hour road march from Kandahar. . . .

Based on the 250-nautical-mile distance and the need to be responsive to operations in the area, planners quickly determined that an airfield in the Khowst-Gardez area was necessary. The airfield could be used as a FARP [forward arming and refueling point] and if suitable could also be used by Marine KC-130 aircraft to flow additional forces and to provide sustainment to the forces in the field. . . .

The number of organizations operating in the area complicated the Khowst mission. In addition to the sensitive site exploitation missions, coalition efforts were ongoing to work with the local population to stem the tribal infighting and power struggle in the region. Over-

all, the mission was complex and the operating environment very difficult. TF 58 continued to “lean into” the operation conducting S&R [surveillance and reconnaissance], airfield surveys, and positioning security forces to support. The Khowst operation would never require a sizeable TF 58 presence and eventually became a series of independent yet linked operations conducted by many different organizations.

The Marines of the KC-130 detachments continued to provide the bulk of the lift into and out of Kandahar. The discipline and commitment of these pilots and aircrew were critical to the efficiency in which operations were conducted in support of Navy and Marine forces. Daily, these aircrew would risk their lives flying in difficult, unforgiving conditions delivering cargo to support the Marines and Sailors on the ground. The Marine KC-130s were also instrumental to sustaining all operations being conducted in Afghanistan. Tragically, on 9 January, a KC-130 from VMGR-352 crashed while on final approach into Shamsi, Pakistan. Marines providing security at Shamsi quickly climbed aboard CH-46 [Sea Knight medium-lift helicopters] to move to the crash site, while Pakistani soldiers at the airfield immediately sent forces to the site by foot. The crash site was located in steep, difficult terrain, complicating search and recovery efforts. The Marines aboard the CH-46 would have to return to the airfield, unable to find a suitable landing zone at the crash site. Under zero illumination, and with secondary explosions occurring, the Pakistanis scaled the steep mountainside with little regard for their own safety. Their efforts were indicative of the close bond established in support of the U.S.-led anti-terrorism effort. Combat search and rescue aircraft were also dispatched from Jacobabad. Despite the quick response to the crash

scene, which included the heroic efforts of two Pakistani Army officers, rescue crews determined that all seven Marines aboard perished in the crash. In the next several days, all of the bodies from the aircraft would be recovered and returned to the United States. The deceased Marines were Captain Matthew [W.] Bancroft, Captain Daniel [G.] McCollum, Gunnery Sergeant Stephen [L.] Bryson, Staff Sergeant Scott [N.] Germosen, Sergeant Nathan [P.] Hays, Sergeant Jeanette [L.] Winters, and Lance Corporal Bryan [P.] Bertrand.

Coalition forces also continued to flow into Kandahar Airport. British, German, Norwegian, and Jordanian forces all began to arrive, joining Australian, New Zealand, Dutch, Turkish, and Canadian forces already there, placing additional stress on communications, logistics, and the available space at the airport. Much of the area surrounding the airport was heavily mined, and expansion to accommodate the additional equipment and personnel required that certain areas be demined. One of the coalition forces to arrive was the Norwegian Army contingent, equipped with a mine flail that proved itself to be very useful during mine clearing operations. Led by Major Treeva Enger, the 15-man detachment was ready, eager, and willing to tackle the minefield problem. Without complaint and with only a mission-type order, they methodically ran their flail, which proofed the entire perimeter of the airfield. They unselfishly provided the Jordanian mine clearing detachment with items and equipment that would allow their participation in effort. Briefing his daily plan, Major Enger would coordinate the actions of his detachment, ensuring that [General Mattis’s] intent was met. He and his conscript troops were an inspiration as they happily charged into mined areas each day.



During their retrograde from Afghanistan on 5 February 2002, fatigued Marines from Company L, Battalion Landing Team 3/6, relax in Pasni, Pakistan, while awaiting transport back to the *Bataan* ARG. Nathan S. Lowrey, *U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001–2002: From the Sea*, U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism series (Washington, DC: History Division, United States Marine Corps, 2011), 253.

On 10 January, Admiral Moore visited the Marines and sailors at Kandahar. . . . That evening at approximately 1630Z, Kandahar Airport was probed by enemy patrols and small-arms fire. The firing came from the north and west of the airport, and the 26th MEU Marines on the perimeter responded quickly. Marines returned fire with small arms, 40mm grenades, 25mm cannon, and 60mm and 81mm illumination rounds. Rotary-wing close-air support responded to the threat, and all fires and actions were deconflicted with the ATF commander. Flight arrivals were temporarily suspended during the action. Soldiers from the 101st [Airborne Division] who just arrived at Kandahar as part of the

relief-in-place force had a rude welcome to Kandahar. Having to take cover, the soldiers found themselves in proximity to a firefight, lacking ammunition due to [the] Air Force's insistence that they not fly with ammunition on Air Mobility Command aircraft. At approximately 1900Z, TF 58 returned to normal security operations and re-opened the runway. . . .

On 15 January, TF 58 remained poised and ready to conduct the mission in the Khowst-Gardez region and elsewhere in southern and eastern Afghanistan. The situation remained fluid in the region: Many units were conducting operations, and many remained posed for operations. Poor weather and ongoing mission analysis

NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION FOR THE FIFTH FLEET

Task Force 58 was part of a massive response to the attacks, operating within the U.S. Fifth Fleet, the naval component that carried the opening phase of the war in Afghanistan from the sea. The fleet comprised nearly 60 ships from six nations and incorporated the 15th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units. Below is the Navy Unit Commendation citation for the Fifth Fleet's operations between 11 September 2001 and 3 March 2002.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20350-1000

2 October 2002

The Secretary of the Navy takes pleasure in presenting the NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION to
UNITED STATES FIFTH FLEET BATTLE FORCE
for service as set forth in the following
CITATION:

For exceptionally meritorious service during assigned missions from 11 September 2001 to 3 March 2002. The Sailors and Marines of the United States FIFTH Fleet Battle Force consistently demonstrated unparalleled success executing their missions of providing presence, power projection and deterrence for the United States and Coalition forces in the Central Command Area of Responsibility. The United States FIFTH Fleet Battle Force met or exceeded all operational requirements while supporting Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and the Global War on Terrorism. The FIFTH Fleet Battle Force executed over 7,840 strike missions in the skies over Afghanistan, effectively destroying the Al Qaeda network and toppling the oppressive Taliban Regime. The superlative efforts of the Battle Force were instrumental in bringing stability to a nation perpetually at war for over 20 years. The Battle Force's successful engagement exercises in Afghanistan, Kenya and Djibouti brought military cooperation and humanitarian relief and played a significant role in improving relations with numerous allies throughout the Central Command Area of Responsibility. By their truly distinctive accomplishments, unrelenting perseverance, and unfailing devotion to duty, the Sailors and Marines of the United States FIFTH Fleet Battle Force reflected great credit upon themselves and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

Gordon R. England
Secretary of the Navy

had contributed to the delay in execution. As the strategic decision makers wrestled over whether or not to conduct the mission, the tactical situation on the ground in the region changed. As the decision to move north remained unchanged, General Mattis issued instructions to the 26th MEU to prepare for backload. The date to commence backload of the 26th MEU was set

for 18 January. With the 101st assuming more of the airfield security and operating functions, all personnel not required for operations up north would begin movement back to the ARG ships. . . .

On 19 January, Colonel [Andrew P.] Frick, commanding officer of the 26th MEU, and Army Colonel [Francis J.] Weircinski, commanding of-

ficer of TF Rakkasan, agreed the soldiers of TF Rakkasan were ready to assume control of the airfield. The Army had enough force in place to take over the perimeter security and was eager to assume the mission. The turnover was smooth, and the Marines happily turned over Kandahar to the Army.

On this same day, a Marine CH-53E crashed while on a supply run from Bagram to Khowst. The flight of two aircraft was transiting a rugged area in the vicinity of Khowst when the number one engine flamed out, causing the aircraft to lose power and crash into the 9,500-foot mountainous terrain. Heroic efforts by the pilot of the aircraft saved the lives of five of the seven crew. Initially knocked unconscious during the crash, Captain [Douglass V.] Glasgow awoke inside the burning aircraft. Even though he had a broken wrist, Captain Glasgow assisted the injured crew out of the aircraft and ensured that all Marines were accounted for before the helicopter was

consumed by fire. He then stomped out SOS in the snow and rendered what aid he could to the injured. A Predator aircraft saw the SOS, and rescue aircraft were immediately dispatched to the site. The injured and deceased Marines were taken to Bagram by TF Dagger's QRF [quick reaction force], where they received aid and were rapidly moved to forward hospitals. . . .

On 5 February, General Mattis and the remaining staff repositioned to NSA Bahrain, ending TF 58's initial participation ashore in Afghanistan. The 26th MEU would continue to reembark their forces from Afghanistan and Pakistan, reconstituting their force on 9 February. . . . Vice Admiral Timothy [J.] Keating, who had assumed command from Admiral Moore, directed that TF 58 be disestablished at the end of February, ending more than three months of Navy-Marine participation in combat operations in Afghanistan.



Weapons Company Patrol, Kandahar, by SSgt Michael D. Fay, USMCR. National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

All Eyes Down by CWO2 Michael D. Fay, USMCR.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art
Collection.





CHAPTER THREE

Reflections

Mary Allia Rose

The events of 11 September 2001 quickly became one of the defining moments in modern American history. Like the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, that morning etched itself into both the collective and individual memories of Americans who lived through it. Due to the historical gravity of the moment, many recall precisely where they were when they first learned of the attacks and how the unfolding events shaped their understanding of what was happening. Marines were part of that national experience, encountering the news in command posts, recruiting stations, classrooms, barracks, and homes.

Institutional memory tends to compress such events into shared narratives that emphasize where the Corps stood, how it responded, and how the attacks reshaped missions and priorities in the months that followed. In contrast, individual Marines often remember the day differently. Their recollections are anchored less in institutional timelines than in personal moments: what they were doing at the time, what they expected out of service to the country, what they understood as events unfolded, and

The military ranks cited at the end of each recollection are the highest rank that an individual attained, not their rank on 11 September 2001.

how that understanding changed as the scope of the attacks became clear and the nation moved toward war. For many, these moments were not only immediate impressions but turning points in their lives. The attacks influenced decisions to enlist, shaped ongoing service, and set the stage for deployments, leadership responsibilities, and years of sacrifice. Memories of that morning are therefore inseparable from the personal and professional paths that followed, as they are a single event that defined the broader arc of a Marine's life and career.

Taken individually, these memories reveal the uncertainty, emotion, and limited information that defined the first hours of the attacks. Taken together, they capture a moment experienced simultaneously across the Corps, when those in uniform began to consider what that day might mean for the nation and for their own roles within it. Senior leaders, junior Marines, and future Marines who had not yet entered service therefore encountered the same event from different vantage points.

A quarter century has passed since that morning, yet time has not diminished its immediacy for many who remember it. In this way, the accounts that follow illuminate the relationship between institutional history and personal memory. The Marine Corps remembers 9/11 as a turning point that led directly to nearly two decades of sustained operations. The Marines whose memories appear here recall that day through the circumstances in which they first encountered it and the ways it shaped their understanding of duty, sacrifice, and readiness. Each reflection represents an individual's experience and is presented in the Marine's own words.

BEFORE THE OATH

The impact of 9/11 extended to those who had not yet joined the Marine Corps. Many watched the attacks as civilians, following the news with friends, family, or classmates. The day left a lasting impression that would shape future decisions to enlist and the understanding of service that they would carry into the Corps. The accounts that follow come from Marines who were civilians on 11 September 2001.

For some, the attacks marked the moment when the idea of duty and military service shifted from an abstract idea into something deeply personal. That morning, Dakota L. Meyer was a middle school student in Kentucky. Like many Americans, he followed the events as they unfolded, struggling to understand what he was witnessing. He later enlisted in the Marine Corps and received the Medal of Honor for his actions in the Battle of Ganjgal on 8 September 2009 in Kunar Province, Afghanistan.

I remember 9/11 like it was yesterday. I was sitting in my eighth-grade art class. I'll never forget the news coming in. You know when you're a kid in school and something's happening, but you don't really understand it yet?

Then they wheeled in one of those old TVs on a tall black cart with the strap over it, plugged it into the wall, and turned on the news. I remember watching the second tower fall. Before that moment, I didn't even know the towers existed. But what I felt in that moment and over the next few days was fear, uncertainty, pain, and the overwhelming sense that something truly evil had reached our country and harmed our people.

I would never wish for another 9/11, but I would give anything for



President Barack H. Obama awards the Medal of Honor to Sgt Dakota L. Meyer during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House, 15 September 2011.
Department of Defense photo (USN) 110915-N-ZZ999-012.

another 9/12. In my lifetime, I don't know that I've ever felt as united as we were in those days after that horrible event.

I didn't join the military to avenge 9/11. I didn't enlist out of revenge for what was lost. But I will say this: Without 9/11, I don't know that I would have joined at all. That moment gave me clarity. I remember how everyone looked to the men and women in the nation's cloth to deliver justice on behalf of all of us. And I wanted to be one of them.¹

Sergeant Dakota L. Meyer, USMC,
2006–10, 2025–present

¹ Sgt Dakota L. Meyer correspondence with Mary A. Rose via Stephanie Bosl, 3 October 2025, Historians Files, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, hereafter Marine Corps Archives.

Similar to Meyer, the day's events inspired another eighth-grader and future Marine. For Amanda J. Eason, a desire to serve and the memories of 9/11 remained as she completed high school and began college before ultimately shifting plans and enlisting.

I joined the United States Marine Corps in October 2008. I remember sitting in class in the eighth grade watching coverage of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on television. Growing up in the small town of Woodland in Aroostook County, Maine, those events stayed with me as I continued through my education.

I graduated from Caribou High School in 2005 and attended college for a few years. During that time, I felt my life lacked purpose. One day, I walked into a recruiter's office at the

mall in Presque Isle and began the process of joining the Marine Corps. I did not know much about the military or what it offered, but after doing my research and learning the Marine Corps had the longest boot camp, I knew I wanted the challenge. I never expected it to become a career.

In 2010, I deployed to Helmand Province [Afghanistan] as a motor transport operator [military occupational specialty (MOS) 3531]. On April 30, 2010, during a route reconnaissance convoy, I was injured by an improvised explosive device and lost part of my right peripheral vision. I was sent to Bagram Airfield for evaluation, then returned to my unit and completed the deployment. I returned home in August 2010, deployed again to Afghanistan in July 2011, and returned in February 2012.

In 2013, I completed a lateral move to career planner [MOS 4821] after my injury made me ineligible to remain a motor transport operator. Throughout my career, I have served with Combat Logistics Battalion 2, Combat Logistics Battalion 6, 3d Marine Division, Headquarters and Service Battalion Quantico, HMX-1 [Marine Helicopter Squadron One], Headquarters Marine Corps MMEA-1 [Manpower Management Enlisted Assignments—Retention Section], Western Recruiting Region, and I am currently attached to Headquarters Marine Corps MMEA-2 [Assignments Section].²

² MSgt Amanda J. Eason, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 24 February 2026, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

Master Sergeant Amanda J. Eason,
USMC, 2008–present

Another future Marine, Christopher J. Green, had already considered joining the military prior to the attacks. A native New Yorker, Green watched the attacks strike his city and people he knew. Although family concerns temporarily delayed his plans, he ultimately enlisted three years later.

The attacks on 9/11 changed the entire trajectory of my life. On 10 September 2001, I took the ASVAB [Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery] to join the Army. I remember looking at the Manhattan skyline as the recruiter drove me to MEPS [Military Entrance Processing Station]. The next day, the whole world changed. I heard reporters on the radio as the second plane hit, school went on lockdown, teachers and classmates had family in the towers. I had friends in lower Manhattan. My neighbors were both NYPD [members of the New York City Police Department]. My parents convinced me to try college instead, but something was missing. Fast forward to November 2004. [Operation] Phantom Fury [in Iraq] was in full swing, and Marines being killed was nightly news. I couldn't get rid of the feeling that I needed to DO something. I was 20, working full time as a forklift operator. My boss was a Marine vet, a CH-46 [Sea Knight medium-lift transport helicopter] crew chief that served in Somalia. We talked often about service, what it meant to support something greater than yourself. I decided to DO something. One night at 8 p.m., I left



Ambush Alley Overwatch by Jason Breidenbach.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

work and drove to the Marine Corps Recruiter. They were open. Less than a month later, on 7 December 2004, I arrived on Parris Island [Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) Parris Island, South Carolina], taking the first steps in a new life dedicated to serving something greater.³

Corporal Christopher J. Green,
USMC, 2004–9

While many young Americans such as Meyer, Eason, and Green would have to wait several years before they could enlist, others were already old enough to act. High school seniors and recent college graduates across the country began speaking with recruiters in the days

³ Christopher J. Green, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 1 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

and weeks after the attacks, some joining immediately, and others like John E. Witt entering the Delayed Entry Program while they completed their schooling.

I was a senior in high school on 11 September. I, along with my fellow students, huddled around a roll-out TV and watched the news broadcast after the first plane had hit the first tower; we watched the smoke and then in real time watched the second plane hit the second tower. We were all taken aback with so many different emotions. We watched as both towers crumbled to the ground and the ash blooms filled the city. I was 17 years old. I went home and told my parents I was joining the Marine Corps. I went to the recruiting office and was in the

Delayed Entry Program on 1 January 2002, graduated high school in June and [was] on the yellow footprints on 29 July 2002. [What occurred on] 11 September was my generation's calling to fight back, to defend our country, to defend our freedom from terrorism abroad. I believe the lasting impact on the Marine Corps will forever be Fallujah, Najaf, An-Nasiriyah, [and] Ramadi in Iraq and Sangin, Marjah, [and] Nawa in Afghanistan. These deadly locations and what Marines accomplished and lost in each will forever be remembered and taught to future generations of Marines.⁴

First Sergeant John E. Witt,
USMC (Ret.), 2002–22

As Americans across the country considered joining the military in the wake of the attacks, recruiters faced a sudden influx of volunteers. At the same time, recruiters bore the responsibility of maintaining the standards of the Marine Corps.

That morning, Marine recruiter Staff Sergeant Jeffery L. Snyder began his first day of recruiting duty by visiting Hartland High School in Hartland, Michigan. Thomas Danna, a Marine Corps veteran and the school's counselor, arranged the visit and asked Staff Sergeant Snyder to meet with several interested students. Among them was Mary A. Rose (née Saad).

I remember that day like yesterday. It was my first day of recruiting duty. I remember an overwhelming feeling of wanting to go deliver justice to those responsible for murdering innocent civilians, along with the overwhelming

hopelessness of being stuck in garrison on recruiting duty.

It also gave me an unbelievable sense of responsibility for how important my role would now be to put the right people into the Marines. Being super selective was a must—the stress of marrying the right individuals to the Marine Corps for the right reasons. Knowing my brothers and sisters were counting on me to find the 2 percent of the world that would be worthy for the Corps and would not falter in a combat situation when their fireteam or squad needed to depend on them. I had to find the right individuals who would mentally be strong enough in trying times. Many people came to my office and tried to join; however, very few were selected to be that 2 percent that I would allow to serve next to my brothers and sisters in arms.⁵

Staff Sergeant Jeffery L. Snyder,
USMC, 1991–2008

On the morning of 11 September 2001, I was a senior in high school and had an appointment to meet with the local Marine Corps recruiter, Staff Sergeant Jeffery L. Snyder. For the next hour or so, he answered dozens of questions I had about the Marines, and in turn asked me why I wanted to join, what type of person I was, and what my goals in life were. Then he laid out the recruiting “benefit tags” and asked me to put them in order of importance. I

⁴ John E. Witt, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 25 June 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

⁵ Jeffery L. Snyder, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 1 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



Recruiters commonly use benefit tags as a tool to identify what applicant needs and motivators are. Department of Defense photo (USMC) 200610-M-HG547-032.

vividly remember “pride of belonging” being my number one choice, and him saying there would be no greater pride in life than becoming a United States Marine. We then agreed upon a date to take the ASVAB and begin the security paperwork, and I soon returned to class.

Within the next hour, the principal announced that our country was under attack. The rest of the day we all moved from one class to the next in a state of total disbelief, glued to TVs. For me, I also felt the gravity of my decision to enlist just a few hours earlier. The attacks did not deter me though;

in fact, I felt even more conviction over my choice. I left for Parris Island after graduation and found myself in a platoon with 100 other young women just like me who wanted to serve, wanted to protect their loved ones, and wanted to belong. Looking back on the last 25 years, I can say for certain that Staff Sergeant Snyder was right: There is no greater “pride of belonging” than the Marine Corps.⁶

Corporal Mary A. Rose, USMC,
2002–7

⁶ Mary A. Rose, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

Christopher M. Giannetti was a high school sophomore when the attacks unfolded. Coming from a family with deep Marine Corps roots, he recalls how witnessing the events firsthand inspired him to serve. His reflection traces a 20-year career marked by deployments to Iraq and assignments across Europe and Asia, highlighting how 9/11 shaped his sense of duty and pride as a Marine.

I was a sophomore in high school when 9/11 happened. I was sitting in art class when the first plane hit the World Trade Center. We watched live as the second plane struck, and in that moment, I understood how real the threats are against our country. I never planned on joining the military—my dream was to play college baseball, but when that didn't work out, I thought about my life as a military child and the sacrifices my father, a retired CWO3 [chief warrant officer 3] in counterintelligence, had made. Both my grandfathers and uncle are also Marines, so I felt called to carry on our family's tradition.

September 11 gave me a purpose bigger than myself. It made me want to stand up for America and protect our freedoms. After spending 20 years wearing the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor, serving in Iraq and in many other countries across Europe and Asia, I know I made the right choice. I'm proud of every Marine I served beside, every mission we saw through, and every sacrifice we made. I'd go back and do it all over again without hesitation. We answered the call when it mattered,

and that pride stays with me for life.⁷

CWO2 Christopher M. Giannetti,
USMC (Ret.), 2005–25

For another future Marine, Amanda M. Brannon, the attacks reinforced a decision she had already been considering during the months following college graduation.

The events of 9/11 meant an opportunity to serve my country in whatever might result from the attack among my generation of Americans. After watching the second airplane hit the World Trade Center, I went for a walk and thought about what I saw and how I might contribute. I was already talking to a Marine Corps recruiter while working my first salaried post-college job. I headed to his office where his team of Marines checked on their comrades stationed in the Pentagon. I enlisted the next day and shipped to Parris Island three weeks later. Some recycled recruits shared their experience of learning about the attack: drill instructors calmly explaining the events and their limited knowledge of that Tuesday morning. Salient experiences from two Iraq deployments include observing families trying to go about their day as normal as possible while I stood overwatch at a Sisters of Fallujah checkpoint, and a handful of the Iraqi contractors requesting a day off to participate in their local election. Serving in the Marine Corps granted

⁷ Christopher M. Giannetti, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 16 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



Lioness by Kristopher J. Battles.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

me an opportunity to serve and grow among Americans who contribute with the range of talents and backgrounds among a trusted team unified by a common mission.⁸

Lieutenant Colonel Amanda M. Brannon, USMCR, 2001–present

Richard A. S. Farrer was a young civilian in Naples, Florida, on 11 September. He watched in disbelief as the events unfolded on television, an experience that ignited a lifelong commitment to serve. Inspired by a family legacy of service, Farrer would go on to join the Marine Corps. Despite sustaining significant shrapnel injuries during his multiple deployments, he proudly

⁸ LtCol Amanda M. Brannon, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 25 June 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

carried the honor and dedication of those who came before him.

On 11 September 2001, I was actually mixing paint at my Sherwin Williams Store number 2049 in Naples, Florida. I was listening to the *Howard Stern Show* when it happened. At first, I did not believe what had happened. That was until I came home and saw the aftermath on TV. I tried to enlist the next day. Unfortunately, my parents did not want me to go. I respected their wishes. My dad was a naval officer/psychiatrist, and my mother was a lawyer and did not want me going right away. It wasn't until three years later that I walked into the RSS [Recruiting



Cpl Richard A. S. Farrer during a deployment in ar-Ramadi, where he sustained shrapnel injuries alongside three other Marines from Company I, 3d Battalion, 8th Marines.

Courtesy of Richard A. S. Farrer.



Untitled by Elize McKelvey.

National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

Substation] Naples office and signed up right away.

I was on the island [Parris Island] in June of 2004, then SOI [School of Infantry] in October, and then to 3d Battalion 8th Marines, India Company. In January of 2005, we deployed. Three deployments back-to-back.

I loved my time in the Fleet and would do it all over again in a heartbeat. I come from a long line of family that served in the military (World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq). It was a great honor to serve my country. Being a Marine is the most honorable title that I have ever earned.

Twenty-five years ago, I graduated from Rollins College (13 May 2001). That September, we were dealt a tragedy, and like my fellow Marines, [I] answered the call to serve. Damn proud to serve and damn proud to be a Marine.⁹

Corporal Richard A. S. Farrer,
USMC, 2004–8

LEARNING TO BE MARINES

For those in recruit training on 11 September 2001, the attacks occurred during a formative moment when discipline, instruction, and transition defined their

⁹ Richard A. S. Farrer, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 14 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

days at the recruit depots. While they were learning customs, structure, and expectations, the world beyond their training environment shifted abruptly. The day did not arrive as a distant event observed in the comfort and safety of their homes but during the earliest states of their transformation into Marines, after they had already taken the oath to defend a country that had suddenly changed. The accounts in this section reflect the experience of receiving historic news while immersed in the structured environment of recruit training. As a consequence, 9/11 became inseparable from their earliest memories of service for many recruits, reinforcing lessons about readiness, purpose, and the responsibilities they were preparing to assume.

The first two testimonies are from Marines who completed recruit training at MCRD San Diego, California. Among them are diary entries from recruit Steven G. Turner, who recorded on Training Day 18 when and how his platoon first learned of the attacks. During the following decade, Staff Sergeant Turner deployed multiple times, including to Afghanistan with Marine Air Control Squadron 4 in 2003, and later to Iraq with the 3d Assault Amphibian Battalion, 1st Marine Division, in 2006. Matthew P. Wee was also in the middle of recruit training at San Diego, California, when the attacks occurred. During the next two decades, he deployed around the world, answering the call to duty that 9/11 ignited and demonstrating the determination and commitment of a generation of Marines.

Today, we went to get our uniform sized and were told that two planes had been hijacked and crashed into the World Trade Center in New York. The whole building was smashed. My head went blank. Who the hell would do something so horrendous. Then the feeling of . . . I might be going to war set in. Going to war really doesn't

scare me because I know the Marine Corps will train me for what I will encounter.

Then the radio announced that all the airports were shut down, and it hit me then that I haven't heard a plane in a long time. Then the radio said that San Diego was a big target . . . not knowing made it that much scarier because everyone wants to have the facts, but there weren't really [any] at the time so everyone is in the dark.

I'm worried how the family is taking this. I hope they understand that this is my job and if I have to go to war, I will. It's not necessarily my job, but I would go to war even if I wasn't in the Marine Corps. I want to protect my country and its way of life.¹⁰

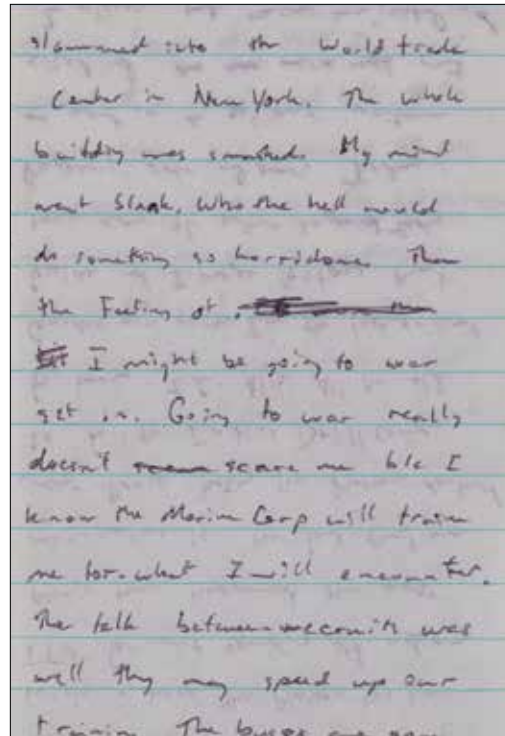
Staff Sergeant Steven G. Turner,
USMC (Ret.), 2001–11

On 11 September 2001, I was in Marine Corps Recruit Training at MCRD San Diego, in the middle of rifle range week. I had shipped to boot camp in July 2001, expecting to serve in a peacetime military. That expectation vanished in an instant. Our drill instructors gathered us and told us the United States had been attacked. They asked if any recruits had family in New York, and for the first time, we saw genuine concern in their eyes. Though the full scope wasn't clear, we knew immediately—this was no longer training for “what if,” but for “when.”

¹⁰ Steven G. Turner, personal collection and correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 26 February 2026, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



Recruit Steven G. Turner.
Courtesy of Steven G. Turner.



Diary entry recorded on 11 September 2001 by recruit Steven G. Turner at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, CA.
Courtesy of Steven G. Turner.

The attacks on 9/11 transformed my purpose. In 2004, I deployed to Kuwait and Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Over my 20 years, I served in California, Bahrain, Germany, Burkina Faso, North Carolina, Japan, DC, and Virginia—each post shaped by the global response to that day. For the Marine Corps, 9/11 reignited our role as America's force in readiness—sharpening our focus, tempo, and resolve. It galvanized a generation of Marines who answered the call not with hesitation, but with commitment. I count myself among them—forever

changed by that day and proud to have served because of it. *Semper Fidelis!*¹¹

Staff Sergeant Matthew P. Wee,
USMC (Ret.), 2001–21

On the other side of the country, recruits at MCRD Parris Island, South Carolina, experienced the same shock as their counterparts in San Diego. Master Gunnery Sergeant Shasta C. Hollins recalls having just completed the Crucible—a defining moment for recruits near the end of training—when her platoon learned of the attacks.

September 11 is a day that still lives

¹¹ Matthew P. Wee, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 2 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

inside me, not just as a memory, but as a turning point in who I became as a Marine and as a person. I was a recruit in boot camp, stepping into the Crucible, believing it was just another scenario-based training meant to push us past our limits. Everything changed when our drill instructors gathered us together. These were women who never showed emotion, yet in that moment there was something different in their eyes something heavy and unmistakably serious.

When we completed the Crucible, the morning was cold, foggy, and soaked with rain. We stood there, newly made Marines, still trying to understand what it meant to have earned that title. Then they showed us the news clippings. The images didn't feel distant; they felt like they reached straight into our chests. And in the middle of all that destruction, the American flag still standing became a symbol I've never forgotten, a reminder that even when everything else falls, something in us refuses to break.¹²

Master Gunnery Sergeant Shasta
C. Hollins, USMC, 2001–present

Then-Captain Theodore P. Sudmeyer was leading Follow Series, Company B, 1st Recruit Training Battalion, aboard MCRD Parris Island when he learned of the news. Once the shock and disbelief subsided, he and other leaders had the difficult task of informing recruits of the news and determining whether any had family affected by the attacks.

¹² MGySgt Shasta C. Hollins, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 24 February 2026, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

Working in the heat of Parris Island, I was a series commander on 11 September. The morning routine done, I was in my office with the radio on when reports of a plane hitting the towers came in. At first, it seemed an unfortunate general aviation accident . . . then follow-on reporting started. My series guns [gunnery sergeants] went to check on the platoons; we had quite a few recruits from the NYC [New York City] area. I jogged over to the battalion command post to catch the TV news, arriving in time to watch the first tower fall. Later, as I walked back to brief the platoons and get recruits on the phone to check on their families, I noted the empty sky where typically there were always contrails. Out of 11 recruits that had family working in the towers, by some miracle not one was lost that day. Some were late to work, some finished a shift early, some were off that day. . . . The stories were shocking in the miraculous nature of loss averted by the mundane aspects of everyday life. What did it mean? Life is not a zero-sum game and any light in the darkness is a treasure.¹³

Major Theodore, P. Sudmeyer,
USMC (Ret.), 1998–2009

Junior Marines who were just finishing their post-recruit training schools or navigating their first years in the fleet looked to their small-unit leaders for guidance during a time when few details about the future were known. At just 19 years old and with

¹³ Theodore P. Sudmeyer, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 25 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



Post and relief ceremony for SgtMaj Sigrid Rivera-Paul, 4th Recruit Training Battalion, on 8 July 2022 at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, SC.

Department of Defense photo (USMC) 220708-M-AW120-0124.

only a year in uniform, then—Lance Corporal Sigrid A. Rivera-Paul learned firsthand what responsibility and discipline looked like while serving with Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 31, Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Beaufort, South Carolina. She would later retire as one of the last sergeants major of the 4th Recruit Training Battalion, prior to its deactivation in June 2023.

On 11 September 2001, I remember waking up in the morning and turning the TV on as I was getting ready for PT [physical training]. I realized I was watching the Twin Towers being impacted by an airplane. I remember thinking to myself, is this a movie? Suddenly, time slowed down, everything I was experiencing during that moment

seemed to be in slow motion. . . . I realized I was watching the live news coverage of the second plane being used as projectile weapon. The significance of this moment and how it made me feel has resonated with me for decades. This was the moment where innocence died and I was no longer a child. Moreover, this moment cemented in me the importance of always remaining a trained military professional, observing warrior ethos, and how glad I was that I was serving our nation on behalf of my family.

Our country's innocence and sense of safety changed forever on 11 September. I remember thinking to

myself that I was honored to be the person representing my family during this tumultuous and uncertain time. I made it my mission and responsibility to be the best Marine I could be and to train those around me to be safe in these uncertain times we've been living in. It has been an honor and a privilege to have served and to have trained the future leaders of our Corps and our nation.¹⁴

Sergeant Major Sigrid A.
Rivera-Paul, USMC (Ret.),
2000–22

Junior officers faced similar challenges, navigating unfamiliar territory during the first few days of the attacks and looking to senior leaders for guidance. Then—First Lieutenant Melissa Y. Ayres had just arrived at a training conference when news broke and was cautious about returning to MCAS Yuma, Arizona. As other conference attendees scrambled to find their way home, First Lieutenant Ayres remained disciplined and calm, following orders from her executive officer (XO) to await further instructions. Her recollection is representative of how frustrating the moment was for Marine officers who are trained with a bias for action.

On 11 September 2001, I was a first lieutenant halfway through my first duty station at MCAS Yuma. I had just arrived in Kansas City for my first G-1 [Manpower Directorate] conference for an MOS-related event and had my sights on legal admin school next. It was early on the first day; I hadn't even met anyone. We were taking a tour of the Personnel Admin Center, and all of a sudden there was a hush in the

room. The TVs were showing the towers having been hit. It was absolutely unbelievable. We were told to go back to our hotel rooms and wait for further instructions. I continued to watch the coverage in my room and, still in shock, tried to make a plan on how to get back to Yuma. Needless to say, the conference was canceled, all flights were canceled, and my XO told me to hold fast for the rest of the week and just plan to take my original flight back home. I was ready to cancel any plans to fly and rent a car. A few Marines did just that to get back to their duty stations, but I listened to my XO and holed up in the hotel room for the next several days. When I finally got back to Yuma, that same hush seemed to extend over the base as if we were all waiting for the command to fight back.¹⁵

Major Melissa Y. Ayres, USMC
(Ret.), 1998–2018

On 11 September, Joseph S. McAlarnen was at The Basic School (TBS), where newly commissioned officers learn the leadership and operational skills that form the foundation of an infantry platoon commander, when he first heard of the attacks. His reflections trace how those early months, combined with the events of 9/11, shaped his perspective, prepared him for deployments to Iraq, and influenced a career spanning more than 25 years.

After completing my Law of War [course] exam at The Basic School, I heard about some aircraft hitting the World Trade Center. I didn't think much about it, as a Cessna had run into

¹⁴ Sigrid A. Rivera-Paul, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 10 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

¹⁵ Melissa T. Ayres, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 25 February 2026, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



LtCol Joseph S. McAlarnen in an AH-1W SuperCobra.
Courtesy of LtCol Joseph S. McAlarnen, USMC (Ret.).

an office building a few months before. Weird things happen, especially in New York. I had time, so I walked up to my room and put on the TV just before the second aircraft hit.

Two weekends earlier, I had spent the Labor Day weekend with my good college friend living up life in Manhattan. He worked in Midtown. We celebrated having earned paychecks for the past three months. We had successfully transitioned from Blacksburg [Virginia, home of Virginia Tech University], to our new professions.

Interestingly, the expedition into Afghanistan in 2001–2 didn't really impact my worldview. I had friends in the 24th MEU [Marine Expeditionary Unit], and we were proud of them as they returned. It was the pivot to Iraq that had more of an effect. I was in a pilot training pipeline as my buddies from TBS and college got ready to cross the line of departure. All of us who were flight contracts were bitter—we wanted to be there; we expected we'd missed it. Little did we know.

My fiancée and I attended the



Gunfighter Salute! by Alex Durr.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

MAG-39 [Marine Aircraft Group 39] ball in 2003. The officers of HMLA-169 [Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 169] were a touch raucous as they celebrated their return from Iraq. [Actor] Alyssa Milano was even in attendance as a date. They had done what skids [helicopter pilots] train to do, and they did it well. Two months later, I joined the “Vipers” [nickname for HMLA-169] as a boot copilot.

Three Iraq deployments followed and shaped my time as a[n] [AH-1] Cobra [attack helicopter] pilot and skid flight lead. The experiences had all the emotions. And yet never had I felt so skilled at what I had trained to do than

when I landed for the last time at FOB [Forward Operating Base] al-Qaim in May 2008.

There was a frantic energy to living as a family in and around Camp Pendleton [California] and then Camp Lejeune [North Carolina] in that decade that followed 9/11. I think we were all making up for uncertainty. It was also our normal.

Like many, I lost some close friends and acquaintances. This included one of my best buds, a guy I went through ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps], OCS [Officer Candidate School], and TBS with. He and another close squadron mate were killed



All Clear! by Craig Streeter.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

in a midair in Afghanistan in 2009 while I was floating on the 22d MEU.

For all of the good and the bad, it was our lived experience. I will retire in fall 2026, with over 25 years of active service, just before the 25th anniversary of the 11 September attacks, in the 250th year of the Corps and after the 250th celebration of our nation's birth. There is some symmetry in that.¹⁶

Lieutenant Colonel Joseph S. McAlarnen, USMC, 2001–present

BEARING THE RESPONSIBILITY

On 11 September, Marine leaders were called on to

¹⁶ LtCol Joseph S. McAlarnen, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 30 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

provide stability during a moment defined by uncertainty. While experiencing the same shock as those they led, they were expected to maintain order, communicate clearly, and prepare for potential action despite incomplete information. Small-unit leaders across the Marine Corps had to respond immediately, instinctively readying their Marines for what might come next.

The reflections in this section come from Marines who held leadership positions at the time of the attacks. Their accounts convey the weight of responsibility to safeguard personnel, enforce security measures, and set the tone for units facing an unknown future. These testimonies illustrate that leadership is tested not only in combat but also in moments when answers are scarce and composure is essential. They reveal how Marines balanced personal reaction with professional duty.



Of Binocs, Bottles and Fly Paper by Kristopher J. Battles.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

As an experienced staff noncommissioned officer, then—Gunnery Sergeant Jamie A. Deets’s account demonstrates how leaders had little time to process what they had witnessed before taking action to lead their Marines through uncertainty.

In September 2001, I was stationed at MCB [Marine Corps Base] Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, attached to Battery B, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, as the battery gunnery sergeant. On the morning of 11 September, I was awakened by a phone call. It was my mother, calling from Virginia, sounding distraught. She said, “Jamie, we’re under attack!” I immediately got out of bed and headed downstairs to turn on the TV. As my wife joined me, we watched in shock as the second plane struck the other tower.

At that moment, I knew we were heading into war. I quickly called my commanding officer [CO] and briefed him on the situation. After hanging up, about 10 minutes later, my CO called back, instructing me, “Gunny, get to the barracks and wake up the Marines. Stand by for further orders.”

By the time I arrived at the barracks, Marines were already waking up and gathering as word of the attack spread. It wasn’t long before I was tasked with organizing the Marines to draw machine guns from the armory and establish overwatch positions on the roof of Mackie Hall in case a vehicle tried to breach the base from the [Interstate] H-3 highway. Over the

next two weeks, we maintained heightened security, and the base was closed to all vehicle traffic from off base. This event profoundly impacted my life and my family, shaping the next 15 years of my career as I supported the Global War on Terror[ism].¹⁷

Sergeant Major Jamie A. Deets,
USMC (Ret.), 1984–2015

Major John F. Dastoli recalls his time as an infantry officer. A captain at the time of the attacks, he remembers the shock of that morning and the worry when he first realized his company commander was near the Twin Towers. Shortly afterward, Dastoli's reserve unit was mobilized, first in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and later attached to the 1st Marine Division during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He would eventually return to active duty before retiring in 2022.

On 11 September 2001, I was serving as a reserve infantry platoon commander with 2d Battalion, 23d Marines, in California. I woke up that morning to the news that one of the towers was on fire. On the way to work, more information started pouring in on the radio: A plane had started the first fire; then a second plane crashed into the other tower and the Pentagon; then, there were what would become false reports of attacks at Los Angeles International Airport and the subways of New York. It seemed like all of America was under attack. My battalion commander called me and asked if I had heard from my company commander, who was supposed to be attending a business meet-

ing near the Twin Towers. I had not. We would later find out that he had put his cammies [camouflage uniform] on and went to the incident location to help first responders, which he would continue to do for a week afterward. He then asked me to initiate a recall for our reserve company. As we got the accountability of all our Marines, everyone wanted to do something, but what? It was the worst feeling of helplessness to be a Marine and not be able to defend your country.¹⁸

Major John F. Dastoli, USMC (Ret.)
1992–2022

Like Major Dastoli's unit, other commands across Marine Forces Reserve soon began mobilizing their reservists. Then—Private First Class (PFC) Celina J. Stockton (née Arellano) recalls how, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, her unit contacted and mobilized Marines across Southern California, ordering them to report to MCAS Miramar before deploying with the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (3d MAW).

September 11 was a day I will never forget. Living in California, three hours behind the events in New York, the Pentagon, and Pennsylvania, I was stationed at MCAS Miramar when it went into complete lockdown. As PFC Arellano, a reservist on active orders, I walked from the barracks to work amid total uncertainty.

During that time, I learned the gravity of our mission. We contacted and mobilized reservists across Southern California, processing their orders

¹⁷ Jamie A. Deets, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 16 December 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

¹⁸ John F. Dastoli, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 23 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



PFC Celina J. Stockton (center, front row) and S-1 Marines with SgtMaj John L. Estrada (center, back row), Marine Aircraft Group 46, 4th Marine Air Wing, Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, CA, in 2002. Courtesy of 1stSgt Celina J. Stockton, USMC (Ret.).

at Miramar before sending them to the 3d MAW for deployment. Witnessing their commitment inspired me to pursue a lifelong career. In November 2001, I was accepted into the Active Reserve (AR) program.

As the first Marine in my family, I worked tirelessly to honor our surname. Though I transitioned to active duty in 2014, I had already served as an AR drill instructor and deployed to Afghanistan—achievements that were rare for AR Marines then. September 11, 2001, was the pivotal event that transformed me from an 18-year-old student into a dedicated professional.

It fueled a lifelong passion to serve and perform my duties with honor.¹⁹

First Sergeant Celina J. Stockton,
USMC (Ret.), 2000–25

Master Sergeant Michael T. Rickey had recently arrived aboard MCB Camp Pendleton, California, in early 2001, a welcome change of pace from his duties at Cherry Point, North Carolina. He had been looking forward to his new orders and was enjoying his enlistment during peacetime. That changed after the attacks, which set in motion rapid and lasting changes in the military for Marines like Rickey.

The morning of 11 September 2001,

¹⁹ Celina J. Stockton, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 25 February 2026, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



Hanger 6 MCAS Miramar by John Deckert.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

I was an embarker [logistics] sergeant (MOS 0431) assigned to load tractor trailers from our back lot in Camp Del Mar (21 Area). I had gotten to the shop early that morning as we had trucks rolling by 0600, outbound for TRUEX [training in urban environment exercise] as part of the 13th MEU workups. Cell phones weren't that accessible then, so we utilized our shop phone to make sure all the camps and stations were operating with no transportation issues. In between trucks, I would go back inside and talk with the duty, who was located at the back door of our building (within sight of the lot). The television was on that morning, and we began to see reports of an airplane might have crashed into one of the buildings in New York City. We both thought that was a strange sight to see, but at that moment, the news didn't have much information to pass. As another [Marine] passed, I passed the duty again, and he mentioned that another aircraft was thought to have crashed into a building as well. By that time, the CP [command post] was active, and a lot of the command had gotten to work. After about another hour or so, the MEU commander had passed that all officers were to meet in his office, and word was passed that our TRUEX had been canceled. So, for the rest of the day we worked with [the] LMCC [logistics and movement coordination center] to have all trucking companies notified to return all equipment and vehicles back to their respective stations.

To say this was a pivotal time in my career is an understatement. I remember those times very vividly. It was a blur after that. We deployed 45 days early for Afghanistan and by the next year were in southern Iraq (2003).²⁰

Master Sergeant Michael T.
Rickey Sr., USMC (Ret.),
1995–2015

Colonel Christopher A. Keane, who was the operations officer for Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 166 (HMM-166) at MCAS Miramar on 11 September, experienced the shock of 9/11 from a different vantage point, fresh from a MEU deployment to the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR). He immediately understood that the nation would look to the Marine Corps for decisive action and felt empowered by his leadership at the onset of deployment.

The attacks on 9/11 were obviously a shock to many, dare I say most of the world. I was in the ready room at HMM-166/MCAS Miramar, just starting my day as the operations officer of a CH-46E squadron, having just returned from a MEU deployment to the CENTCOM AOR. Personally, we felt like we would be heading straight back to the AOR we just returned from facing an adversary that wished nothing but harm on the United States, its people, and our way of life. Looking back today, I feel like it was a moment that shaped [me] and most of my brothers and sisters in arms for the next two decades. We took the fight to the enemy, we showed resolve, and unfortunately,

²⁰ Michael T. Rickey, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 29 December 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



Triple Seven: Arty Marines Placing the Gun by Kristopher J. Battles.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

we lost way too many in the process. Our nation wanted the Marine Corps then, and they want us now to hold those that would wish us harm accountable. The 1st MARDIV [1st Marine Division] commander [Major General James N. Mattis] put it best during OIF [Operation Iraqi Freedom]—“No better friend, no worse enemy.” Would I go back if I had to do it all over again? Damn straight.²¹

Colonel Christopher A. Keane,
USMC (Ret.), 1988–2015

²¹ Christopher A. Keane, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 16 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

Colonel Michael J. Livingston was serving as a Marine officer instructor with the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) at the University of Southern California on 11 September. His account captures the sudden shock of the attacks and the immediate awareness that the next generation of Marine officers would begin their careers in a world that had abruptly changed.

I was commuting westbound on I-10 [Interstate 10], heading for my new duty station at the NROTC building aboard the University of Southern California campus where I served as their Marine officer instructor. Between songs, a DJ came on the radio and ca-

sually mentioned a small plane [had] crashed into a building in Manhattan, and as I looked up at a few downtown LA [Los Angeles] skyscrapers, I thought to myself, what idiot was joyriding in his Cessna, flying around buildings? Walking to my office, I strolled past the closed student union with TVs still on, and that's when I saw my first images of the smoking towers through the large pane windows, and I knew immediately we were going to war with a terrorist organization. The rest of the day, all I could think about were two things: First, how could I get out of this non-FMF [Fleet Marine Force] tour of duty and get back to the Division; and second, these senior Midshipmen were about to start their careers at no less than 100 miles per hour. And you can imagine the rest of the story over the next decade plus: we all gave some, and some gave all.²²

Colonel Michael J. Livingston,
USMC (Ret.), 1993–2022

While some Marines were reacting to the attacks from afar, others were immersed in training and preparation that seemed nearly tailor-made for the coming world. Major Wade A. Patton was at Weapons Training Battalion aboard MCB Quantico, Virginia, participating in the High-Risk Personnel Course, which emphasized rapid, close-range engagements and small-arms proficiency. On 11 September, what was intended as routine training became a stark reminder that real-world threats were no longer hypothetical.

I was attending the High-Risk Personnel Course at Quantico. The training

day began with a class on situational awareness. Shortly after we started the first course of fire for the day, “cease-fire” was called, and we were ordered into the classroom. The OIC [officer in charge] told us that a plane had hit the first tower. My first response was “BS . . . this is just part of the course.” Shortly afterwards, an instructor came into the room and started calling off names of Marines who needed to return to their commands. He declared that this was not a drill, and the class was being put on hold. We began to hear sirens from the FBI Academy; it was clear that this was not an exercise. I watched the second plane hit the towers in the OIC's office and began to contemplate what the future held. We resumed training two days later and graduated on time. Two days later, I was on the first flight out of Dulles [Washington Dulles International Airport] following the attack and flew to Germany and reported into MARFOREUR [Marine Corps Forces Europe]. The bases in Germany had an increased security posture. We supported GWOT [the Global War on Terrorism] and operations in Africa.²³

Major Wade A. Patton, USMC,
1991–2003

Colonel Scott W. Pierce was serving as the executive officer of the 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, during Combined Arms Exercise 9-01 at Twentynine Palms, California, when the attacks occurred. His recollection captures the moment Marines first learned of the events, the

²² Michael J. Livingston, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 18 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

²³ Wade A. Patton, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 15 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

urgent decisions required to safeguard personnel, and the sense that the nation had gone from peacetime to wartime.

After weeks of training in the desert of Twentynine Palms, [Battalion Landing Team] 2/2 was set to return to Camp Lejeune, with the first buses departing at 0900. That morning, a few of us finished a crack-of-dawn final PT run. As we walked back to our K-Spans [a rust resistant, weather resistant, and fireproof structure], we noticed a knot of serious-looking Marines huddled around an open van, listening to the radio.

“What’s up?”

“Airliners hitting the World Trade Center, sir!” Two planes? We all immediately sensed the gravity: This was an attack.

I raced to find the battalion commander, just as he was stuffing the last item into his day pack. “I just heard, Scotty. I need to get back to Lejeune before all flights are grounded—I’ve got to convince Division to send us first!” As he leaped into a van, he called back, “Get the boys home as soon as you can!”

The battalion soon gathered, faces grim. I briefed the Marines on what we knew and promised prioritized phone access for those with family who might have been affected.

“Any questions?” A long silence. Then a corporal raised his hand: “Are we going to war, Sir?” I nodded. “Yes, we are.” He looked me in the eye. “Good.”²⁴

Colonel Scott W. Pierce, USMC
(Ret.), 1984–2024

Despite Staff Sergeant Chariss R. Howard being stationed 300 kilometers south of the nearest attack, the impact of 9/11 hit home for her and her colleagues that morning. Staff Sergeant Howard recalls comforting a fellow servicemember who learned a close family friend was aboard American Airlines Flight 77. Even today, working as a flight attendant for Southwest Airlines, the events of 9/11 haunt retired Master Gunnery Sergeant Howard.

For me as a Marine, 9/11 changed everything. Until then, service meant duty, discipline, and readiness. That morning, it became personal. I was a staff sergeant assigned to Joint Forces Command in Norfolk, Virginia, working inside our SCIF [sensitive compartmented information facility] when we saw the first tower burning on our Navy captain’s television. It looked like a movie until the second plane hit. In that instant, we knew our nation was under attack.

After the Pentagon was struck, the pain worsened. My family lived minutes away, and communication lines were jammed. The fear of not knowing if they were safe is something I will never forget. At the same time, my immediate boss, an Air Force major who was a high-risk pregnancy candidate and visibly shaken, learned that her best friend’s daughter was on the plane that hit the Pentagon. As her Marine, I steadied her, contacted her husband, and made sure she received care while holding my own fear in check.

That day reshaped the Marine

²⁴ Scott E. Pierce, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 23 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

Corps and my understanding of leadership. It forged a generation defined by resilience and sacrifice but also marked by invisible wounds. Most of all, it taught me that in chaos, Marines look for calm strength, and that caring for your people is the greatest act of leadership.²⁵

Master Gunnery Sergeant
Charissa R. Howard, USMC (Ret.),
1985–2015

WITNESSING HISTORY UP CLOSE

A small number of Marines found themselves close enough on 9/11 to feel the heat, smell the smoke, and see the destruction unfold. Others were near the attacks in a different way: close to national power and the response. The raw immediacy of that day and the Marines' proximity to the events shaped their memories. The reflections in this section come from those who witnessed 9/11 firsthand. They describe what they saw, heard, and understood in the moment before the full scope of the attacks became clear. These narratives offer an unfiltered view of history as it happened. For additional accounts from Marines who were at either Ground Zero or the Pentagon that day, see chapter 1.

Most Marines were preparing for a normal Tuesday at work. Colonel Jeffrey J. Douglass was walking from his office in Crystal City, Virginia, to the Pentagon for a scheduled meeting when American Airlines Flight 77 struck the Pentagon. His account captures the shock of violence, the immediate exposure and heroism, and the lasting impact of directly witnessing history unfold.

When 9/11 violently rolled into our history books, I was serving as the chief

of staff [for the] DoD [Department of Defense] 50th Anniversary of the Korean War Commemoration Committee located in Arlington, Virginia. I was about to depart my office in Crystal City to walk the short distance to the Pentagon for a meeting when the plane crashed into the building. My initial feeling was shock; this new war had struck deeply and violently in our homeland.

Soon thereafter, and for several hours, I watched the heroic efforts to rescue personnel and extinguish the terrible fire. The visuals and the smell of the destruction are with me even today.

As a Marine, I witnessed firsthand a demonstration of evil that has nothing to lose. It represented pure hatred. September 11 became a day of sadness for me. Each year, the bitter recollection visits my being, telling me that vigilance must not pass with time.²⁶

Colonel Jeffrey J. Douglass,
USMC (Ret.), 1975–2005

That morning, another Marine found himself even closer to the Pentagon. Lieutenant Colonel Scott E. Yost worked at the Navy Annex, located on a nearby hill, when he and his colleagues heard American Airlines Flight 77 crash into the Pentagon. Lieutenant Colonel Yost was close enough to see and smell the smoke from the initial impact before watching the outer ring collapse.

I was stationed at Headquarters Marine Corps on 11 September 2001. My office was in the Navy Annex, about a half

²⁵ Charissa R. Howard, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 22 February 2026, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

²⁶ Jeffrey J. Douglass, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 16 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



The view of the Pentagon from the Navy Annex hill minutes after the attack.
Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DM-SD-02-03875.

mile uphill from the Pentagon. A little after 0930, we heard a dull “thump.” Because our building was under renovation, we didn’t think anything of it; we thought that the contractors were just putting down another 40-yard dumpster between the wings of the building. A few minutes later, the fire alarm went off. Again, we didn’t think anything of it and assumed the contractors had accidentally activated the fire alarms as they had done several times before. It wasn’t until one of the colonels came running down the passageway yelling, “Everybody out, this is not a drill,” [that] we all grabbed our covers and went outside to our muster areas. As soon as we got to the back parking lot, we saw the big cloud of black smoke spreading out over the side of

the Pentagon. About half an hour later, we saw the partial collapse of the outer ring of the Pentagon. It took a while until we heard what had happened. Very few people had cell phones at the time, and those who had them couldn’t make or receive a call because the networks were overloaded. Around 1100, we were told to secure for the day, but we weren’t allowed back into the building to grab our things. The Metro [Washington, DC’s rapid transit system] was shut down, so I needed to find another way home. Eventually, I was able to bum a ride and rode the 11 miles to my home—it took close to four more hours.

What I remember most about that day was a sense of surprise, shock, and helplessness. I knew we needed to do

something, but there was nothing we could do (yet).²⁷

Lieutenant Colonel Scott E. Yost,
USMC (Ret.), 1980–2007

Colonel Stephen P. Taylor was in his office at Marine Corps Air Facility Quantico, Virginia, where he was commanding officer of Marine Helicopter Squadron One (HMX-1). Responsible for the rotary-wing movement of the president, vice president (VP), and other important leaders, he found himself directing aircraft, personnel, and critical operations as the attacks unfolded. His account illustrates the unique pressure and responsibility of being both near the events and entrusted with safeguarding national leaders during a moment of unprecedented crisis.

On the morning of 11 September 2001, I was in my office when someone came up and said that a plane had hit the World Trade Center [WTC] in NYC. I assumed that a small plane had hit the building, maybe in bad weather. I went back to desk work. A few minutes later, I went to the ready room and found a small group of officers watching the TV. The WTC building was on fire. Just as I walked in, the second plane hit the other tower. We all immediately realized something was very wrong. We quickly contacted the detachment duty officer at our Anacostia Facility (NDV) [the airport code for the landing zone]. She indicated that there were other aircraft inbound to DC. Shortly after that, the third aircraft hit the Pentagon. At that point, I told ops to get every helicopter we had outside, preflighted with a crew assigned. After the Pentagon was hit, I

expected that we would have requests for medevacs. We had all our [CH-]46s standing by with litters, corpsmen, and doctors assigned to each. While they were quickly ready, there was never a call for medevac assistance. Later in the day, we sent CH-53 [Sea Stallion heavy-lift transport helicopters] to the Pentagon to move a group from the Pentagon to a classified location. About 1800, Major [Edward] Spicknall did the POTUS [President of the United States] lift from Andrews [Air Force Base] to the White House. His copilot was Major [Damien M.] Marsh. The Marine One crew chief was Sergeant [Travis M.] Boes. I had gone to NDV and was standing by to take the President from the White House to an undisclosed location. At about 2000, the decision was made that the President would stay in the White House and the VP would move to the undisclosed location. Major Spicknall took the VP to that location and remained there with him overnight.

The entire squadron responded to a very fluid and uncertain situation. Each department knew what needed to be done and got it done. I was very proud of the squadron's response. For the next several weeks, we were at a heightened level of alert, with a number of aircraft and crews on standby for contingencies.²⁸

Colonel Stephen P. Taylor, USMC
(Ret.), 1975–2003

²⁷ Scott E. Yost, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 17 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

²⁸ Slide deck, Col Stephen Taylor, USMC (Ret.), to Dr. Seth Givens, "HMX-1 9/11/2001 Info for Seth Givens, Marine Corps History Division," 15 December 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



VH-3D USMC 1st Helo by Col H. Avery Chenoweth, USMCR.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

Most Marines experience history at a distance, but some find themselves in the very rooms where decisions are made and power is exercised. For Colonel Drew T. Doolin, proximity to the vice president of the United States placed him at the epicenter of one of the nation's most urgent crises. On 11 September, what began as a routine day transformed into a direct engagement with the mechanisms of government, succession, and continuity at the highest levels, offering a unique vantage point on both leadership and history in real time.

In the summer of 2000, I was a major awaiting orders that would eventually place me at the heart of American history. I was selected for a new distinction: becoming the first Marine Corps

military aide to the vice president of the United States.

I reported to the White House in November 2000. My training began during a period of intense national uncertainty as the legal battles over the election results unfolded. Once the transition was finalized, I stood ready as President George W. Bush and Vice President [Richard B.] “Dick” Cheney were sworn in on 20 January 2001.

I had been on duty with Vice President Cheney on 10 September. On the morning of 11 September, I turned over my duties to the U.S. Navy aide



Maj Drew T. Doolin aboard an HMX-1 helicopter while serving as the military aide to Vice President Richard B. “Dick” Cheney, 2001.
Courtesy of Col Drew T. Doolin, USMC (Ret.).

to the vice president. I was “in zone” for promotion to lieutenant colonel, so I traveled to Quantico to hand-carry my fitness report—signed by the vice president himself—to the selection board.

While visiting a colleague’s command on base, my pager alerted me to contact the Presidential Emergency Operations Center (PEOC). Due to poor cellular reception, I used a land-line and a White House-issued “override” card to bypass jammed circuits. At that moment, the first plane had struck the north tower. The initial report was that a “small commuter plane” had hit New York City. I was ordered to return to my residence and stand by on my secure telephone unit.

As the scale of the attacks became clear, the situation escalated instantly.

My orders were to return to the White House immediately. However, the National Capital Region was in total gridlock.

The PEOC initially suggested landing a Marine Corps helicopter on the playground of my local elementary school—where my own children were in class—to airlift me. Recognizing the panic this would cause, I redirected the mission to Marine Corps Air Facility Quantico, home of HMX-1.

The atmosphere on base was electric. Traffic was frozen, and I was escorted by fellow Marines to the airfield. My mind immediately turned to my core responsibility: the 25th Amendment and the succession of power.

While President Bush was being moved to safety via Air Force One, Vice President Cheney was being evacuated from the White House to a secure location. My role was to ensure the vice president remained connected and capable of assuming command should the worst happen.

As a Marine major, the weight of the moment was never lost on me. Our actions were the physical manifestation of the U.S. Constitution in a time of war. We fulfilled our duty to ensure that the leadership of the United States remained unbroken.

Looking back, the perspective is both humbling and surreal. I was once just a small-town kid from Illinois; at the time, I never could have imagined I would find myself at the epicenter of such a defining moment in American

history. That Tuesday morning started with a routine promotion board and ended with me carrying the weight of the 25th Amendment into a bunker.²⁹

Colonel Drew T. Doolin, USMC
(Ret.), 1986–2016

FAMILY AND SERVICE

For the Marines in this section, the legacy of 9/11 is interwoven with the families who supported and served beside them. Dual-active-duty couples learned to navigate alternating deployments, careers, and the demands of raising children. Many Marines grew up witnessing their parents' dedication to service, internalizing those values and later following in their footsteps. Service therefore became a shared family commitment, modeled across generations and marked by sacrifice, resilience, and mutual support.

Retired First Sergeant Stacie M. Black and her husband, the 19th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps and the 5th Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Troy E. Black, each reflect on the challenges of balancing long careers, multiple deployments, and home-life responsibilities. They also share their recollections of 9/11, describing how that day shaped their perspectives on service and marriage.

Engaged to be married at the time, Staff Sergeant Black (née Polich) was working between two training companies at the 4th Recruit Training Battalion when she first learned the news, an experience that would leave a lasting imprint on her career and family life. Her fiancé, Gunnery Sergeant Troy Black, was already an experienced Marine and drill instructor on that day. His recollections reflect not only the challenges of combat, but the profound ways service shaped his family, forged enduring friendships, and inspired acts of courage and sacrifice that continue to define his legacy.

²⁹ Drew T. Doolin, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 19 July 2026, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



Left to right, SgtMaj Troy E. Black, LCpl Arewynn Black, 1stSgt Stacie M. Black, and Brayden Black, in May 2024 at MCRD Parris Island. SgtMaj and 1stSgt Black had just served as the reviewing officials at their daughter's boot camp graduation. Courtesy of 1stSgt Stacie M. Black, USMC (Ret.).

On 11 September 2001, I was a drill instructor at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island. One moment we were focused on transforming civilians into Marines; the next, we were watching history unfold in disbelief. In an instant, the mission became painfully real. Up to that point, my career had been about pride, discipline, and serving something greater than myself. After that day, service carried a new weight. We were no longer preparing for the possibility of war—we were

preparing for certainty. The years that followed reshaped my life. My husband deployed five times. I deployed once. We raised our family between homecomings and goodbyes, learning resilience in ways we never expected. What occurred on 11 September didn't just change the trajectory of our nation; it defined the rhythm of our family's life and the depth of my commitment to service. Today, as I watch my daughter wear the uniform of a United States Marine, I see the enduring legacy of that day—one of sacrifice, strength, and an unbroken line of service across generations.³⁰

First Sergeant Stacie M. Black,
USMC (Ret.), 1992–2013

The 9/11 attacks marked a turning point in both my military service and my life. I had previously served in combat during the Gulf War, worked as a drill instructor in the mid-1990s, and later with a Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team company before returning to the drill field at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island in late 2000. I was dating my future wife—also a drill instructor—when the attacks occurred. I will never forget seeing the Twin Towers fall, the Pentagon attacked, and eventually hearing of the brave passengers who attacked the terrorists on Flight 93, giving their lives to save others. Shortly afterward, I took my fiancé to see [the 2001 movie] *Black Hawk Down* and told her that if

we deployed, that depiction was likely close to what modern combat would resemble. We married just before the invasion of Iraq, and from 2003 to 2014, I deployed twice to Iraq, twice to Afghanistan, and later in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. My wife also served in Iraq. During those years, we built our marriage and raised our children in the midst of war, and those years not only defined our careers but profoundly shaped our family and the lives of our children.

In the midst of combat, with all its horrors, I was blessed to meet my closest friend, see the most amazing acts of courage, valor, and heroism. I witnessed sacrifice and held the hand of many a wounded Marine. Lost others, some of whom were friends, and I will never lose the memories of any of them. Those Marines set a standard that I only hope that my future career could have held up to. It is for them and so many others that I continued to serve along with the knowledge that my service was for the benefit of my family's safety and to ensure their future could be safe and prosperous.³¹

19th Sergeant Major
of the Marine Corps and 5th Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman
of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Sergeant
Major Troy E. Black, USMC (Ret.)
1988–2025

*For Gunnery Sergeant Charmale D. Gallagher, 9/11
reshaped both her military career and her family life.*

³⁰ Stacie M. Black, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 28 February 2026, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

³¹ Troy E. Black, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 29 February 2026, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

Serving as an individual mobilization augmentee (IMA) Marine at Camp Pendleton, she quickly assumed critical mobilization responsibilities for I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), ensuring reserve Marines were properly assigned, processed, and deployed. At the same time, the attacks altered her retirement plans and tested her family's resilience, as her children had to adapt to the long hours, deployments, and demands of service.

On 11 September 2001, I was an IMA Marine with I MEF and on active duty orders (what is now called ADOS, Active Duty Operational Support) with Marine Corps Warfigting Lab at Camp Pendleton, California. My orders were to end on 15 September, and I was to start another set on 1 October. I went to the reserve liaison officer and asked if the IMA Marines were going to be mobilized and was told yes. I had my next set of orders canceled, and we began the process to activate our IMA Marines. Those orders began on 26 September. I was assigned as the mobilization chief for I MEF. My job was to request Marines to fill reserve billets on the T/O [table of organization] that had been identified as required by the different G shops [Marine Corps staff directorates]. Once reserve Marines checked into I MEF, our office managed their entitlements and made sure the sections had the Marines they needed. We also were required to report to the CG [commanding general] how many reserve Marines were on board and deployed, across all of the MEF. We also reported this information to Marine Forces Reserve.

Personally, 9/11 changed our

family plans and my own. I was at 19 years reserve time and planned to do one last set of active-duty orders to end March 2002, which would give me enough points to retire. The events of 9/11 changed that and I ended up serving four more years. My husband ended up retiring earlier than we had planned, as he decided he was done being deployed away from the family. My children (aged 17, 14, and 8) learned to be self-sufficient with dad deployed and mom working long hours. Upon his return, we transferred to Quantico before I could deploy with I MEF. I was then activated at Quantico to the Mobilization Processing Center [MPC]/ Reserve Support Unit as the SNCO-IC [staff noncommissioned officer in charge] of the MPC. I retired from there.³²

Gunnery Sergeant Charmale D.
Gallagher, USMCR (Ret.),
1983–2006

As dual active-duty spouses were navigating the impact of 9/11 to the family they were building, a different type of family dynamic shaped the lives of servicemembers who shared the bond of service and blood with siblings and parents. Sergeant Dexter A. Fagan shares how his older brother inspired his decision to join the Marine Corps and how they would later be stationed together before separately deploying with their respective units. Sergeant Fagan shares his reflections in honor of his brother, Captain Eric S. Fagan, who died in 2023.

I was in eighth grade on that infamous morning; and while too young to truly

³² Charmale D. Gallagher, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 24 February 2026, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



Sgt Dexter A. Fagan (right) with his brother, Capt Eric S. Fagan.
Courtesy of Sgt Dexter A. Fagan.

comprehend what was going on, something about that day ignited a fire and desire inside of me to defend my country and its freedom. This desire was shared by my older brother Eric, who would first honor our father's wishes to finish college before commissioning in 2007. Two years later, I followed in his footsteps and enlisted in 2009. Soon thereafter, we would happen to get stationed together at Marine Corps Air Station New River, he as a maintenance officer for HMH-461 [Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 461] [nicknamed] "Iron Horse," and I as an [MOS] 7051, an aircraft rescue and firefighting specialist. Although not deployed simultaneously, my brother Eric and I both faced deeply challenging deployments. I experienced a wide range of



Cmdr Tom McKavitt Jr., USN (Ret.), and Capt Margaret McKavitt, USNR (Ret.), center, attending the 250th Marine Corps Birthday Ball with their sons, Capt Sean McKavitt, left, and then-Maj Thomas "Pat" McKavitt III.

Courtesy of LtCol Thomas McKavitt III.

emotions due to being separated from my pregnant wife, sleep deprived, and confronted with the enemy in close proximity. By the grace of the good Lord above, and a handful of brothers in arms, we both made it home. The events of 11 September would forever change the life trajectory of the Fagan brothers, for better or for worse. Captain and sergeant—brothers by blood and in arms.³³

Sergeant Dexter A. Fagan,
USMC, 2009–19, on behalf
of Captain Eric S. Fagan, USMC,
2007–17

For Lieutenant Colonel Thomas P. McKavitt, 9/11 was a defining moment that shaped both his sense of duty and his path to the Marine Corps. As the son of two Navy officers, he already understood service, but the

³³ Dexter A. Fagan, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 10 July 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

attacks deepened his commitment and inspired both him and his brother to become Marines.

Tuesday morning, 11 September 2001, I was seated in my eighth-grade science class at Robinson Secondary School in Fairfax, Virginia. An announcement over the public address system from our principal informed us that planes had struck the World Trade Center in New York and a fire had broken out at the Pentagon. While the World Trade Center seemed a world away, the news of an emergency at the Pentagon hit very close to home. My father, Commander Thomas McKavitt, USN, was stationed at the Pentagon. He worked on a watch floor, so my immediate thought was trying to recall which shift he was on that day and if he was in the building. Luckily for us, he was scheduled to go in that afternoon for the swing shift. Later that day, he and his team departed Northern Virginia for the Pentagon's remote site to execute the DOD's continuity of operations plan; he would be gone for two weeks.

The events of 9/11 did not radically alter my life, as they did so many others. As the son of two Navy officers, a career in the armed forces seemed preordained. However, my dedication to service was strengthened in the aftermath of the attacks. I felt it my obligation to serve my country, and in my young mind, to avenge the threat made to my father. It was around this time that I decided I wanted to be a Marine, the first to fight.

In pursuit of becoming a Marine, I attended the U.S. Naval Academy,

where I attempted to immerse myself in Marine Corps culture. I studied the history of the Corps and sought out Marines as my mentors. Commissioning as a U.S. Marine in 2010 seemed like I had achieved a lifelong goal.

The 9/11 attacks continued to impact my career. My first deployment was to Afghanistan, where I spent a year advising the Afghan Border Police in Helmand Province. I viewed it as my contribution to ensuring an attack on our homeland would never again be planned in that place. The loss of our war there is something I still have not fully come to grips with.

In 2015, my 9/11 story seemed to come full circle. As a member of the 26th MEU, I was on the maiden deployment of the USS *Arlington* (LPD-24), one of the "9/11 ships." She was named in honor of Arlington County, Virginia, the home of the Pentagon.

Between my father, mother, and me, a member of my family served every day of the Global War on Terror[ism]. My father retired from the Navy in 2006. My mother, Captain Margaret McKavitt, USNR, retired from the Navy Nurse Corps in 2011, spending a year on active duty assigned to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, where she treated the wounded from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. My brother and I continue their legacy of service today.³⁴

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas P.
McKavitt, USMC, 2010–present

³⁴ LtCol Thomas P. McKavitt, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 13 August 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



32d Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen James L. Jones during the reactivation ceremony of the 4th MEB (AT), 29 October 2001. Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DM-SD-03-09744.

REFLECTIONS FROM CAREER LEADERS

The reflections that follow in this final section come from Marines who served at the highest levels of the Marine Corps, and whose careers are both expansive and revered. Their perspectives offer a broader view of how the attacks influenced the Marine Corps institutionally, shaping a culture of readiness that defined the era.

General James L. Jones Jr., the 32d Commandant of the Marine Corps, began his day at the Pentagon with a 0730 breakfast with former Secretary of the Navy James H. Webb Jr. His recollection of the events that day, and his visit to Ground Zero days later, re-

September 11, 2001 Tuesday	
All Day	Duty Aide: LCDR Cave Driver: GySgt Walker
07:00 - 07:15	Depart Quarters en route Pentagon Svc "C"
07:30 - 09:00	Breakfast w/ Hon James Webb -- POR (Read-ahead at TAB A)
09:00 - 09:15	(Time TBD) O/C by Mrs. Nordstrom-Ho
09:30 - 10:00	Depart Pentagon en route Holy Trinity Church, 36th & O Sts. -- Georgetown Svc "A"
10:00 - 11:00	Funeral Service -- Holy Trinity Church, Georgetown
11:00 - 11:30	Depart Holy Trinity Church en route Pentagon
11:30 - 12:00	C/O Gen Jumper -- 4E924
12:15 - 13:45	CMC Lunch -- POR (Read-ahead at TAB B)
15:15 - 15:30	O/C w/Dr. Tony Tether, DARPA Director (In Call) (Bio at TAB C)
15:30 - 15:50	Depart Pentagon en route Marine Barracks
16:00 - 16:30	Address Marine Barracks 8th and 1st Marines - SHMC also attends
19:00 - 19:30	Depart Quarters en route 1231 Crest Lane, McLean, VA 22101 Business Attire

"All hell broke loose"—"Terrorist attack on Pent." Handwritten notes in Gen James L. Jones's day planner, 11 September 2001. Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

flects the perspective of the Marine Corps' senior leader confronting the onset of a new era. It also underscores his instinct for small-unit leadership, maintaining focus on what could be controlled in the moment amid profound uncertainty.

When the plane crashed into the Pentagon, I had just come back to the office. I walked into the office, and I saw the television in my office was on. I saw a plane—the second plane—crash into the towers. I thought somebody put on a movie. Then I realized quickly that this was actually a real event. I knew what was happening, but it was happening in New York. When the plane did hit [the Pentagon], that's when the reality set in. I remember feeling the

shock of the hit. Almost like when your ears pop in an airplane. Because of the way the Pentagon was built with those circles, there was a pressure, an over-pressure, that traveled through the E Ring. I could feel it in my ears. I wasn't that far away, but we were far enough away.

Then they started the evacuation of the Pentagon. I left the Pentagon with everybody else out the mall entrance and carried out the rest of the schedule. I went to the funeral of my friend's father, who was being buried over in Georgetown. As the roads were closed and traffic was cut off and everything else, I cut my visit to the funeral short and went back to the new location of the headquarters.

In the meantime, working with the assistant commandant, we had decided to relocate the Marine Corps headquarters up on the hill [the Navy Annex], where it had traditionally been. The Navy Command Center was destroyed in the hit. I called the CNO (Chief of Naval Operations) [Admiral Vernon. E. Clark] and offered our services and capabilities that were still wired up there on the hill to the Navy. So, the Navy and the Marine Corps were colocated in the old buildings. But we're glad we had them. You have to relocate the headquarters of the Marine Corps and the Navy to make sure that the command and control mechanisms were still functioning to execute our roles and missions during this time of great crisis. Most of the rest of the day was [spent] making sure that those

systems were, in fact, up and operating; that the Navy was able to relocate and establish its command and control systems. I was talking to the assistant commandant and the three stars, the senior leadership of the Marine Corps, to make sure that our command and control systems were up and operating. By the end of the day, we were pretty satisfied that we could operate from where we were up on the hill.

[In the days after the attack], I was encouraged to go to New York City by people who wanted to see senior military representatives up there. We have a lot of Marines in New York. I'm sure the other [Joint Chiefs] did the same thing, but there's not much question that I wouldn't go. I was definitely going to go. It was pretty horrific. I remember giving a speech to a Marine Corps organization [in] downtown New York, [and there were] a lot of firefighters there. That was a pretty emotional day. My concluding thoughts were that we were being presented with a global challenge that we were going to have to respond to. I felt that the Marine Corps was probably in a pretty good position to do that, if called upon. I think the subsequent weeks and months proved that we were pretty capable.³⁵

32d Commandant of the Marine
Corps General James L. Jones, USMC
(Ret.), 1967–2007

By the time of the attacks, Sergeant Major John L. Es-

³⁵ Adapted from Gen James L. Jones Jr. interview with LtCol Timothy Heck and Dr. Lisa M. Budreau, 12 April 2024, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Marine Corps Archives.



Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps SgtMaj John L. Estrada speaks to Marines at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, 14 February 2007.

Department of Defense photo (USA) 36319.

trada had built a distinguished 28-year career and was serving as sergeant major of Marine Corps Training Regiment, MCRD Parris Island. Three months later, he became sergeant major of the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (3d MAW), which immediately began deploying Marines in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. He was forward deployed and participated in Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Southern Watch, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Sergeant Major Estrada assumed the post of the 15th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps on 26 June 2003 and served in this position until 25 April 2007, before retiring two months later after a 34-year career.

After seeing the airplane hit the first Twin Tower [in New York City], I assumed it was pilot error or mechanical failure. But when I saw the second airplane hit the other tower, I was in

disbelief. Because the flights were domestic and were on American flag carriers, I thought perhaps the crashes were strategically coordinated by disgruntled American pilots who were flying these planes.

After the third aircraft flew into the Pentagon, I realized these crashes were indeed coordinated and premeditated, and I naturally wondered how this tragedy would affect me and other Marines. Then, when the news broadcasts reported the last aircraft went down in a field in Pennsylvania while the passengers were fighting to take control of the aircraft, strong emotions erupted within me. Like many other Americans, I wondered what would

happen next. My mind was swirling with disbelief and many questions. However, there was never a thought in my mind that we would be facing a national security challenge of great magnitude.

Two years later, at the time of the invasion of Iraq, my billet description was sergeant major of the 3d MAW. I was forward deployed with the wing and participated in the invasion of March 2003. By June, I had been selected and posted as the 15th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps. As I prepared for my next assignment while forward deployed with the 3d MAW in Iraq, my immediate thoughts were how would I leverage my new assignment to best support our Marines and their families, especially those in battle?

Top priority for me at this time was ensuring that our Marines were given the best training, technologies, and equipment then available. Individual personal protective equipment and [the] survivability of Marines while riding in humvees (HMMWVs; High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles) and other wheeled vehicles were the two top issues critical to the morale, welfare, and confidence of our warriors at that time.

Advocating for the resources to fund research, development, and procurement for those two high-priority issues were on top of every leader's list. To address these critical issues, I had to get a good understanding of what our warriors needed on the battlefield. I engaged individual Marines and units

through consistent and numerous visits, in training at homebases or abroad, and at seminars and symposiums. I came away from those engagements armed with real-time information and facts to advocate on behalf of our Marines to elected officials in Congress for the necessary resources.

Many Americans, young and old, felt it was their patriotic duty to serve in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, and I believe that desire still exists. I am pleased to have played a part in that evolution at such a crucial time in the Corps' history.³⁶

15th Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Sergeant Major John L. Estrada, USMC (Ret.), 1973–2007

On that morning, Lieutenant General James B. Laster was relaxing in the Shenandoah Mountains rather than working in the Pentagon, where he was a colonel serving as chief of war plans in the Joint Staff J-7 (Directorate for Joint Force Development). His testimony provides a rare window into the world of staff officers whose decisions and knowledge are critical in moments of crisis. It also underscores how the world was not yet instantly connected in 2001 as it is today. News still traveled slowly, even for staff officers who held important roles inside the Pentagon.

On 11 September 2001, I was a colonel and I had just graduated from the National War College [at Fort Lesley J. McNair in Washington, DC]. I was assigned as the chief of war plans, J-7 Joint Staff.

The day prior to 9/11, I took leave. My dog and I went fishing up in

³⁶ Adapted from SgtMaj John L. Estrada, "Reflections," 25 April 2025, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.

the Shenandoah Mountains. The next morning, there was a little country store just down the road about half a mile, and I decided to walk down with the dog and call my wife just to check in. I didn't have a cell phone then. And so I called her and she said, "Oh my God, we're under attack." And I said, "What are you talking about?" She says, "New York City's been hit, the Pentagon's been hit, you need to get back." I literally dropped the phone, ran a half mile back to my little campsite, grabbed up everything, threw it in my truck, and me and the dog jumped in and drove very fast back home to Stafford, Virginia.

I immediately called my boss on the Joint Staff, and he said, "Don't come in, but I need to know where you keep a certain plan," and when he said the name of this plan, I knew exactly what he was talking about and who potentially may have done this, and so I gave it to him. He said everyone's being evacuated out of the building, and there's people that are being transferred to an alternate site and just to come in first thing in the morning.

I took numerous other calls throughout the night, mainly with the Joint Staff. The next morning, I drove to the Pentagon, and I can remember the eerie sight of flames about 10–12 foot leaping off the building of the Pentagon where the plane had gone in. When I got inside it was still smoke-filled. My office wasn't damaged [in] the Joint Staff [area], but it was smoky.

From there on, we went to 24-

hour operations for several months. It was shortly after that time that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs [Air Force General Richard B. Myers] decided to stand up a special organization called the Future Ops Group [Future Operations Group]. I became the deputy in the Future Ops Group under another Army colonel. I was the number two in the room with not only the chairman of the Joint Chiefs but also the Secretary of Defense. I basically saw history being developed right there.³⁷

Lieutenant General James B.
Laster, USMC (Ret.), 1978–2008

For more than four decades, Lieutenant Colonel Rhonda C. Martin served, first as an enlisted Marine and later as an officer. With more than 42 years in uniform, she was the longest-serving Marine on active duty until her retirement. On 11 September, she was serving in Okinawa, Japan. Reflecting on that day, she recalls the moment she first learned about the attacks and how her unit responded.

On 11 September 2001, I was assigned as the adjutant for the 31st MEU in Okinawa. On this day, I was standing duty as command duty officer, and it was after midnight on 12 September in Okinawa because of the time difference. I was watching a *Godzilla* movie to stay alert and the phone rang. I was asked if I had seen the news, and I replied that I had not. So, I turned the channel to the news, and I saw a replay of Twin Towers in NYC being struck by a plane. At first, I thought I was still

³⁷ Adapted from LtGen James B. Laster interview with Mary A. Rose and Jeremy B. Mazur, 30 July 2025, Marine Corps Oral History Collection, Marine Corps Archives.



LtCol Rhonda C. Martin, who was the longest-serving active-duty Marine until her retirement, stands by the “Molly Marine” statue outside the Gray Research Center, Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA, 11 September 2025.

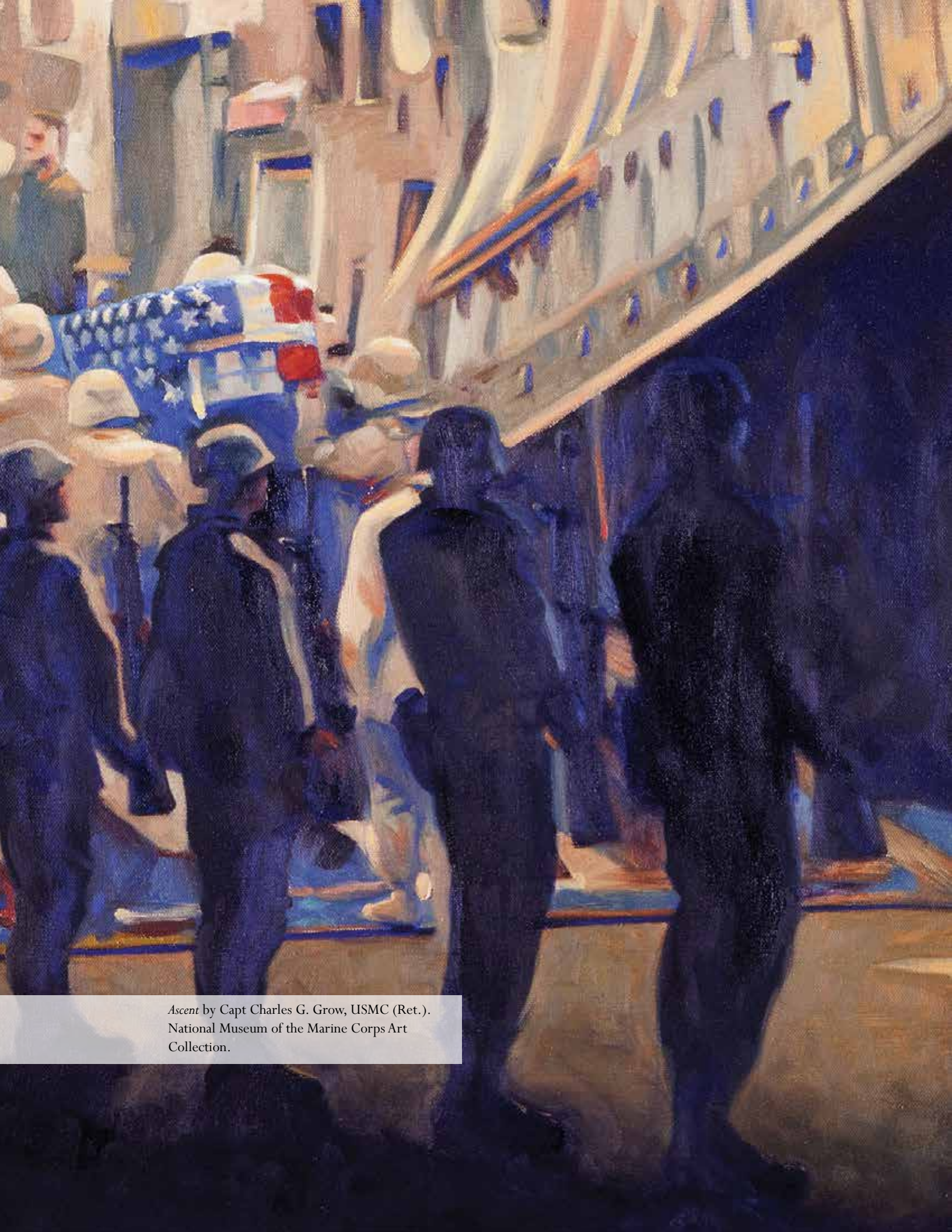
Department of Defense photo (USMC) 250911-M-ML869-1055.

watching another movie and then I realized it had happened. Immediately, I called the MEU CO to let him know how many Marines were on leave in NYC. After receiving further instructions, we recalled everyone back to work for further instructions. At the time, our MEU CO wanted the unit to

be prepared for any future mission that we might receive from HHQ [higher headquarters]. As a Marine, I was ready to defend our nation and wanted to do what I could.³⁸

Lieutenant Colonel Rhonda C.
Martin, USMC (Ret.),
1983–2026

³⁸ Rhonda C. Martin, correspondence with Mary A. Rose, 23 February 2026, Historians Files, Marine Corps Archives.



Ascent by Capt Charles G. Grow, USMC (Ret.).
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art
Collection.



CHAPTER FOUR

The Legacy of 9/11

Seth A. Givens

The terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 marked a generational turning point and inaugurated what can be termed the 9/11 era, a period that extended to August 2021, when the United States completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan. These attacks reshaped American security policy, military strategy, and public consensus, creating a sense of urgency that reverberated across government and society.¹ For Marines, the 9/11 era demanded rapid adaptation, with multiple deployments in support of operations and a fulfillment the Marine Corps' role as a flexible, first-response force. Across all the Service branches, this sustained operational tempo during this period came to define the character of American military service for the next two decades.

The 9/11 era was defined by the Global War on Terrorism, a series of U.S.-led military campaigns and counterterrorism efforts aimed at dismantling terrorist networks, preventing attacks on the United States, and protecting national and global security. These campaigns shaped U.S. strategy, military operations, and the experiences of Marines across multiple

¹ Melvyn P. Leffler, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920–2015* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 281–302.

theaters. They began with Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001, with the objective of removing the Taliban from power, dismantling al-Qaeda, and preventing further attacks on the United States. The conflict expanded in March 2003 with Operation Iraqi Freedom, when U.S.-led coalition forces invaded Iraq to topple the Baathist regime, eliminate alleged weapons of mass destruction programs, and remove a potential state sponsor of terrorism. Operation Iraqi Freedom transitioned in September 2010 to the advisory and stabilization mission Operation New Dawn, which lasted until December 2011. Following the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in 2014, U.S. forces launched Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) in October to degrade and defeat ISIS while supporting local partner forces. Other specialized campaigns within the Global War on Terrorism included Operation Enduring Freedom—Horn of Africa, a counterterrorism effort in East Africa; Operation Enduring Freedom—Philippines, focusing on terrorist networks in the southern Philippines; and the 2011 interventions in Libya, known as Operation Odyssey Dawn and later

Operation Unified Protector, aimed at enforcing a no-fly zone and protecting civilians during the Libyan civil war. Marines participated in these operations, contributing through combat and advisory roles.

The 9/11 era left an enduring imprint on the Marine Corps. It molded a generation of Marines and instilled lessons in adaptability, small-unit leadership, and the integration of tactical actions with broader strategic objectives. The experience of two decades of persistent operations also drove institutional adaptation, which refined doctrine, professional education, and the Corps' capacity to advise, partner with, and build the capabilities of allied forces. Amid two decades of change, Marines drew on the enduring strength and guidance from the Corps' long and storied history. The 9/11 era now stands as a chapter in that living legacy. Reflecting on the experiences of the Global War on Terrorism shapes how today's Marines understand their mission, interpret challenges, and preserve institutional memory, guiding how they fight, lead, and uphold the values that have always defined them.

THE 9/11 WARS ARE OVER

Charting the Best Way Forward

Major Michael Anderson, USA

Major Anderson is an Army infantry officer, a graduate of the resident Marine Corps Command and Staff College, and a 2022 graduate of the School of Advanced Military Studies. He has completed four operational deployments, including to the Middle East, Afghanistan, and East and Central Africa, and he holds a graduate degree in military history and a bachelor's degree in history and political science.

The 9/11 wars are over. It is time to stop using 9/11 as a call to arms. The United States has entered a new era of a persistent engagement with various violent extremist groups across the globe and a resurgence in growing state competitors, such as Russia and China. This is an era inherited from the 9/11 wars, otherwise referred to as the Global War on Terrorism. The al-Qaeda of 9/11 has ceased to exist in its previous form and the war with Saddam's Iraq ended with a sovereign Iraq and withdrawal of U.S. troops, leaving the authorizations for use of military force for the 9/11 wars overused. The "forever

war" against the Taliban, the first expansion to a non-specified enemy from the post-9/11 congressionally approved Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMF), is ending. A new, different threat environment has emerged, requiring new or adjusted authorizations. It is important for the Nation and its military to fully understand the environment they are in to determine the best way forward in this new era and to recognize that the 9/11 wars are concluded and that the Nation is engaged in a new set of wars.

AL-QAEDA TRANSITION AND BIN LADEN'S DEATH

With Osama Bin Laden's death on 2 May 2011, many concluded this was the end of the al-Qaeda of 9/11, the specified enemy in the original post-9/11 AUMF. In actuality, the al-Qaeda that perpetrated the 9/11 attacks and instigated the 9/11 wars (Global War on Terrorism) already felt its death knell circa 2009 after a steady decline starting in 2004. Bin Laden's death in 2011 simply put a new face to the replacement, a changing al-Qaeda after the decline and end of the core, original al-Qaeda.

Between 2004 and 2009, the al-Qaeda base

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Moving Up in the Dust of a Thousand Years by Kristopher J. Battles.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

in Pakistan contributed to only 6 of the 21 most serious plots against the West. A report by British terrorism expert Paul Cruickshank found the other 15 were from affiliated groups without training or direction from the core group, or from independent terrorist groups and home-grown radicalized terrorism.² Another study found 3 of 20 plots, specifically 2 of 6 planned against the United States, came from affiliate offshoots—not from the core who planned and orchestrated 9/11. In comparison to the plans prior to 2009, these plots lacked the vision, depth, and audacity in scope the traditional al-Qaeda had provided to the 9/11 and previous international terror plots.³ Prior to the decline and transition to more affiliate or inspired copy-cats, the core al-Qaeda group from 2001 to 2005 planned and conducted successful attacks in the United States, Bali, Madrid, and Lon-

don—demonstrating a different approach, focus, and capability.⁴ In fact, the failed 2009 New York subway plot seemed to be one of the last core al-Qaeda internationally planned events. Two other plots were also planned and foiled for attacks in Britain and Norway.

Starting in 2009, al-Qaeda accelerated its shift to the new strategy of the local fight, focusing on de-centralized, affiliate-style perpetrators; in 2011 with Bin Laden's death, [it] legitimately shifted to a new "face" with the loss of its iconic figurehead.⁵ Whatever the cause was for this shift, whether it was natural evolution of the organization or if it was because of the external pressure on al-Qaeda post-9/11, the organization fundamentally altered its methods and structure.

Bin Laden's death affected three critical features of al-Qaeda as a global organization:

Its legitimacy as a core organization capa-

² Thomas F. Lynch III, "The 80 Percent Solution: The Strategic Defeat of bin Laden's al-Qaeda and Implications for South Asian Security," National Security Studies Program Policy Paper (Washington, DC: New America Foundation, February 2012).

³ Lynch, "The 80 Percent Solution."

⁴ Lynch, "The 80 Percent Solution."

⁵ Anne Stenersen, "Thirty Years after Its Foundation—Where Is al-Qaeda Going?," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 6 (December 2017): 5–16.

*ble of choreographing catastrophic global terrorist events. . . . Its ability to claim that it was the base for certain victory . . . [and] a credible unfettered training area for global jihad—on the area most critical to its own mystical lore: Afghanistan and western Pakistan.*⁶

Aside from the damage his death caused the global organization, more than anything it damaged the core—the “brand name.”⁷

Further emphasizing the disconnect between direct core al-Qaeda control and independence of associated affiliates was that after Bin Laden’s death, there were increased occurrences of the organization ignoring the ideological background of those they were aligning with—namely the increased involvement in the transatlantic drug trade.⁸ The new al-Qaeda shifted funding from donations largely garnered by Bin Laden’s notoriety and message of jihad to illicit drug trade, kidnapping, and international financial system loopholes. These efforts are largely overseen and managed by affiliates for self-sustainment and less for a global group support managed by the core as had been done previously and for 9/11.⁹ In contrast, Bin Laden’s 9/11 al-Qaeda core had less affiliates and centrally managed majority of funding, forcing the few affiliates to fall in line with the direction of the core. Even so, some groups such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s affiliated al-Qaeda in Iraq (later to become the Islamic State) started giving Bin Laden pushback as early as 2006, revealing

the decline of the centralized 9/11 al-Qaeda.¹⁰

The affiliates, of course, shared views and inspiration from the traditional al-Qaeda of 9/11, but there is no clear evidence of Bin Laden’s al-Qaeda leadership directly influencing and planning the affiliates operational actions or support.¹¹ This undercuts the idea of the elusive mastermind or puppeteer, and more like a role model and later a martyr. A study by the Institute for Peace and Conflict stated,

Al Qaeda of bin Laden, once an organized structure with set endgames and long term plans has been replaced with [Ayman] al-Zawahiri’s al Qaeda: one that is fractured, has short-term goals, and riddled with communication issues.

It goes on to argue the difference between the two leaderships and their inherently effected organizations is a result of “the nature and political climate they had to operate in.”¹² Al-Qaeda post-Bin Laden has become steadily more decentralized, more of an aspirational, advisory model for the increasingly more independently funded affiliates and independent, like-minded terrorist organizations.¹³

END OF OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM AND WITHDRAWAL OF OPERATION NEW DAWN IN 2011

Though tenuously connected even the time of its instigation, the 2003 Invasion of Iraq, later christened Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, was included under the umbrella of the Global War on Terrorism as a result of 9/11. Although it did have a separate authorization for use of military

⁶ Lynch, “The 80 Percent Solution.”

⁷ Lynch, “The 80 Percent Solution.”

⁸ Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy, “Three Years after Osama bin Laden: Al Qaeda Today: Transitions and Trajectories,” IPCS Special Report 165 (New Delhi: Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, October 2014).

⁹ Lynch, “The 80 Percent Solution.”

¹⁰ Lynch, “The 80 Percent Solution.”

¹¹ Lynch, “The 80 Percent Solution.”

¹² Krishnamurthy, “Three Years after Osama.”

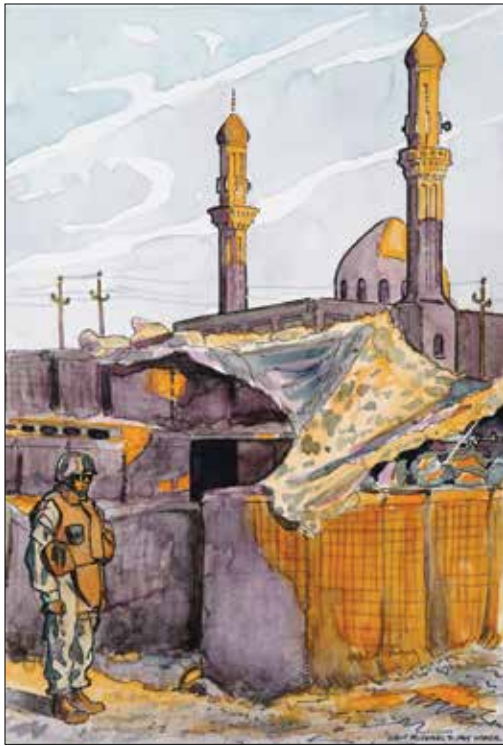
¹³ Krishnamurthy, “Three Years after Osama.”



A Moment to Ponder in the Poppy Fields by John Deckert.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

force provided by Congress, it was initially presented as a continuation, or broadening, of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM—the 9/11 war that was ongoing in Afghanistan.

As the Iraq War dragged on, feeding off the 2006–2007 “surge” in Iraq coupled with the aligning of the Sunni Awakening, negotiations paved the way for the U.S. military withdraw-



Entry Control Point for Government Center, Fallujah, by WO1 Michael D. Fay, USMCR.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

al. These negotiations ended with the Strategic Framework Agreement and the partner security agreement, outlining the future conduct of American military in Iraq and a timeline for gradual withdrawal.¹⁴ The security agreement, meant to be a broad baseline for the U.S. military withdrawal, remained the final agreement between the United States and Iraq when subsequent negotiations failed to achieve consensus.¹⁵ This lengthy process eventually led to the final transition from Operation NEW DAWN in January 2010, which oversaw the final with-

¹⁴ Richard R. Brennan et al., *Ending the U.S. War in Iraq: The Final Transition, Operational Maneuver, and Disestablishment of United States Forces-Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2013).

¹⁵ Brennan et al., *Ending the U.S. War in Iraq*.

drawal of U.S. troops the following year.¹⁶

On 31 December 2011, Operation NEW DAWN ended, leaving the only U.S. military residual presence supporting the embassy-based Office of Security Cooperation and normal, albeit robust, defense attaché team for the routine interaction of the Department of State and DOD [Department of Defense] with the Iraqi government.¹⁷ All eyes were on Iraq after the U.S. military departed with so much blood and treasure poured into the nation. After the American forces departed, violence remained at levels similar to those of the preceding, last three years of the American presence, hovering around 4,000 civilian deaths a year.¹⁸

The violence in Iraq had largely stabilized and with multiple successful elections, the government had established its sovereignty. According to an NPR [National Public Radio] report in April 2011, the residual murder-violence rate in Iraq was on par with that of Brazil or Mexico and less than Colombia or Venezuela—by multiples. The American occupation and Iraqi government had established and supported a full government of services, regular elections, and a ratified constitution.¹⁹

By the last troop departure in 2011, the Iraq War had ended. Iraq was now a sovereign nation, standing on its own, making its own decisions, for good or bad. Continued U.S. presence arguably would be nothing more than a crutch for a nation that needed to learn how to manage its own affairs.

¹⁶ Brennan et al., *Ending the U.S. War in Iraq*.

¹⁷ Brennan et al., *Ending the U.S. War in Iraq*.

¹⁸ Emma Sky, *Iraq in Hindsight: Views on the U.S. Withdrawal* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, December 2012).

¹⁹ Kelly McEvers, "Violence in Iraq Down, but Killing Indiscriminate," *All Things Considered*, NPR, 26 April 2011, available at <https://www.npr.org/2011/04/26/135745223/violence-in-iraq-down-but-killing-indiscriminate>.

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM-PHILIPPINES CONCLUSION IN 2014

The impetus for America's expansion of the 9/11 response to the Philippines was by invitation to help them deal with their extremist threats and terrorist groups in the Philippines hiding Ramzi Yousef and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the 1993 World Trade Center bomber and the main planner of the 9/11 attacks in 1994 and 1995, respectfully.²⁰

The initial involvement of the United States in the Philippines revolved around the hunt for Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) affiliated with al-Qaeda terrorists who had kidnapped two U.S. citizens, a missionary couple. Additionally, beyond ASG, an Indonesian jihadist group, Jemaah Islamiyah, was on the hit list as well. Starting in February 2002 and lasting fourteen years until 2016, what became known as Operation ENDURING FREEDOM-PHILIPPINES (OEF-P) remains a little-known successful theater of the 9/11 wars. Originally named Operation FREEDOM EAGLE before being consolidated under ENDURING FREEDOM banner, the initial deployment was under the guise of a regular occurring U.S.-Philippines joint training exercise called Operation BALIKATAN 02-1. This joint exercise was the peak of U.S. involvement, totaling 1,300 personnel who provided assistance, advice, and supported both training and air support. Of the total personnel involved, 160 came from special operations forces—largely U.S. Army Special Forces—along with Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations and limited number of U.S. Navy SEALs and Marine special operations.

Because of socio-political sensitivities, the Philippines authorized only 600 Americans in the operational area at any given time. After the first six months and the completion of that mission, resulting in the liberation of one hostage (the husband died during the rescue attempt) and successful targeting of ASG leadership, OEF-P's mission evolved to building Philippine forces' self-sufficiency. The new mission was based on building competency within the Philippine forces for internal defense with the mission balancing out around 500–600 troops. This transition being the residual 500–600 coming from special operations forces remaining under a new Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P). During the entire period, the Philippine government and local forces took the lead, with the American troops providing advice and assistance but not partaking in any combat missions or direct action. However slow, this process successfully built the Philippine forces up to conduct independent missions and kept the United States from taking the reins and relegating the Philippine forces to the background as was largely done in Iraq and Afghanistan. This overriding effort in the long run served as a forcing function to make the Philippine troops improve as they could not use the United States military as a crutch.²¹ U.S. special operations leadership along with the Philippine leadership agreed that the Zamboanga siege response by the Philippine forces validated the final phases of the gradual withdrawal of the JSOTF-P, showing the Philippine forces capable of planning and executing a complex joint mission in a chal-

²⁰ Molly Dunigan et al., *Characterizing and Exploring the Implications of Maritime Irregular Warfare* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2012); and "The 80 Percent Solution."

²¹ Linda Robinson, "The SOF Experience in the Philippine and the Implications for Future Defense Strategy," *PRISM* 6, no. 3 (2016); and Linda Robinson et al., *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines, 2001–2014* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2016).

lenging, urban environment on short notice.²²

The Philippines' response and handling of the Zamboanga crisis served as the culmination of OEF-P. In October 2013, rogue members of the Moro National Liberation Front broke away from their base during ongoing negotiations with the Philippine government and seized the city of Zamboanga, starting with 20 hostages and soon growing to taking 200. Within the day, the Philippine government sealed off the city, both land and sea, and over the course of a week fought through the city, killing over 180 rebels. In totality, the siege lasted 28 days, with more rebels surrendering as they took casualties. Philippine military and police suffered casualties as well, with over a 100,000 left homeless from the fighting.²³ During the crisis, Americans supported the Philippines with planning and advice, but no involvement beyond that as a result of the involvement of the Moro National Liberation Front and not the ASG or Jemaah Islamiyah, which were the only two international extremist groups the operation authorized U.S. direct support to Philippine response.²⁴

When JSOTF-P's withdrawal effectively ended OEF-P, the international terrorist presence in the Philippines had declined, shown by three factors reported in the Rand study on effectiveness of OEF-P. Enemy initiated attacks declined up to 56 percent between 2000 and 2012 in the ASG's primary operating areas. Estimated membership declined for ASG, the primary targeted group, from a high of 2,200 members to 400. Independent polling data indicated decreased public support for the ASG declining from 8 percent to less than 3 percent

coupled with an increase in positive views from 51 percent to 63 percent of the Philippine government's forces.²⁵ After the 9/11 wars, new threats evolved.

ISLAMIC STATE EMERGENCE FROM AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ

Although the Islamic State (IS) came from al-Qaeda in Iraq, itself an al-Qaeda offshoot, IS remained a distinct entity. In scope (financing, ideology, and tactics), IS stood apart from al-Qaeda. IS is not al-Qaeda and is not the protégé or standard-bearer for the organization that conducted the 9/11 attacks. It is distinct and fundamentally different, even though it acted as an affiliate to al-Qaeda during the height of the Iraq War (2004–2007).

What was once al-Qaeda in Iraq, then renamed the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) in October 2006, broke with al-Qaeda officially in February 2014 over disputes about its spread into Syria. Al-Qaeda, now under al-Zawahiri after Bin Laden's death, attempted to divide the affiliates between al-Nusrah in Syria and ISI focused in Iraq. [Abu Bakr] al-Baghdadi, leader of ISI, ignored him and continued operations in Syria, resulting in Zawahiri disowning the organization. Al-Qaeda's al-Nusrah forces now joined other anti-ISI groups combatting the newly renamed Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), later to become ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] and then settle on just Islamic State.²⁶

The Islamic State's financial plan focused on raising money through local means, pillaging, black markets sales, taxation, and robbery, in contrast to how al-Qaeda focuses on its

²² Robinson et al., *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*.

²³ Janice Burton, "Zamboanga Crisis," *Special Warfare* 27, no. 1 (January–March 2014), 38–45.

²⁴ Robinson et al., *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*.

²⁵ Robinson et al., *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines*.

²⁶ Erinn McQuagge, "The Genesis of ISIS," *Special Warfare* 28, no. 1 (January–March 2015): 16–21.

funding through international donations.²⁷ The tactics used by the Islamic State to establish itself in a new area were consistent: small cells would infiltrate an area, conduct an assassination campaign to foster deep social antagonism and delegitimize the government, and finally establish intimidation over the population before attempting complete control of the area. The manufacturing of chaos is how the Islamic State made itself a legitimate player in the region, a technique its affiliate offshoots adopted in places such as North Africa and Asia.²⁸

The Islamic State ideology, inspired by the teachings of Abu Bakr Naji and his “management of savagery,” is that out of chaos comes the just rule of the caliphate. The Islamic State’s own hyper-obsession with territory contrasted sharply with al-Qaeda’s global, trans-national organization. While al-Qaeda attempted to co-opt other groups into working with al-Qaeda, the Islamic State either absorbed them into their own or fought them. In the Islamic State worldview, you were either with them or against them. This was in direct contradiction to Bin Laden’s al-Qaeda, who preferred to be “guests” in other lands, such as guests of the Taliban and earlier guests of Sudan and Saudi Arabia. The Islamic State preferred to conquer, control, and hold territory directly under their banner.²⁹ While the Islamic State and the various other violent extremist groups scattered around the disaffected areas of the globe are

threats, they are not the threats of 9/11 but something new and different.

THE WAR WITH THE TALIBAN

The original post-9/11 authorization for military action was directed at al-Qaeda as the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks; however, the Taliban’s intransigence in handing over Bin Laden and his group resulted in the Taliban being the first expansion of opponents from within the specified named enemies in the congressionally approved authorization for force. Although the war in Afghanistan did not start with the Taliban, had the Taliban turned over Bin Laden there would have been no war with the Taliban; over time it evolved to be largely a contest between the United States and NATO against the Taliban.

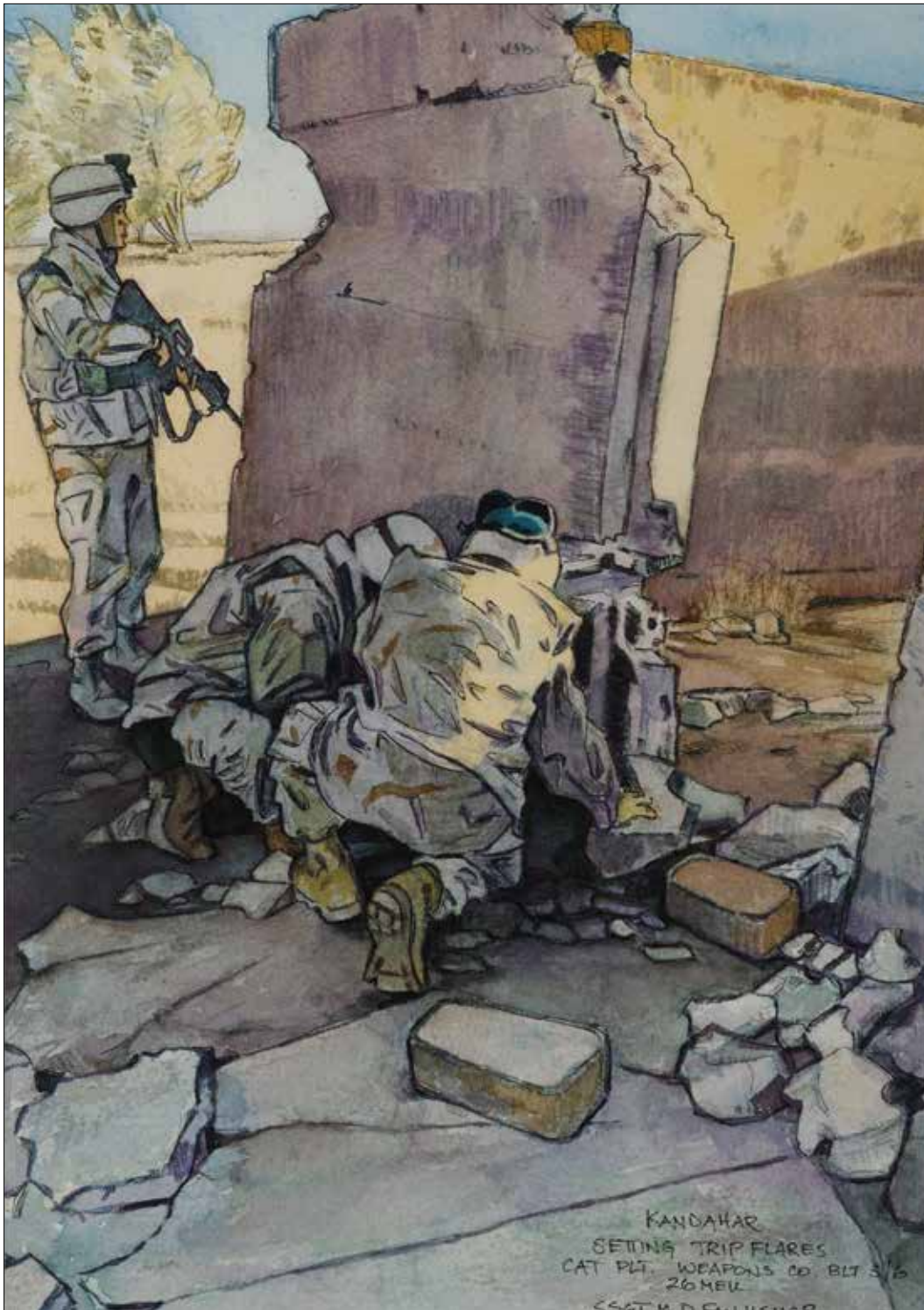
Regardless of how the al-Qaeda-targeted authorization was used to justify the prolonged conflict against the Taliban in Afghanistan, even that war has come to an end. Signed on 29 February 2020, the “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan” between the United States and the Taliban agreed to Afghanistan not harboring terrorists, a ceasefire between the United States and Taliban, and beginning of negotiations between internal Afghan groups for continued peace, and most importantly to this analysis, the complete withdrawal of foreign forces, namely the United States and its coalition.³⁰ Originally set for withdrawal by 1 May 2021 according to the agreement, the current administration of President Joe Biden shifted the date to 11 September, and then to 31 August. With the closure of the last major U.S. base at Bagram in early

²⁷ Howard J. Schatz and Erin-Elizabeth Johnson, *The Islamic State We Knew: Insights before the Resurgence and Their Implications* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2015); and Stephen De Spiegeleire and Tim Sweijts, “The Rise and Fall of ISIS: from Evitability to Inevitability,” in *Volatility and Friction in the Age of Disintermediation* (The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2017), 155–72.

²⁸ Schatz and Johnson, *The Islamic State We Knew*.

²⁹ Charles Lister, *Al-Qaeda versus ISIS: Competing Jihadist Brands in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 2017); and Krishnamurthy, “Thirty Years after Osama.”

³⁰ “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America,” signed 29 February 2020.



Setting Trip Flares, Kandahar, by SSgt Michael D. Fay, USMCR.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

July, the war against the Taliban effectively ended for the United States.³¹

THE OVERUSE OF THE 9/11 WAR'S AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF MILITARY FORCE

On 18 September 2001, Congress passed a joint resolution *Public Law 107-40 Authorization for the Use of Military Force*. The text reads in part,

the President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or harbored such organizations or persons,

providing the legal context for the emerging 9/11 war against al-Qaeda worldwide and the Taliban in Afghanistan. This authorization for use of military force (AUMF) has been broadly applied since the war against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, Africa, and Philippines and the Taliban in Afghanistan began in the first years after 9/11 and later Yemen. It now is used to legitimize support against most notably the Islamic State but additionally against a myriad of other terrorist organizations across North, Northwest, and East Africa; through the islands of the Pacific; and Syria and the broader Middle East—all somehow tied to “nations, organizations, or persons . . . planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001.” This broad application possibly falls under the second half of the AUMF stating the use of force against those nations, organizations, or persons associated with the 9/11 attacks is “in order to prevent any future

acts of international terrorism against the United States,” except it finishes with, “by such nations, organizations or persons.” Many of these currently targeted groups were not affiliated with al-Qaeda or the Taliban on 9/11, some existing before with no connections, others not even in existence until afterward. As demonstrated, even the Islamic State, which is arguably the most violent extremist group, is a stretch to connect directly to 9/11. To hold the Islamic State accountable as an organization or persons responsible for the 9/11 attacks, although arguably a morphed descendant of an al-Qaeda offshoot, would be like holding Turkey or Bulgaria responsible for specific actions of the Ottoman Empire—from which they came. Although a nuanced argument, when a democracy goes to war it should be under very specific direction.

In comparison, the congressional joint resolution, *Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002* made into *Public Law 107-243* on 16 October 2002, provided a very specific and lengthy Iraq AUMF. The key authorization stated,

The President is authorized to use the Armed Forces of the United States as he determines to be necessary and appropriate in order to- (1) defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq; and (2) enforce all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq.

This resolution for what would be the second campaign of the Global War on Terrorism clearly identified the target and the scope of the use of military force. The 2003 invasion and the resultant 2011 withdrawal definitively marked the beginning and end of this authorization, to such an extent that the campaign against Islamic

³¹ President Joseph R. Biden, “Remarks by President Biden on the Drawdown of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan” (remarks, Washington, DC, 8 July 2021), available at <https://nato.usmission.gov/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-drawdown-of-u-s-forces-in-afghanistan/>.

State in Iraq years later fell under the original September 2001 AUMF since it was such broadly written.

A new or adjusted AUMF, or multiple AUMFs, pertaining to the broader conflicts of the post-9/11 wars provide a distinct benefit to the United States, in that it focuses the national efforts, clarifies the message both domestic and foreign audiences, and provides a better governmental and professional military framework for action. Without a congressional challenge, there is nothing inherently incorrect in a broad application of a specifically congressionally approved AUMF within a democratic system. However, appropriately adjusting the AUMF provides improved ability for practitioners to narrow their efforts and for continual public discourse on this new era of persistent conflict with various, evolving, and morphing violent extremist

groups and threats. The Biden administration supports a congressional replacement of the post-9/11 AUMFs as well with more appropriate frameworks. This effort supports increased congressional involvement in deciding and regulating America's current and future military actions.³²

With the end of the 9/11 wars, there is a shifting paradigm in our global engagement. The proliferation of violent extremist organizations and emergent state competitors still require a U.S. response—however, one more appropriately guided by a new or adjusted authorization for use of military force. As the measure for congressional approval for the President to take military action, a more directed AUMF better guides the military and national leaders while providing public debate on the use of force on behalf of the people.

³² Stephen M. Walt, "How Biden Benefits from Limiting His Own War Powers," *Foreign Policy*, March 2021, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/11/biden-aumf-limit-war-powers/>.

LOOKING BACKWARD AND FORWARD

The U.S. Marine Corps in the Aftermath of the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks

Amin Tarzi

Hours after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, and the downing of a fourth airplane in rural Pennsylvania, President George W. Bush addressed the American people. He committed the United States to bringing to justice anyone responsible for the attacks. During the coming weeks, the President vowed to strike not only the perpetrators but also state sponsors of terrorism and any nation that harbored terrorist groups. This wide-ranging classification, and President Bush's characterization that the attack was "an attack on the heart and soul of the civilized world," set the parameters for both the Bush Doctrine and the Global War on Terrorism.³³

The United States determined first to take action against Taliban-ruled Afghanistan for providing support and a safe haven to Osama bin

Laden and his terrorist organization, al-Qaeda. On 18 September, President Bush delivered an ultimatum to Afghanistan, ordering the Taliban to hand over bin Laden or suffer the consequences. The Taliban refused, leading Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld to announce the launch of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) on 25 September. The United States, Secretary Rumsfeld announced, would defend "our way of life and our ability to remain engaged in the world" by "taking the fight to the terrorists."³⁴ On 7 October 2001, OEF commenced with air strikes against targets in Afghanistan.

As America's force in readiness, the Marine Corps played a key role in the opening of OEF. The Service's largest contribution came in November with Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58, composed of all amphibious forces in theater and under the command of Brigadier General James N. Mattis. On 25 November, Marines and sailors of the task force conducted a 650-kilometer amphibious assault from naval shipping to a remote landing strip in eastern Helmand Province and established Forward Operating Base Rhino.

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³³ President George W. Bush, "Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation," (remarks, Washington, DC, 11 September 2001), <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html>. See also <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011011-7.html>. The Global War on Terrorism is also known as the Global War on Terror or simply GWOT.

³⁴ "Donald H. Rumsfeld, 'Rumsfeld Says Anti-terrorism Efforts Are Broad-based' (media briefing transcript, 25 September 2001), archived on USinfo.org.

Elements of the task force next seized Kandahar International Airport on 14 December. The Taliban eventually withdrew from Kandahar and Kabul, but bin Laden escaped and thousands of Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters fled into the mountains of Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan. The initial phase of OEF nonetheless succeeded in overthrowing the Taliban and denying Afghanistan as a haven to terrorists.

In its efforts to target state sponsors of terrorism, U.S. national leadership next turned its attention to Iraq out of fears that Saddam Hussein might cooperate with al-Qaeda or other terrorist groups. Tensions with Iraq mounted throughout 2002, with the Bush administration making the case that the country possessed the capability to produce weapons of mass destruction. President Bush eventually declared that the threat Iraq posed was “crucial to winning the war on terror,” and he ordered the invasion of Iraq, called Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), in March 2003. In less than three weeks, U.S.-led Coalition forces, which included a corps-level Marine effort under the I Marine Expeditionary Force, toppled Saddam and the Baathist regime. The removal of the regime, however, brought challenges of rebuilding the country and instituting democracy. Inadvertently, the invasion provided a catalyst for jihadist militants, including many from the ranks of al-Qaeda, to join an increasingly complex insurgency that had multiple factions and motivations.

The Global War on Terrorism became a multidimensional and multinational campaign throughout the 2000s. The mission to defeat global terrorism and prevent future attacks against the United States and its allies and partners challenged the Marine Corps. The Service displayed its proficiency in full-spectrum operations, however, by conducting combined

arms, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism operations while also focusing on civil affairs, training, advising, and partnering with both local and international forces. Moreover, it demonstrated its organizational dexterity by providing troops to U.S. Central Command to execute OEF and OIF simultaneously while retaining its traditional roles supporting the Joint Force, particularly by deploying Marine expeditionary units and maintaining the Unit Deployment Program.

In January 2010, the final Marine headquarters in Iraq withdrew, and the Department of Defense redesignated OIF as Operation New Dawn one month later. The U.S. military mission in Iraq officially ended in December 2010. However, despite the relative success in Iraq, Afghanistan began to unravel, necessitating a deployment of 30,000 troops to stabilize the country. The surge of troops included Marines, whose relative autonomy in their area of operations led to the nickname “Marineistan.” Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta announced in February 2012 that U.S. forces would transition from a combat to an advisory mission in Afghanistan.

In the meantime, the United States had tracked down and killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in May 2011. While al-Qaeda had retained its influence over global jihadism, affiliated terrorist groups had wielded considerable regional and local influence in Iraq and Syria. One such group was al-Qaeda in Iraq, which Marines had fought from 2004 until its virtual destruction in 2008. In April 2013, it reemerged as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (Levant), or ISIS, and established its capital in ar-Raqqa, Syria. ISIS became the successor to al-Qaeda as the leader of the global jihadist movement, accumulating affiliates from the Philippines to South Asia and the

Sahel Region to the Horn of Africa and carrying out multiple terrorist attacks around the world.

In response, the Department of Defense initiated Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) in October 2014. Meant to advise, assist, and enable partner forces fighting ISIS, OIR became one of the most comprehensive, multinational, and ongoing efforts of all post-9/11 operations. Combined Joint Task Force—OIR had three lines of effort: in Syria from 22 September 2014 to present, in Iraq from 15 June 2014 to 9 December 2021, and in Libya from 13 November 2015 to 30 October 2019.³⁵

In the various operations that followed 9/11, the Marine Corps distinguished itself as the nation's expeditionary force-in-readiness. It drew on its past experiences in small wars and adapted those lessons to current challenges. Among the lessons the Marine Corps applied to post-9/11 campaigns, three endure despite the shift of focus on enhancement of the Corps' role in the maritime littoral environment with the need for greater integration with the U.S. Navy. These are conducting counterinsurgency operations in an ever-changing landscape of what are often referred to as "nonstate actors" but who act either within a state or with similar attributes to a state; functioning as a successful fighting force and winning tactical victories, despite overall strategic ambiguities about the shape of final endgames of long-standing campaigns; and, finally, working with local and allied forces to build capacities in host states.

LEGACY OF EFFECTIVE IRREGULAR WARFARE

Geographically, the OEF and OIF theaters were

not conducive to the Marine Corps' mission of being a maritime force operating in full partnership with the U.S. Navy that is capable of conducting littoral operations. As in the interwar period (1918–39), when the Department of the Navy had categorized two-thirds of the Marine Corps as land forces, the operational experience of the Marines during the aforementioned operations was the same as the Army and its reserves and involved long, terrestrial deployments, extensive irregular warfare, and advising and training missions as an integral part of the protracted nation-building process.³⁶ The aim was to introduce democracy into Afghanistan and Iraq as a countermeasure to extremism and support for terrorism. These roles leveraged the Marine Corps' strength and legacy of fighting irregular and counterinsurgency operations that started during the Philippine-American War (1898–1902).³⁷

According to one Marine Corps historian, in the era between 1898 and the 1930s, "members of Congress and the Department of the Navy began to see military intervention and the waging of small wars as the Marine Corps' primary mission."³⁸ The Marine Corps' accomplishments in the large-scale, conventional campaigns of the two world wars, the Korean War, and the Gulf War have often overshadowed its irregular warfare competency from the first four decades of the twentieth century. Likewise, the "failures in Vietnam also overshadowed a number of Marine Corps counterinsurgency innovations . . . such as the Combined Action Program."³⁹ However,

³⁵ See, for example, "Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve," <https://www.inherentresolve.mil>, accessed 18 June 2026.

³⁶ Allan R. Millet, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 261.

³⁷ Millet, *Semper Fidelis*, 151–55.

³⁸ Nicholas J. Schlosser, comp. and introduction to *U.S. Marines in Iraq, 2004–2008: Anthology and Annotated Bibliography*, U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism series (Washington, DC: History Division, United States Marine Corps, 2010), 2.

³⁹ Schlosser, *U.S. Marines in Iraq, 2004–2008*, 2.

as a learning organization, the Marine Corps has been adapting to the varieties of challenges, including major operations such as the Gulf War to amorphous conflicts that the 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Charles C. Krulak, described as “the three-block war—contingencies in which Marines may be confronted by the entire spectrum of tactical challenges in the span of a few hours and within the space of three contiguous city blocks.”⁴⁰

The initial phase of OIF (20 March to 14 April 2003) involved force-on-force actions. After Iraqi military forces ceased offering tangible resistance to the Coalition, the majority of post-9/11 operations involving the Marine Corps can be categorized as irregular warfare, employing counterinsurgency and counterterrorism warfare strategies, despite most of these actions being part of larger full-scale combat operations.

Combining small war or irregular warfare methods within sizeable large-scale maneuver operations became the *modus operandi* of the Marine Corps in post-9/11 operations, and the Marines accomplished their missions. However, these battlefield victories did not equate to achieving the overall strategic objectives, mainly because the latter were not clearly defined. As discussed below, this was primarily due to doctrinal discrepancies between the stated goals of the military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq with the modalities of campaigns employed in those two theaters of operation.

TACTICAL VICTORIES WITHIN STRATEGIC AMBIGUITIES

Marines achieved numerous tactical victories throughout the long military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq; looking back, however, nei-

ther of these cases ended in overall victory for the United States due to mismatch between objectives and the geopolitical and societal realities existing on the ground. The models of post-World War II Germany and Japan—where military and civilian U.S. involvement in full concert with the local authorities turned two major enemies into linchpins of the American-led world order—was not applicable in many ways to the subjects on which they were being implemented. Additionally, the U.S.-led efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq lacked local cohesiveness of purpose, had adverse regional interferences, were under-resourced, and haphazardly managed.

The best examples of Marine tactical victories that led to strategic setbacks are the two battles of Fallujah in 2004. The first, dubbed Operation Vigilant Resolve, was launched in April 2004 by Marines supported by Army and Air Force units. This operation was in response to the killing, mutilation, and public display of the bodies of four American contractors by a newly formed al-Qaeda affiliate group in Iraq. The Coalition Provisional Authority’s desire for swift retribution to showcase American resolve was in contravention to the Corps’ *Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain* manual, which states no “single factor is more important to the attacker’s success than isolation of the urban area,” and went against the advice of Lieutenant General James T. Conway, commander of I Marine Expeditionary Force, and Major General James N. Mattis, commander of the 1st Marine Division.⁴¹ Despite achieving initial tactical victory,

⁴⁰ Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three-Block War,” *Leatherneck*, January 1999, 16.

⁴¹ Carter Malkasian, “Signaling Resolve, Democratization, and the First Battle of Fallujah,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 3 (2006): 433–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390600765843>; and U.S. Marine Corps, *Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT)*, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-35.3 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1998), 1-17.



Fallujah by Kristopher J. Battles.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

but not wanting to inflict heavy casualties on the city or sustain excessive casualties themselves, the Marines did not enter the central sections of Fallujah, hoping that the hastily formed Fallujah Brigade, a local, Iraqi-led force, “would assume security duties in the city and ultimately accomplish the mission.” After the withdrawal of U.S. forces, the Iraqi insurgents declared victory. This was a sentiment shared by a majority of the Arab public, who were influenced by media reports focused on the inability of the Marines to take control of the city, thereby helping the cause of the Sunni-led insurgency.⁴² Gradually, the mem-

bers of the Fallujah Brigade melted into the population, handing most of their weapons over to the insurgents.

During the ensuing months, insurgents turned Fallujah into a stronghold. A second, larger, Marine-led assault (with units from the U.S. Army and new Iraqi Security Forces) on the city was launched in November 2004. Codenamed Operation Phantom Fury and later renamed Operation al-Fajr—“Dawn” in Arabic, to highlight Iraqi participation and symbolic leadership—it became the deadliest Marine operation in the post-9/11 period. Early warnings had prompted most of the civilians to move out of Fallujah, leaving the insurgents—or what has become known as violent extremist orga-

⁴² Jonathan F. Keiler, “Who Won the Battle of Fallujah?,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, January 2005, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2005/january/who-won-battle-fallujah>.



The Strategic Lance Corporal by Kristopher J. Battles. National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

nizations—and Coalition units to fight for the city block by block. In January 2005, soon after the conclusion of Operation al-Fajr, Jonathan F. Keiler wrote that “despite the superb performance of the Marines and soldiers in Fallujah, there is reason for concern” due to the heavy casualties suffered by U.S. forces in order to “spare civilians and infrastructure and appease the U.S. and international media.”⁴³

Alternatively, arguing from a strategic outlook, Carter Malkasian maintains that the Fallujah campaign “renders a cautionary lesson on using military force to signal resolve in an unconventional conflict,” leading to escalation of violence and triggering “popular support for the

⁴³ Keiler, “Who Won the Battle of Fallujah?”

insurgents, counteracting positive effects from signaling resolve.” The principle demonstrating force and resolve was an underpinning of the Bush Doctrine, which “would presumably cause states to bandwagon with the United States and domestic popular opinion to shift in favor of the US government.”⁴⁴

As in most battles of the post-9/11 military campaigns, Marines executed their orders with utmost efficiency and bravery, but, as the Service’s doctrine recognizes, tactical actions may have “operational and strategic repercussions.”⁴⁵ Such tactical implications with strategic consequences were what General Charles Krulak wrote when discussing his concept of the “strategic corporal,” in which “the individual Marine will be the most conspicuous symbol of American foreign policy and will potentially influence not only the immediate tactical situation, but the operational and strategic levels as well.”⁴⁶ The warning signs were there, as Keiler wrote: “The battle of Fallujah was not a defeat—but we cannot afford many more victories like it.”⁴⁷

While the stories and pain, seen and unseen, by many Marines who have proudly served during the post-9/11 campaigns remain, the writing on the wall was to turn a page for the Corps, sailing it back to its maritime confines. This adaptability and flexibility are reminiscent of the post-Vietnam era when the Marine Corps, unique to other U.S. Services, was able to redirect its intention, revise doctrine, and return to its domain of amphibious warfare.

MARINES AS NATION-BUILDERS

The Marine Corps’ experience with small wars

⁴⁴ Malkasian, “Signaling Resolve,” 423–24, 426.

⁴⁵ MCWP, *Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT)*, 1–20.

⁴⁶ Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal.”

⁴⁷ Keiler, “Who Won the Battle of Fallujah?”



Civil Affairs Marines and Interpreter Talk with Local Farmers by Kristopher J. Battles.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

and advising and training began with the so-called Banana Wars in Latin America and the Caribbean between 1898 and 1934. Legendary Marines, such as Lewis B. “Chesty” Puller and Smedley D. Butler, “rose to prominence within and beyond the Marine Corps as a result of their service in the Banana Wars.”⁴⁸ Later in the century, Marines served as advisors to the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces from 1954 to 1973 and in Haiti from 1959 to 1963 in a strictly advisory capacity to rebuild the Haitian constabulary. Historically, prior to coining the term *nation-building*, the United States saw creation or reformation of “professional, apolitical, and

centralized security forces” as a means to secure American political and economic interests in these regions.⁴⁹ In the post-9/11 era, the total overhaul of Iraqi forces and the rebuilding of the Afghan security forces formed a fundamental part of U.S. strategies in those two cases, and the Marine Corps was central to this mission, drawing on their extensive experience in preparing for and executing such missions. To prepare advisors for missions in South Vietnam, the Marine Corps invested significant resources, establishing “for the first time a school (in Quantico, Virginia) to train advisors.”⁵⁰ They did the same in the post-9/11 era.

⁴⁸ William Rosenau et al., *United States Marine Corps Advisors: Past, Present, and Future* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2013), 9.

⁴⁹ Rosenau et al., *United States Marine Corps Advisors*, 11.

⁵⁰ Rosenau et al., *United States Marine Corps Advisors*, 32.

In the case of Afghanistan, Marines faced similar challenges to those in Haiti, namely that “security-force recruits were drawn from wider populations characterized by poor health, lack of education, and insufficient physical stamina.”⁵¹ The challenge in Afghanistan was that the Afghan armed forces had ceased to exist as a central force due to the civil war that had begun in 1978. When U.S. forces entered the country, what remained of the old Afghan security forces “were fractured into units loyal to parties, local commanders, and warlords, and the country was fragmented into fiefdoms.” By 2021, when the United States withdrew its forces from Afghanistan, the Afghan National Army was “the most trusted organization in the country.”⁵² However, due to its dependency on American support and longstanding divisive political wrangling in the country, the Afghan National Army folded within hours of the U.S. withdrawal, and the Taliban returned to power.

Unlike the case of Afghanistan, Iraq had a large, organized, well-equipped military force with extensive warfighting experience against both Iran (1980–88) and the U.S.-led Coalition (1990–91). However, after defeating Saddam Hussein’s regime and the ruling Baath (Resurrection) Party, the newly established Coalition Provisional Authority, led by Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, de-Baathified Iraqi society as its “first major official act.”⁵³ This included his decision to dissolve the country’s armed forces. Bremer’s decision, which appeared to contradict President Bush’s policy of keeping the Iraq Army

intact, has had, and continues to have, negative reverberations in the regional balance of power and has resulted in the rise of terrorism.⁵⁴ For the Marines and other U.S. and Coalition forces, it meant rebuilding a military force anew, while countering rising armed civil disturbances and opposition to foreign occupation, the Coalition Provisional Authority, and its policies.

CONCLUSION

The terrorist attacks of September 2001 redirected the Marine Corps from the maritime, expeditionary mission that defines its institutional identity into two decades of landlocked counterinsurgency, stabilization, and nation-building. That redirection was not without precedent. As in the interwar period and again during the Vietnam War, the Corps found itself drawn into protracted irregular warfare far from the littoral environment it was designed to dominate. As in those earlier eras, it adapted without abandoning its core competencies.

What the Global War on Terrorism revealed, however, was something more sobering than a test of adaptability. Marines consistently demonstrated tactical proficiency in Fallujah, across the Helmand River Valley, and in the advise-and-assist missions that helped build Afghan and Iraqi security forces. In spite of that, tactical excellence, however consistently displayed, could not compensate for strategic objectives that were poorly defined, under-resourced, or mismatched to the political and social realities on the ground. The Corps won its fights, but the campaigns did not end in victory. That distinction matters, and the record makes clear that the fault lay not with the Marines who executed the missions but with the frameworks within which those missions were conceived.

⁵¹ Rosenau et al., *United States Marine Corps Advisors*, 23.

⁵² *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, under “Afghanistan: Martial Society Without Military Rule,” by Amin Tarzi, 25 March 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1917>.

⁵³ W. Andrew Terrill, *Lessons of the Iraqi de-Ba’athification Program for Iraq’s Future and the Arab Revolutions*, Strategic Studies Institute Monograph (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2012), 13.

⁵⁴ Terrill, *Lessons of the Iraqi de-Ba’athification Program*, 18.

The institutional lesson the Marine Corps drew from this experience was characteristically pragmatic. When Commandant General David H. Berger issued *Force Design 2030* in March 2020, reorienting the Marine Corps toward great power competition and the Indo-Pacific, the shift was not a repudiation of the post-9/11 era but an extension of the same adaptive logic that had carried the Corps through every major strategic transition in its history.⁵⁵ The 20 years of population-centric warfare, advisory missions, and multinational coalition operations had added depth to that institutional repertoire, even as the Corps returned to its maritime roots.⁵⁶

The post-9/11 campaigns are more than a chapter in the Corps' history. They offer a precise and hard-earned guide to the limits of military force when divorced from coherent strategy to the possibilities of irregular warfare conducted with discipline and cultural awareness, and to the institutional resilience required to remain effective across the full spectrum of conflict. In a security environment defined by uncertainty and peer competition, the post-9/11 era is not behind the Marine Corps. It is part of what the Corps carries forward.

⁵⁵ David H. Berger, *Force Design 2030* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2020), 2.

⁵⁶ Berger, *Force Design 2030*, 13.

THE ROLE OF MARINE CORPS CULTURE IN REMEMBERING AND COMMEMORATING THE 9/11 ERA

Seth A. Givens

The terrorist attacks on 11 September marked the beginning of a distinct period in the Marine Corps' storied history. The 9/11 era, spanning from the attacks to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, encompassed two decades of war that forged and defined an entire generation of Marines. Characterizing it was the challenges of counterinsurgency, the strain and sacrifice of multiple combat deployments in two countries, and the difficulty of balancing combat operations with projecting expeditionary power across the globe. While the 9/11 era tested the endurance of the force and demanded adaptation across every level, it nonetheless confirmed integral values and beliefs. In so doing, it left a lasting legacy within the Corps, shaping both the Service and the Marines who served during it.

One of the clearest expressions of that legacy lies in the way the Marine Corps remembers 9/11. How Marines have understood, remembered, and commemorated the era is rooted not in circumstance but in the Corps' cohesive and enduring culture. The Service's self-image is built on the conviction of being distinct, elite,

and perpetually ready. Its ethos prizes physical and mental toughness, small-unit leadership, and an ingrained expectation of hardship as the price of excellence. Much of this culture was forged in the crucible of the Corps' martial past. The institutional memory of the Service, embodied in such figures as Lieutenant General John A. Lejeune, Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone, and Lieutenant General Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, and at places like Belleau Wood, Iwo Jima, and Chosin Reservoir, celebrates endurance, audacity, and the ability to prevail against seemingly insurmountable odds. For each generation of Marines, these traditions are not simply a history to preserve but a code that defines who they are and how they are to act.⁵⁷

This essay explores how Marines have remembered and commemorated the 9/11 era. It draws from memory and remembrance studies, an interdisciplinary field that spans history, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies. Today, that field is broad enough to include scholars who study collective and cultural memory, public memorials and monuments, and the transmission of trauma across generations. Each

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⁵⁷ Aaron B. O'Connell, *Underdogs: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 5–9.

approaches the distinctions between memory and remembrance in different ways. This essay also subscribes to historians' view that collective accounts shape public memory, which requires distinguishing memory from remembrance. *Memory* in the Corps is internal and continuous. It exists in doctrine as much as it does the traditions that Marines inherit and the written and spoken narratives that Marines hand down, all of which sustain the Service's ethos. By contrast, *remembrance* is the outward display of Marines' memory that appears in commemorative acts, ceremonies, and memorials. Examining both in the 9/11 era reveals that culture shaped how Marines understood events, directed how they reacted, and ultimately defined what the era meant for the Corps. In this way, culture functions not merely as tradition but as the framework through which Marines build their identity and understand the significance of their service.

HOW THE MARINE CORPS REMEMBERS THE 9/11 ERA

The Marine Corps' memory of the 9/11 era reveals that Marines continually found affirmation of their enduring sense of purpose. Across three distinct periods—the attacks, the immediate response, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—they interpreted events through that purpose, turning moments of shock, action, and sacrifice into a narrative of service and meaning. What began as a national tragedy became, in Marine memory, a test of character and a calling. The attacks at home underscored the Corps' readiness to act in any crisis.⁵⁸ The deployments that followed demonstrated its value as an expedi-

⁵⁸ Gen James L. Jones, *All Marine Corps Activity message (ALMAR) 041/01, A New Reality*, 12 September 2001, HD Archives.

tionary force, and the long war that ensued reinforced its identity as a disciplined and resilient institution. During each phase, Marines found continuity between past and present, drawing on the same convictions that had sustained earlier generations. In remembering 9/11, they reaffirmed who they were and why they served.

The Attacks

Since 9/11 occurred at home rather than on distant battlefields, the day did not fit neatly within the Marine Corps' established traditions of memory. The location and nature of the attacks led many Americans at the time to liken them to Pearl Harbor. "Not since Dec. 7, 1941," the *Washington Post* editorial board wrote on 12 September, "has the U.S. homeland sustained such an aggression."⁵⁹ The comparisons, though, were more misleading than enlightening.⁶⁰ The Japanese attack was a military strike by a rival power on a naval base to seek a decisive advantage before the United States could mobilize. By contrast, al-Qaeda was a nonstate actor that targeted symbols of American power and used terror as a tactic to provoke the United States to overreach and weaken its global position. For perhaps a brief time, the terrorists succeeded in eroding Americans' sense of security, but the attacks themselves produced neither victory nor defeat for either side. New York City, the Pentagon, and Shanksville were, after all, not battlefields. Indeed, losses were overwhelmingly civilian that day. Of the 2,977 people killed, 55 were U.S. military servicemembers, and none of those active-duty Marines. By comparison,

⁵⁹ Editorial board, "September 11, 2001," *Washington Post*, 12 September 2001.

⁶⁰ Chad L. Nielsen, "Pearl Harbor and 9/11: A Comparison" (master's thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2008).

109 Marines were killed in action at Pearl Harbor.⁶¹

If any touchstone existed for Marines at the time, it was the Beirut, Lebanon, barracks bombing on 23 October 1983, when a suicide truck bomber targeted the headquarters building of Battalion Landing Team 1/8 (BLT 1/8), killing more than 200 Marines and sailors. Beirut was a pivotal moment in Marine Corps' institutional memory. There were earlier, minor examples of Marines facing terrorism when aboard ships or as colonial infantry, but the character and scale of the Beirut attack was unprecedented and the largest single-day loss of Marines since the Battle of Iwo Jima.⁶²

Marines since then have memorialized, studied, and debated the bombing.⁶³ They observe the anniversary of the attack by commemorating without using triumphant rhetoric and by emphasizing service, camaraderie, and vigilance. The barracks bombing also shaped how Marines later comprehended the 9/11 attacks. Beirut became a prologue to 9/11, a moment when the Corps first confronted the kind of faceless, transnational violence that would later define a generation. Many Marines have described the connection in hindsight. "That's

when the whole thing started," recalled Dan Joy a retired gunnery sergeant who was a corporal in BLT 1/8. "Now I look back after 9/11 and everything, I can see that it all began there."⁶⁴ Marines came to view both attacks as unjustified and dishonorable assaults on Americans who had not sought battle but stood ready for it. In 2013, the 35th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James F. Amos, went so far as to argue that the barracks bombing "defined the beginning of the War on Terror."⁶⁵ While such claims are debatable, others similarly recognized the parallels in retrospect. Beirut was "like 9/11," the 37th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert B. Neller, said in 2018, in that it "changed the way we all looked at the world."⁶⁶

Marines responded to both Beirut and 9/11 the way they were trained: by running toward the sound of battle. Steeped in a culture that prizes initiative and thriving in chaos, Marines have long seen themselves as a force meant to move first. As Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak once observed, Marines' "complex personality" has been "dominated by a conviction that battle is the Marines' only reason for existence and that they must be ready to respond promptly and effectively whenever given an opportunity to fight."⁶⁷ That instinct shaped their conduct on 9/11. As the Pentagon burned, Marines joined soldiers, sailors, and airmen

⁶¹ Marine Corps History Division, *Semper Fidelis: 250 Years of Honor, Courage, and Commitment* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2025), 138.

⁶² Irene Loewenson, "40 Years after Beirut: How the Bombing Still Haunts the Corps Today," *Marine Corps Times*, 23 October 2023, <https://www.marinecorpsimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2023/10/23/40-years-after-beirut-how-the-bombing-still-haunts-the-corps-today/#:~:text=When%20a%20driver%20on%20a,personal%20insult%2C%E2%80%9D%20Hammel%20wrote.>

⁶³ Marine Corps History Division published an official history of Marines in Lebanon within four years of the attack. See Benis M. Frank, *U.S. Marines in Lebanon, 1982–1984* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1987). The intellectual debate began with Eric Hammel, *The Root: The Marines in Beirut, August 1982–February 1984* (Pacifica, CA: Pacifica Military History, 1993).

⁶⁴ John Hollis, "Beirut Bombing the Start of War on Terror," Marine Corps Base Quantico, Crossroads of the Corps (official U.S. Marine Corps website), 27 October 2014, <https://www.quantico.marines.mil/News/Article/528732/beirut-bombing-the-start-of-war-on-terror/>.

⁶⁵ Gen James F. Amos, "Remarks at the Beirut Memorial" (speech, Camp Lejeune, NC, 23 October 2013).

⁶⁶ Shawn Snow, "'It Changed the Way We Look at the World': Top Marine Says Beirut Bombing, like 9/11, Still Impacts Us Today," *Marine Corps Times*, 23 October 2018.

⁶⁷ Victor H. Krulak, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 3.

in rescuing the wounded, improvising first-aid stations, and helping secure the building amid confusion. In New York, Marine reservists descended on Ground Zero, assisting the New York City police and fire departments in search and recovery operations. These acts later became central to how Marines remembered the day not as bystanders but as first responders. The Corps' self-image as the nation's "911 force," a phrase the 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alfred M. Gray, had popularized during his reforms in the 1980s, took on renewed symbolism after the attacks, when Marines, driven by a cultural instinct to move toward chaos, ran alongside firefighters and police into danger.

The Immediate Response

The parallels between Beirut and 9/11 end at rescue and recovery. In 1983, the nation's Middle East policy constrained the Marines' ability to respond, and troops withdrew within months. That denial of the Marines' cultural instinct produced a lasting memory of frustration.⁶⁸ By contrast, the Service reacted immediately following the 9/11 attacks, permitting Marines to act in ways consistent with their culture. The 32d Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James L. Jones, made that point explicit in his first remarks after the attacks. On 12 September, he issued *ALMAR 041/01*, a message to all Marines titled *A New Reality*.⁶⁹ In it, General Jones told Marines that they confronted a "new form of open warfare" that targeted civilians, military personnel, and the country's

institutions. While affirming the Corps' capabilities and resolve, the message was less operational than symbolic. It suggested that the Service's culture had prepared the Marines for the moment. "Our expeditionary culture has once again proven valuable to our nation," he wrote. Since the late 1980s, the Marine Corps had reimagined itself as an agile, expeditionary, and instantly deployable force in readiness.⁷⁰ This posture enabled Marines to provide national leaders with a diverse array of capabilities, ranging from disaster relief in New York to the full spectrum of joint operations, and, most notably, the anti-terrorism and force protection competencies that the Service had developed during the previous decade. In this light, the Marine Corps did not view the attacks as a rupture in an otherwise stable peace but as the moment for which its culture had prepared it.

That opportunity came early in the Global War on Terrorism, the broad American-led effort to target al-Qaeda, prevent future attacks, and confront regimes and organizations that harbored or enables terrorists. "The battle is now joined on many fronts," President George W. Bush told the nation on 7 October 2001 when announcing the beginning of operations against the Taliban in Afghanistan. "We will not waiver, we will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail."⁷¹ Marines were among the first conventional forces to enter the fight. Though U.S. Special Operations Command had preceded them on the ground, Brigadier Gen-

⁶⁸ Jack Carr and James M. Scott, *Targeted: Beirut: The 1983 Marine Barracks Bombing and the Untold Origin Story of the War on Terror* (New York: Emily Bestler Books, 2024),

⁶⁹ Gen James L. Jones, *All Marines Message (ALMAR) 041/01, A New Reality* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 12 September 2001).

⁷⁰ See especially chapter 4 of U.S. Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, Fleet Marine Force Manual 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1989).

⁷¹ George W. Bush, "Address to the Nation Announcing Strikes Against Al Qaida Training Camps and Taliban Military Installations in Afghanistan," 7 October 2001, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George W. Bush, 2001*, book 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003), 1202.

eral James N. Mattis's Task Force 58 deployed rapidly and became a visible expression of the Corps' expeditionary ethos. The task force seized Forward Operating Base Rhino in what General Mattis later claimed was the "deepest amphibious assault from the sea in history," a feat that reasserted the Marines' identity as the nation's foremost expeditionary force in readiness.⁷² The strikes that opened Operation Enduring Freedom carried their own symbolism. Two F/A-18 Hornets from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 were among the first aircraft launched from USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71) to hit Taliban positions in Afghanistan. The carrier flew a flag recovered from the ruins of the World Trade Center, an unmistakable message that the strikes were the beginning of the nation's response to 9/11.⁷³

Operation Enduring Freedom became, in Marine memory, the first opportunity to seize the initiative and turn mourning into resolve. Marines recalled their role in those opening days as an affirmation of their culture and traditions, chief among them the conviction that they are first to fight. Their contributions were operational successes but also vindication, tangible proof that the Corps had answered 9/11 in a way its culture prescribed: swiftly, decisively, and forward deployed. In the years that followed, the memory of Task Force 58 joined the pantheon of formative Marine moments, regarded not simply as a symbol of retribution but also as a model of amphibious and ex-

peditionary operations in modern warfare.⁷⁴

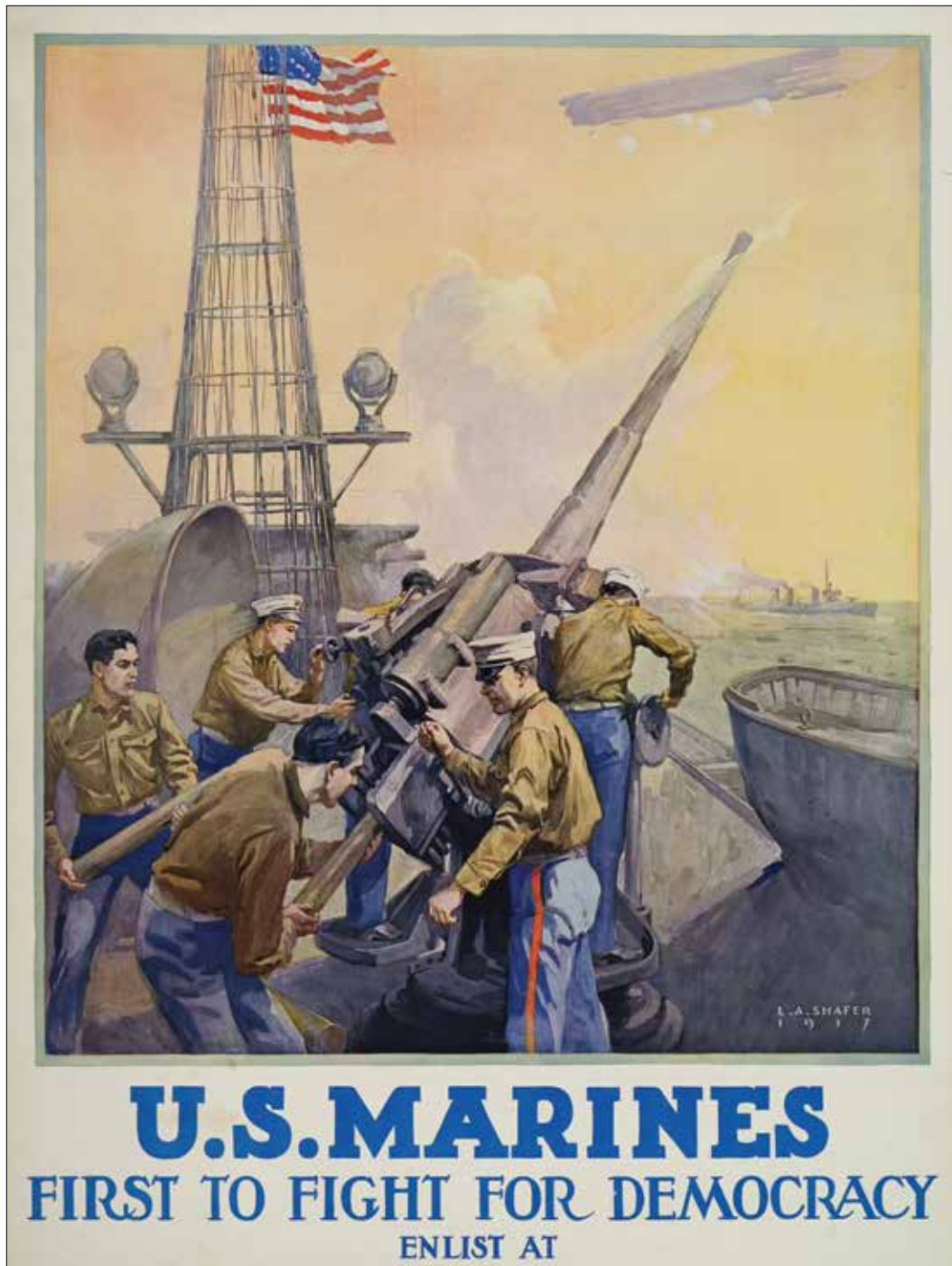
The expansion of the Global War on Terrorism in March 2003 with Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Coalition invasion of Iraq, altered how Marines viewed 9/11. What had been remembered chiefly as a single day of loss followed by swift retribution widened into a longer, open-ended 9/11 era. In official rhetoric, the attacks remained tragic events but became the origin point of an enduring struggle. The toppling of the Baathist regime in March and April 2003 added another superlative achievement in Marine Corps history, with Marines advancing 500 kilometers over land in two weeks. Within months, however, the situation in Iraq began to devolve.⁷⁵ Between 2004 and 2006, the country slipped into a civil war driven by a complex mix of local grievances, sectarian violence, regional rivalries, and Iraqi resentment of a foreign occupation. Marines and Iraqi Security Forces became engaged across the populated areas of al-Anbar Province, leading to cities such as Fallujah and ar-Ramadi earning a place in the battle history of the Corps. Culture featured prominently in how Marines responded. A predilection to learning and decentralized leadership prompted the Service to look to the past to solve current issues. Marines leaned heavily on their predecessors' experience in the small wars

⁷² Jim Mattis and Bing West, *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead* (New York: Random House, 2019), 65.

⁷³ Fred H. Allison, "Thunderbolts: Strike First Marine Corps Blow against Taliban," in *U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001–2009: Anthology and Annotated Bibliography*, comp. Maj David W. Kummer, U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism series (Quantico, VA: History Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 2014), 9–10.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Major Michael L. Valenti, *The MattisWay of War: An Examination of Operational Art in Task Force 58 and 1st Marine Division*, Art of War Papers (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command General Staff College Press, 2014); and Vincent Goulding, "Task Force 58: A Higher Level of Naval Operation," *Marine Corps Gazette* 95, no. 8 (August 2011): 38–41.

⁷⁵ LtCol Michael S. Groen et al., *With the 1st Marine Division in Iraq, 2003: No Greater Friend, No Worse Enemy*, Occasional Paper series (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2006), 396–400; and LtCol Kenneth W. Estes, USMC (Ret.), *U.S. Marines in Iraq, 2004–2005: Into the Fray*, U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism series (Washington, DC: History Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 2011), 4–6.



First to Fight by Leon Alaric Shafer. Recruiting poster from 1917, tying the Marines' traditional naval role with the broader ideal of being the first to fight and therefore the defenders of freedom. National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

MATTIS LETTER



MajGen James N. Mattis addresses the 7th Marines in Kuwait, before the invasion of Iraq.
Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 330-CFD-DM-SD-05-06333.

After the invasion of Afghanistan, James N. Mattis was promoted to major general and assumed command of the 1st Marine Division in August 2002. Major General Mattis believed that preparation for war with Iraq involved not only physical readiness but spiritual and ethical preparedness. He emphasized understanding the mission, the commander's intent, and the moral framework within which the division would operate in combat.

Through months of planning and personal engagement, Mattis shaped a force grounded in both tactical proficiency and moral clarity. His focus on aggressiveness, initiative, and disciplined restraint ensured that every Marine was mentally prepared for survival and dominance. This preparation culminated in the below message, circulated within the division before crossing into Iraq. It encapsulated Mattis's vision of war: speed, violence of action, and strict adherence to the law of war. Rooted in the division's motto, "No Better Friend, No Worse Enemy," the message reminded Marines that their enemy was the Baathist regime, not the Iraqi people. Mattis's guidance reflected the Marine Corps ethos that moral force is as decisive as physical force, with the strength of a Marine unit lying in its ability to combine lethal effectiveness with restraint.

1st Marine Division (REIN) Commanding General's Message to All Hands

For decades, Saddam Hussein has tortured, imprisoned, raped and murdered the Iraqi people; invaded neighboring countries without provocation; and threatened the world with weapons of mass destruction. The time has come to end his reign of terror. On your young shoulders rest the hopes of mankind.

When I give you the word, together we will cross the Line of Departure, close with those forces that choose to fight, and destroy them. Our fight is not with the Iraqi people, nor is it with members of the Iraqi army who choose to surrender. While we will move swiftly and aggressively against those who resist, we will treat all others with decency, demonstrating chivalry and soldierly compassion for people who have endured a lifetime under Saddam's oppression.

Chemical attacks, treachery, and use of the innocent as human shields can be expected, as can other unethical tactics. Take it all in stride. Be the hunter, not the hunted: never allow your unit to be caught with its guard down. Use good judgement and act in best interests of our Nation.

You are part of the world's most feared and trusted force. Engage your brain before you engage your weapon. Share your courage with each other as we enter the uncertain terrain north of the Line of Departure. Keep faith in your comrades on your left and right and Marine Air overhead. Fight with a happy heart and strong spirit.

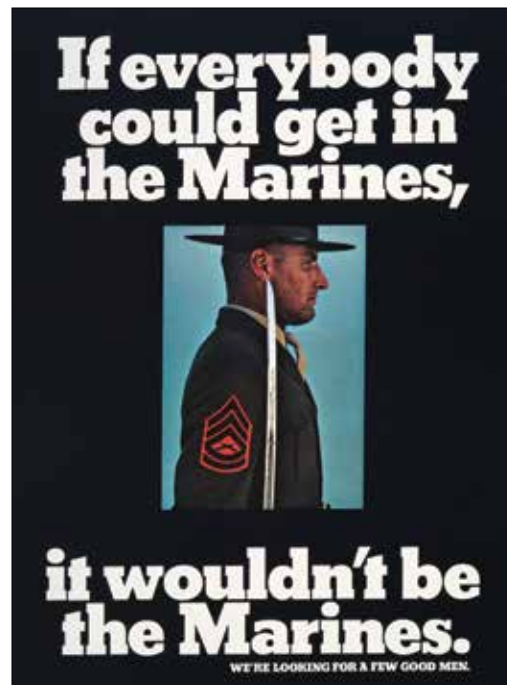
For the mission's sake, our country's sake, and the sake of the men who carried the Division's colors in past battles—who fought for life and never lost their nerve—carry out your mission and keep your honor clean. Demonstrate to the world there is "No Better Friend, No Worse Enemy" than a U.S. Marine.

J. N. Mattis
Major General, U.S. Marines
Commanding

in Latin America during the first third of the twentieth century, learning that effectiveness in counterinsurgency depended less on firepower than on persistence, restraint, and the ability to cultivate local trust.⁷⁶

The Long War

By the end of 2006, a high operational tempo in Iraq while maintaining its global mission began to strain the Corps. The 34th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James T. Conway, successfully requested the Service's end strength increase from 175,000 to 202,000, the largest since the Vietnam War.⁷⁷ Unlike Vietnam, however, every Marine who fought in the Global War on Terrorism was a volunteer. As General Conway acknowledged to Marines in February 2007, "You joined expecting to go into harm's way and have shouldered that duty with courage and determination."⁷⁸ Marines had long regarded themselves as elite, but the 9/11 generation's voluntary service in a war that some in uniform considered a fight between good and evil deepened their sense of distinction. Fewer than 1 percent of Americans eligible for military service during the Global War on Terrorism served, and Marines composed around 10 percent of the



In 1974, the U.S. armed forces adopted the all-volunteer force concept. Without the steady influx of recruits from the draft, the other Services tried to attract young Americans by portraying military service as skills-based training and career development. The Marine Corps took an opposite approach that remains today, wagering that emphasizing hardship, pride, and exclusivity would appeal to those who could be forged into Marines.

National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

Total Force during the period.⁷⁹ Remarkably, the high deployment tempo had little effect on the Marine Corps' ability to recruit and retain at the height of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2006, as the Service exceeded in both areas for the fiscal

⁷⁶ Nicholas J. Schlosser, *U.S. Marines and Irregular Warfare Training and Education, 2000–2010* (Quantico, VA: History Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 2015), 2–4; and Jeannie L. Johnson, *The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture: Lessons Learned and Lost in America's War* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 217–55.

⁷⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, *Selected Manpower Statistics, Fiscal Year 2009* (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2010), 9.

⁷⁸ Gen James T. Conway, *ALMAR 008/07, Marine Corps End Strength Increase* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 6 February 2007).

⁷⁹ Russell Heimlich, "Small Share of Americans in Active Military Duty," Pew Research Center, 23 May 2012, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2012/05/23/small-share-of-americans-in-active-military-duty/>. For the Marine Corps' portion of the Total Force, see table D-39, "Active and Reserve Components End Strength by Service, FYs 1973–2020," Appendix D, in *Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2020 Summary Report*, OPA Report Number 2023-019 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense Office of People Analytics, 2020).



Afghanistan Nocturne by Kristopher J. Battles.
National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.

year.⁸⁰ This was not an isolated example. By the end of the 9/11 era, the Marine Corps had either met or exceeded its accession goals for 26 consecutive years.⁸¹ To be a Marine under such conditions was therefore a calling, an affirmation of their role as defenders of the American way of life and members of a warrior class.⁸²

⁸⁰ Aline O. Quester et al., *Marine Corps Retention in the Post-9/11 Era: The Effects of Deployment Tempo on Marines with and without Dependents*, Center for Naval Analyses Research Memorandum D0013462.A1 (Washington, DC: Center for Naval Analyses, 2006), 33; and Lawrence Kapp, *Recruiting and Retention: An Overview of FY2005 and FY2006 Results for Active and Reserve Component Enlisted Personnel*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), 10, 12.

⁸¹ U.S. Marine Corps, *Force Design Update: October 2025* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 2025), 8.

⁸² For the first attempt at this idea, see Christopher Coker, *The Warrior Ethos: Military Culture and the War on Terror* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

This view created a third and final phase in how Marines viewed the 9/11 era, one that emerged around 2007. By then, the Department of Defense had characterized the Global War on Terrorism as “the Long War,” a term it introduced in the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* when articulating a sustained worldwide campaign that involved military, political, and ideological lines of effort.⁸³ Marine leaders followed suit, adopting the same terminology. “I believe Afghanistan and Iraq are not wars,” Conway told *Leatherneck* in July 2007. “They are the first battles of what’s going to be a very long

⁸³ The phrase *the long war* appears 41 times in the review. U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2006).

war.”⁸⁴ The rhetoric was important, as it framed why Marines were serving multiple combat deployments and suggested that it was unclear when they would end. Conway explained the stakes, calling the fight against Islamic extremism “a generational struggle.” Meeting the challenge demanded persistence, faithfulness, and readiness to keep threats from American shores to avoid another 9/11.⁸⁵ That resolve drew from the moral foundations of Marine culture, with its sense of service as a calling, a belief in selfless sacrifice for the nation’s ideals, and a conviction that defending those ideals gave purpose and an ability to endure hardship.⁸⁶

The Corps did not rely solely on endurance in the Long War, however. The sustained pace of operations strained the operating forces, as a skewed deployment-to-dwell ratio placed significant physical and psychological stress on Marines and sailors. Recognizing the toll, the 2006 *Commandant’s Planning Guidance* emphasized the need to protect the Corps’ most important asset: its people.⁸⁷ By fall 2007, the Marine Corps had studied potential program and policy changes to mitigate combat operational stress, including a working group composed of the commanding generals of the three Marine Expeditionary Forces who submitted suggested program and policy changes to the Commandant. These mirrored the Service’s warrior culture, prioritizing “strength over weakness, wellness over illness,

and prevention over treatment.”⁸⁸ The efforts highlighted another enduring aspect of Marine culture. Although the other Services have historically invested most heavily in ships, aircraft, and advance weapons systems, the Marine Corps has centered its investment on its Marines and sailors, believing the strength of the institution lies in their quality and resilience.⁸⁹ That outlook is expressed in a leadership principle that places the mission first but never loses sight of those who carry it out. In practice, “Mission first, Marines always” functions as a guiding ethos that has shaped how the Service confronted the stresses of a long war.

While caring for the force addresses one dimension of the Corps’ wartime experience, Marines also relied on another cultural trait: an ingrained understanding of the need to remain flexible and adaptable as circumstances evolve. Headquarters Marine Corps underscored this need in January 2008 with *Send in the Marines: A Marine Corps Operational Employment Concept to Meet an Uncertain Security Environment*, a new operational concept that accounted for enduring irregular warfare and the emergence of regional powers and global near-peer adversaries.⁹⁰ The concept emphasized the need to rebalance the Corps for the challenges ahead by adjusting how it organized, equipped, trained, and employed its forces. It reaffirmed the Marines’ role as the nation’s forward, expeditionary vanguard and

⁸⁴ Arthur P. Brill Jr., “34th CMC—General James T. Conway: Straight Answers to Tough Questions,” *Leatherneck*, July 2007, 18.

⁸⁵ “34th Commandant of the Marine Corps’ Planning Guidance,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 91, no. 1 (January 2007): S1.

⁸⁶ *Marine Corps Values: A User’s Guide for Discussion Leaders*, MCRP 6-11B (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997), 2–3.

⁸⁷ “34th Commandant of the Marine Corps’ Planning Guidance,” 12A–12B, S1–S13.

⁸⁸ Letter, Commanding Generals of I MEF, II MEF, and II MEF to Commandant of the Marine Corps, “Tri-MEF Combat Operational Stress Conference,” 12 September 2007, published in *Marine Corps Gazette* 91, no. 11 (November 2007): 32–33.

⁸⁹ MajGen Jason Q. Bohm, “Warrior Defined: A Re-Affirmed Meaning on Today’s Battlefield,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 104, no. 11 (November 2020): 12.

⁹⁰ The concept came from the Plans, Policies, and Operations Department’s National Plans Branch in the Strategy and Plans Division. For their explanation of the concept to the Marine Corps, see Staff, National Plans Branch, “Fighting the Long War: An Introduction,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 92, no. 6 (June 2008): 63–67.

argued that the Corps must remain ready to meet whatever tasks the future required.

This was prescient thinking. By January 2010, the final Marine headquarters withdrew from Iraq, and the center of gravity shifted to Afghanistan, where Marines conducted major operations in Helmand Province before an extended drawdown. Even prior to the decline of large-scale combat operations, the rising threat of China required Marines to refocus on their amphibious roots and strengthen expeditionary capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region. Marines understood this simultaneous effort to protect Americans from terrorism while deterring near-peer threats not as abstract strategy but as a continuation of their cultural commitment to agility, expeditionary readiness, and the ability to shift between missions as the nation required.⁹¹ By the mid-2010s, the Long War had defined an entire generation of Marines, shaping how they trained, deployed, and understood their service.

Eventually in the Global War on Terrorism, many first-term Marines were young enough when 9/11 happened not to remember it, and some were not even born yet. Marines who fought at Belleau Wood, Iwo Jima, or Khe Sanh forged the memories that later generations would inherit. Their wars and their actions became moral reference points for the Corps. By contrast, the terror attacks had already shaped the Marines entering the Service by the end of the 2010s. Having grown up with the images of the attacks, they already understood why they were fighting, even if they had not experienced it firsthand. In this way, 9/11 reversed the normal sequence of Marine mythmaking, as

Marines deployed already carrying the memory. The attacks became not just history but a reminder of the timeless virtues of honor, courage, and commitment.

HOW THE MARINE CORPS COMMEMORATES THE 9/11 ERA

Institutional culture shaped how Marines understood their purpose during the 9/11 era, but it has also influenced how they have commemorated the attacks since. Commemoration, as an act that remembers and honors the past, preserves traditions and interprets their meaning by explaining why events matter. Marines often accomplish this with relics and through ritual ceremonies and symbolic events. From Major Samuel Nicholas's commission as one of the Corps' founding documents to the American flag that flew atop Mount Suribachi as a symbol of victory and sacrifice, the material objects of the Marine Corps' past turn the abstract into something visible and real. Ceremonies and symbolic events likewise anchor Marines to their history and embed lessons and values.⁹² The birthday cake-cutting every 10 November and memorial ceremonies for the fallen are disciplined, precise, and symbolic expressions of Marine identity. In the case of 9/11, the Corps has adapted familiar forms of material memory, ceremonies, and symbolic gestures to connect the Service to a moment of national tragedy.

Material Memory

The initial and most tangible expressions of Marine commemoration after 9/11 are mate-

⁹¹ Arthur P. Brill Jr., "The Corps and the Way Ahead: General James F. Amos Reviews His First Year as Commandant and Outlines the Future," *Leatherneck*, November 2011, 12.

⁹² Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Order 5060.20, Marine Corps Drill and Ceremonies Manual* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 15 May 2019), ii.



LtCol Eric S. Weissberger, executive officer of Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, NC, reads the dedicated bricks of Havelock 9/11 Memorial Plaza after a memorial service, 8 September 2012. Department of Defense photo (USMC) 120824-M-FL266-112.]

rials. One such example was the establishment of Camp Teufel Hunden at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, where Marine aviation combat elements arrived in October 2002. In the center of the camp, Marines built a 9/11 memorial at the base of the flagpole. The names of the fallen Marines in Afghanistan were carved into the monument, which featured miniature Twin Towers on a concrete pentagonal base and the outline of Pennsylvania, each element representative of where the 9/11 attacks occurred.⁹³

Building on this tradition of remembrance, Marines of the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (Anti-Terrorism) buried a 150-pound piece of melted glass and rubble from the World

Trade Center at the rebuilt American embassy in Kabul on the one-year anniversary of 9/11. They placed it in a special container beneath a stone plaque inscribed with the words, “We serve because they cannot. Semper Fidelis.” Lieutenant Kyle Aldrich, a former Wall Street portfolio manager who left the finance world to serve because of 9/11, spearheaded the effort. This personal and material act demonstrates how deployed Marines linked their operational mission directly to the memory of the attacks and the sacrifices it inspired.⁹⁴

As with the monument at Camp Teufel Hunden, Marine Corps memorials from the 9/11

⁹³ Fred Allison, “Bagram Nightmares,” in *U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001–2009*, 48.

⁹⁴ Kathy Gannon, “Piece of WTC Buried in Kabul,” Associated Press, 12 September 2002; John F. Burns, “In Looking Back on 9/11 Attacks, Nations Show a World of Emotions,” *The Globe, New York Times*, 12 September 2002.



USS *New York* (LPD-21) sails up the Hudson River, 8 September 2011. On board the amphibious ship were family members of victims and first responders from 9/11, the ship's crew, and Marines from the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines. The black square in the lefthand corner of the photograph is where the South Tower once stood, now one of two memorial reflecting pools at the National September 11 Memorial and Museum.
Department of Defense photo (USMC) 110908-M-KZ372-002.



Marines on board USS *Somerset* (LPD-25) underway 11 August 2025. *Somerset* is named for Somerset County, PA, where United Airlines Flight 93 crashed on 11 September 2001. The ship's superstructure bears the flight's number and the passengers' rallying cry, "Let's Roll," in their honor.
Department of Defense photo (USMC) 250811-M-PK186-1043.



Marines from the 26th MEU form the outline of the Pentagon along with sailors of USS *Arlington* (LPD-24) while embarked with the *Kearsarge* ARG and deployed in the U.S. Fifth Fleet area of operations, 10 January 2016.
Department of Defense photo (USMC) 160110-M-CV548-008.

era rarely distinguish between remembrance of the attacks and commemoration of the fallen in the Global War on Terrorism. Across Marine installations, artifacts from the attacks anchor monuments that link the events of 2001 to the sacrifices that followed. At Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, for instance, a piece of twisted steel from the World Trade Center stands at the center of a granite monument dedicated to all who perished that day. During its 2011 unveiling, Marines and community members gathered to honor both the victims and those who later served in response. At nearby Havelock, North Carolina, adjacent to Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, another memorial incorporates a beam from the towers. During its 2013 dedication, speakers described it not only as a token of mourning but as a symbol of America's strength.⁹⁵ Likewise, a monument at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California, pairs steel from the World Trade Center with a memorial wall engraved with more than 1,100 names of Marines killed in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁹⁶ Together, these memorials demonstrate how the Corps remembers 9/11 and the wars that followed as parts of a single story of service and sacrifice.

The blending of artifact and meaning also defines Marine commemorative practices at sea. Three amphibious transport dock ships—USS *New York* (LPD-21), USS *Arlington* (LPD-24),

and USS *Somerset* (LPD-25)—serve as symbols of strength, warships dedicated to the memory of those lost in the attacks. *New York's* bow was forged with seven-and-a-half tons of steel recovered from the World Trade Center. Its commissioning on 7 November 2009 was filled with symbolism, as Marines and sailors manned the rail together when sailing up the Hudson River to pass Ground Zero.⁹⁷ The choice of vessels central to the Marine Corps' expeditionary mission is noteworthy. These ships are not passive monuments but a means to project power, and they embody the idea that remembrance and readiness are inseparable.

Commemoration also extends to the institutional heart of Marine heritage. The National Museum of the Marine Corps (NMMC), located outside the gates of Marine Corps Base Quantico in Triangle, Virginia, functions as a shrine to the Corps' collective memory. One of the aircraft hanging in the museum's rotunda is the Fire Department of New York City (FDNY)-inspired AH-1W SuperCobra attack helicopter. Originally one of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 169's aircraft in Afghanistan, the SuperCobra was painted in 2012 with the insignia of Ladder Company 17, Engine 60, of the South Bronx, which lost 60 members on 9/11. The SuperCobra's color scheme linked two communities of service: Marines and firefighters. By taking it into combat in Afghanistan, Marines turned remembrance into part of their mission, honoring the fallen through action rather than just sentiment. The Corps' decision to preserve this aircraft in the NMMC, among all the SuperCobras that flew in Operation Enduring Freedom, is telling and links the 9/11 attacks with the operations that followed.

⁹⁵ PFC Cory D. Polom, "Havelock Unveils Piece of World Trade Center, Remembers the Fallen," MCAS Cherry Point News, 14 September 2011, <https://www.cherrypoint.marines.mil/News/Article/525191/havelock-unveils-piece-of-world-trade-center-remembers-the-fallen/>.

⁹⁶ Alison St John, "Memorial Wall Unveiled on Camp Pendleton," KPBS Public Media, 1 February 2012, <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2012/02/01/memorial-wall-unveiled-camp-pendleton>; and Sgt Emmanuel Necoechea, "Never Forget: 18 Years Since 9/11," DVIDS, 11 September 2019, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/5741502/never-forget-18-years-since-9-11>.

⁹⁷ Mara R. Rutherford, ed., "USS *New York* Commissioning Brings Trade Center Steel Home," *Leatherneck*, January 2010, 28.



The National Museum of the Marine Corps, located in Triangle, VA, adjacent to Marine Corps Base Quantico, preserves artifacts connecting the Corps to the events of 11 September 2001. Some of these are on display in the museum's dedicated 9/11 exhibit.

Courtesy of Jose Esquilin, Marine Corps University Press.



The fuselage artwork of the FDNY-inspired AH-1W SuperCobra that hangs in the rotunda of the National Museum of the Marine Corps.

Department of Defense photo (USMC) 250213-M-IE924-1056.



Beneath the cockpit of the AH-1W SuperCobra that hangs in the rotunda of the National Museum of the Marine Corps is the insignia of Ladder Company 17, Engine 60, of the South Bronx.
Department of Defense photo (USMC) 250213-M-IE924-1011.

Farther into the NMMC, visitors will see the 9/11 exhibit, located at the entrance of the galleries dedicated to Afghanistan and Iraq. The exhibit displays artifacts from the Pentagon and the World Trade Center with particular relevance for the Marine Corps. Its narrative mirrors the way the Service remembers the 9/11 era, moving from the shock of the attack to the resolve of the response. On the grounds outside the museum, in Semper Fidelis Park, the FDNY Marine Corps Association erected a monument

to the 17 firefighter Marines killed that day out of steel from the World Trade Center. Placed among the other memorials in Semper Fidelis Park, the monument links the losses of 9/11 to the sacrifices of earlier generations, reinforcing the continuity of Marine remembrance.

Ceremonies

The Marine Corps has held formal 9/11 commemorations since the first anniversary of the attacks, when the United States Marine Band



The FDNY Marine Corps Association 9/11 Memorial stands in Semper Fidelis Memorial Park, just outside the National Museum of the Marine Corps. Dedicated in 2014 and built with steel beams recovered from the World Trade Center, the memorial honors the 17 firefighters who were also Marines and gave their lives on 11 September 2001.

Courtesy of Jose Esquilin, Marine Corps University Press.

performed at the bottom of Ground Zero.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ SSgt Chase Baran, "The Nation Heals and the Marine Band Plays: 9/11 20th Anniversary," *United States Marine Band News*, 9 September 2021, <https://www.marineband.marines.mil/News/Article/2769263/the-nation-heals-and-the-marine-band-plays-911-20th-anniversary/>.

These events reveal how the Corps integrates ritual and discipline into acts of remembrance. A feature of the 9/11 ceremonies has been community participation. Since the first anniversary, Marines have stood alongside civilians to pay

tribute, mourn, and remember the events of that day.⁹⁹ By combining participation from local communities with standard military honors such as rifle volleys, “Taps,” and color details, the ceremonies have reinforced both Marine values and the Service’s connection to civilian society. The scale of these observances grew during the 9/11 era and expanded to include commemorating the casualties of the Global War on Terrorism. Unlike the Vietnam War period, when public support for the military was often contentious or limited, joint civilian-military 9/11 commemorations have served as a venue to honor and support the troops. The Warrior Recognition Evening Ceremony at Camp Lejeune in 2013, for example, drew more than 5,000 attendees and served as a memorial not only to those who lost their lives on 9/11 but also to the casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq.¹⁰⁰ Since the attacks touched every American, Marine commemorations developed into public ceremonies that shared a national loss, affirmed the Service’s values, and honored the individual Marines’ sacrifices.

By the 20th anniversary of the attacks, Marine commemorations expanded in scale and complexity. The experience of nearly two decades of sustained combat in Afghanistan and

Iraq shaped how the Corps remembered the attacks, making ceremonies more introspective and often highlighting the personal impact of 9/11 on Marines.¹⁰¹ While traditional formal events remained, the Marine Corps leveraged its extensive public affairs capabilities to produce a series of multimedia products that featured Marines reflecting on the attacks, their deployments, and the meaning of service after 2001. These projects, which were shared widely across social media, broadened the audience for Marine remembrance and framed the Corps’ experience within the American memory of 9/11. In this way, commemorations moved beyond installation-level observances and became part of a public narrative that presented Marine identity, culture, and sacrifice to the nation. Even as the methods evolved, Marine commemoration retained its core cultural principles of ritual precision, symbolic gesture, and reinforcement of institutional values.

Symbolic Events

Alongside formal ceremonies and multimedia observances, Marines have commemorated

⁹⁹ See, for example, 9th Marine Corps District, “Ninth District Headquarters Joins with Commands, Civilians to Remember 9/11,” 9th Marine Corps District, 11 September 2002, <https://www.9thmcd.marines.mil/In-the-News/Stories/Article/Article/518900/ninth-district-headquarters-joins-with-commands-civilians-to-remember-9-11/>; LCpl Tavairus Hernandez “Patriot Day Observance Ceremony Hosted at Lejeune Memorial Gardens,” Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, 15 September 2016, <https://www.lejeune.marines.mil/News/Article/Article/945276/patriot-day-observance-ceremony-hosted-at-lejeune-memorial-gardens/>.

¹⁰⁰ LCpl Christopher Johns, “3rd MAW Hosts Special Colors Ceremony in Memory of 9/11 and Camp Bastion Attack,” 3d Marine Aircraft Wing Media Room, 13 September 2013, <https://www.3rdmaw.marines.mil/Media-Room/Stories/News-Article-Display/Article/548995/3rd-maw-hosts-special-colors-ceremony-in-memory-of-9-11-and-camp-bastion-attack/>.

¹⁰¹ U.S. Marine Corps, “We Will Never Forget: Marines Honor 20th Anniversary of 9/11,” 11 September 2021, <https://www.marines.mil/News/MarinesTV/video/813723/dvpTag/september/>. See also U.S. Marine Corps, “20th Anniversary of 9/11,” 3 September 2021, <https://www.marines.mil/News/MarinesTV/video/813148/dvpTag/11/>.

OPPOSITE PAGE: By the Cold War, the Marine Corps had refined its recruiting message to emphasize transforming men into Marines through development of body, mind, and spirit. Designed to appeal to young men seeking self-improvement, adventure, and purpose, it framed the Corps as a path to maturity and personal growth. While the Marine Corps has modified that message slightly since, the core ideal remains today.

National Museum of the Marine Corps Art Collection.



**THE MARINE CORPS
BUILDS MEN
BODY, MIND, SPIRIT**

9/11 through physical and symbolic acts. The physical commemorations reflect a culture in which fitness is not merely a requirement but a core element of Marine identity, rooted in long-standing expectations of toughness, discipline, and readiness. From the early twentieth century, when leaders such as Major General Smedley D. Butler wove organized athletics, daily conditioning, and hard soldiering into the fabric of Marine life, physical fitness became a marker of character as much as capability. Today, it remains a moral quality expected of every Marine regardless of age, rank, or billet and reinforces combat readiness, leadership, and self-discipline.¹⁰² For this reason, the same traits that prepare Marines for war also shape how they remember it. Stair climbs, for instance, have become a ritual of 9/11 remembrance. Whether climbing flights equal to the height of the Twin Towers at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, or ascending the same number of stairs as there were victims while in full firefighting gear at Camp Pendleton, Marines have challenged themselves to attain a higher level of physical fitness and combat readiness in honor of the fallen.¹⁰³

Building on this spirit, memorial runs extend the same idea of endurance and reflection. At Camp Foster, Okinawa, Japan, Marines and sailors gathered for consecutive years each September for a 9/11 memorial run, carrying unit guidons and national flags. Similar annual observances have occurred at other installations across the world, from Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, to Marine Corps Recruit Depot

Parris Island, South Carolina, and Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in California, where the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing has hosted an annual “Evening Colors” ceremony.¹⁰⁴ Beginning in 2005, Marines have conducted runs to the World Trade Center site during New York City’s Fleet Week that conclude with a wreath-laying ceremony. During the height of the Global War on Terrorism, this tradition allowed Marines to connect their combat deployments to the site “where the first shot of the war that we are all now participating in was fired,” one commander told his Marines after the run.¹⁰⁵

These practices exemplify the Corps’ approach to commemoration as discipline. Physical commemoration mirrors physical readiness; to run, climb, or stand in formation is to honor the day in the same disciplined way Marines mark other moments of significance. This is not mourning but remembrance rooted in the readiness and discipline that are enduring elements of the Service’s culture. By taking part in these rituals, Marines merge their personal memories of the 9/11 era with the broader, collective memory of the Corps. In this way, the Corps’ culture and the commemoration of the 9/11 era became reciprocal, with culture framing remembrance and remembrance feeding back into the culture that created it.

¹⁰² U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Physical Fitness*, Marine Corps Reference Publication 7-20C.1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 11 April 2025), 1-1.

¹⁰³ Sgt Christian Oliver Cachola, “In Stair Climb Events, Marines Pay Tribute to 9/11 Fallen,” *Leatherneck*, December 2020, 44–45, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/7415483/marines-with-mwss-372-arff-remember-9-11>.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, U.S. Marine Corps, “Okinawa Marines Participate in 2016 Annual 9/11 Remembrance Run,” 9 September 2016, <https://www.marines.mil/News/Marines-TV/video/482537/dvpmoduleid/599/dvpTag/5K/>; LCpl Tyler Harmon, “MWSS-171 Conducts 9/11 Memorial Run,” DVIDS, 11 September 2018, DVIDS, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/4751502/mwss-171-conducts-9-11-memorial-run>; and 3d Marine Aircraft Wing, “9/11 Memorial Evening Colors Ceremony,” 9 September 2013, <https://www.miramar.marines.mil/News/Press-Release-View/Article/548010/911-memorial-evening-colors-ceremony/>.

¹⁰⁵ For example, see Headquarters Marine Corps, “America Supports You: Fleet Week Starts with Reflection, Thanks in NYC,” 28 May 2005, <https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/News/Article/Article/551937/america-supports-you-fleet-week-starts-with-reflection-thanks-in-nyc/>.



Marines from the 24th MEU (SOC) and U.S. Navy sailors assigned to USS *Bataan* (LHD-5) look into the South Tower pool at the National September 11 Memorial after a spirit run during Fleet Week New York 22, New York City, 25 May 2022.

Department of Defense photo (USMC) 220526-M-UG171-0014.



Marines and sailors with the 22d MEU (SOC) participate in a 9/11 memorial run aboard amphibious assault ship USS *Iwo Jima* (LHD-7), while underway in the Caribbean Sea in support of Operation Southern Spear, 11 September 2025.

Department of Defense photo (USMC) 250911-M-KB995-1073.

CONCLUSION

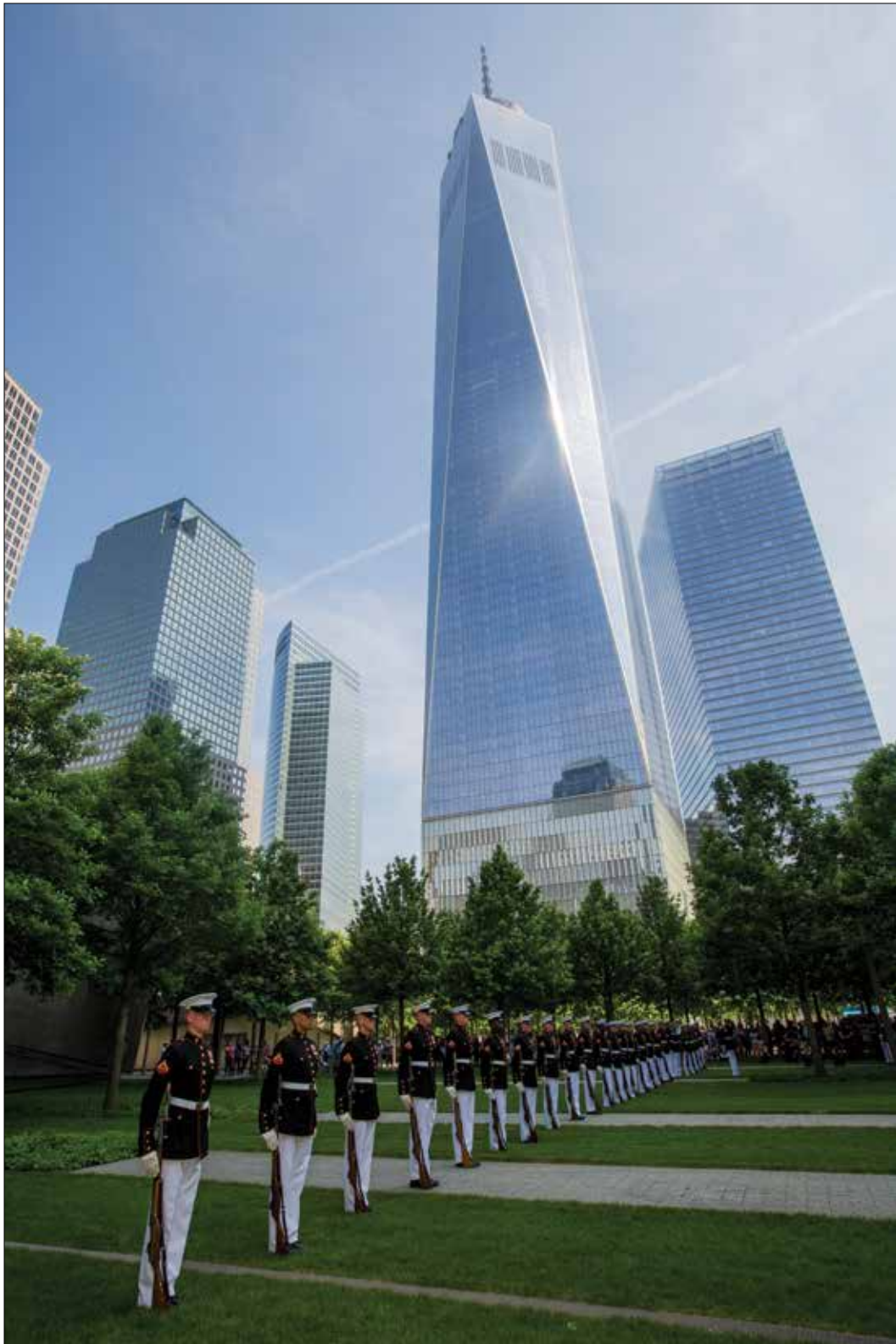
For today's Marines, many of whom were born after 9/11, the attacks are history, not memory.¹⁰⁶ The institution they join nonetheless bears the imprint of that day in its rhythms, values, and reflexes. The 9/11 era reshaped how the Marine Corps understands readiness, resilience, and remembrance. What began as retribution and deterrence against an attack on the homeland evolved into a test of organizational, moral, and human endurance. In the process, the Corps adapted. It derived new ways of capturing and incorporating lessons learned, improving combat capabilities, emphasizing family readiness, and prioritizing troop welfare. These changes refined rather than erased the Marine Corps' traditional identity. As a result, the legacy of the 9/11 era is neither solely martial nor memorial but both, and each is a product of the Service's culture.

The Corps' memory and remembrance of the era reveal something deeper about the re-

lationship between culture and the events that formed it. Culture shaped how Marines interpreted the attacks and the wars that followed, but the era has also become part of the culture that will guide generations who never lived it. Some scholars have noted that the U.S. military can forget hard-earned operational lessons, but those arguments often overlook that a Service cannot erase the way conflicts shape its members and its culture. In the Marine Corps, where values, ethos, and a shared sense of obligation are inherited as much as taught, events that shape one generation become touchstones for the next. For that reason, the 9/11 era now rightfully stands alongside other notable, venerated moments in Marine Corps history. Its imprint endures in the Corps' vigilance, in its reflex to care for its own, and in the rituals that bind past sacrifice to present service. Taken together, these qualities help ensure the Service will continue to make Marines and win battles.

¹⁰⁶ Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, *Quick-Look Report: USMC.2017.0005: Insights from the Marine Corps Organizational Culture Research Project: Generational Differences in the Marine Corps—Exploring Issues and Frictions Between Older and Younger Marines* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 2020), 9–10.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Members of the Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon perform at the National September 11 Memorial during Fleet Week New York, 29 May 2016. In the background is One World Trade Center, begun on 4 July 2004 and opened on 3 November 2014. It was built near the northwest corner of the former North Tower. Department of Defense photo (USMC) 160525-M-IJ860-055.



APPENDIX A

First Responders with Marine Corps Service Lost at Ground Zero

No active-duty or reserve Marines were lost at the Pentagon or Shanksville, Pennsylvania, on 11 September 2001. There were, however, Marines who perished in New York City while performing their duties as firefighters and law enforcement officers. Two of the fallen were drilling members of the Marine Corps Reserve: Gunnery Sergeant Matthew D. Garvey, Individual Ready Reserve; and Corporal Sean P. Tallon, 2d Battalion, 25th Marines. The list below does not include Marines in civilian occupations lost in the towers or onboard the hijacked aircraft.

Name	Rank	Service/unit
Calixto Anaya Jr.	Firefighter	Fire Department of New York City (FDNY) Engine 4
Patrick J. Brown	Captain	FDNY Ladder 3
John G. Chipura	Firefighter	FDNY Engine 219 (detailed to Ladder 105)
Ruben D. Correa	Firefighter	FDNY Engine 74
John G. Coughlin	Sergeant	New York City Police Department (NYPD)
Michael S. Curtin	Sergeant	NYPD Emergency Service Unit Squad 2
Vincent G. Danz	Officer	NYPD
Raymond M. Downey	Deputy chief	FDNY Special Operations Command
Michael A. Esposito	Captain	FDNY Squad 1
Matthew D. Garvey	Firefighter	FDNY Squad 1
Gary P. Geidel	Firefighter	FDNY Rescue 1
Joseph Grzelak	Battalion chief	FDNY Battalion 48
Leonard W. Hatton Jr.	Special agent	FBI
Ronnie L. Henderson	Firefighter	FDNY Engine 279
Paul W. Jurgens	Officer	Port Authority Police Department (PAPD)
William E. Krukowski	Firefighter	FDNY Ladder 21
Manuel D. Mojica Jr.	Fire Fighter	FDNY Squad 18
James W. Parham	Officer	PAPD
Christian O. Regenhard	Firefighter	FDNY Ladder 131 (working on Engine 279)
Gregory R. Sikorsky	Firefighter	FDNY Squad 41
Kevin J. Smith	Firefighter	FDNY Hazardous Materials 1
Sean P. Tallon	Firefighter	FDNY Ladder 10
Allan Tarasiewicz	Firefighter	FDNY Rescue 5

APPENDIX B

Major U.S. Counterterrorism and Related Military Operations Since September 2001

The following operations are those designated as qualifying for Global War on Terrorism campaign recognition.

- Operation Noble Eagle (2001–present)
- Operation Enduring Freedom (2001–14)
 - Operation Enduring Freedom–Afghanistan (2001–14)
 - Operation Enduring Freedom–Horn of Africa (2002–present)
 - Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines (2002–17)
 - Operation Enduring Freedom–Trans Sahara (later renamed Operation Juniper Shield) (2007–present)
- Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003–10)
- Operation Nomad Shadow (2007–20)
- Operation New Dawn (2010–11)
- Operation Observant Compass (2011–17)
- Operation Inherent Resolve (2014–present)
- Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (2015–21)
- Operation Odyssey Lightning (2016–17)
- Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines (2017–present)
- Operation Enduring Sentinel (2021–present)
- Operation Prosperity Guardian (2023–25)
- Operation Poseidon Archer (2024–25)
- Operation Pandora Throttle (2024–present)

