

UNITED STATES ARMY  
CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY

INTERVIEW OF



NEIT-0032

CONDUCTED BY



The Center of Military History

AT

Fort Myer, Virginia

October 2, 2001

TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

## PROCEEDINGS

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[REDACTED]: Today is the 2nd of October, 2001. I am [REDACTED] from the U.S. Army Center of Military History. I am at Company B in Building 248, Fort Myer, Virginia, interviewing [REDACTED].

[REDACTED], please state your full name.

[REDACTED]: And you are a sergeant first class?

[REDACTED]: That's correct.

[REDACTED]: And your unit, please?

[REDACTED]: Bravo Company, 3rd United States Infantry, the Old Guard.

[REDACTED]: You're in 2nd Platoon?

[REDACTED]: Right.

[REDACTED]: And your position is?

[REDACTED]: The platoon sergeant.

[REDACTED]: What were you doing on the morning of 11 September?

[REDACTED]: We had just -- I'm fairly new here so we were practicing what you call SNOPE (phonetic), sword qualification. But we were in the Delta Company watching television, watching the attack on the World Trade Center.

And about, I guess it was about 9:40, maybe a little earlier, we went out back and began to practice again. Actually, we were just discussing the World Trade Center incident

22 and I saw a plane fly over from our right side. I guess it was a United Airlines or whatever.

23 And I knew -- I kind of said, "Oh, shit," excuse my French. But the first sergeant  
24 said, "What's going on?" I said, "Oh, I just saw a plane fly over. It was really low." And I  
25 said, "The landing gear is up and it was moving pretty fast."

26 And then we heard an explosion, walked around the corner and saw the smoke.

27 [REDACTED]: So you saw the plane actually before it went into the building?

28 [REDACTED]: Right.

29 [REDACTED]: And you realized that it had crashed into the Pentagon or you --

30 [REDACTED]: Well, being new here, I was -- you know, I'm not -- now

31 I'm better oriented than I used to be. I just knew it had crashed in this direction over here.

32 And then a couple minutes later we were out in the parking lot watching the smoke  
33 cloud and then someone drove by and said, "Yeah, it hit the Pentagon."

34 [REDACTED]: What were your orders immediately after the attack or what did  
35 the company do?

36 [REDACTED]: We just pretty much went into a muster, got full  
37 accountability. You know, a little bit of confusion. Not confusion but heightened alert  
38 status, you know, whether we should draw weapons and the chain of command were  
39 talking about that, you know.

40 We got into battle dress uniform, our work fatigues, and just stood by waiting to do  
41 what we needed to do.

42 We were all in a heightened sense of alert already because of the IMF deal going on

43 and we were practicing civil disturbance and so on, so we kind of knew something was  
44 going to go on, but didn't expect that.

45 [REDACTED]: So your most immediate mission was to be out there for riot  
46 control for the International Monetary Fund conference?

47 [REDACTED]: Right. That's what we were gearing up for.

48 [REDACTED]: Okay. Was there any sort of preplanned assignments that you  
49 knew of the company having, like in the event of protests at the Pentagon or anything?

50 [REDACTED]: We were expecting to go out. As far as receiving an  
51 operation order on where we would be, you know, that wasn't put out as of yet.

52 [REDACTED]: How long did you remain in the company area after the muster  
53 before you went to the Pentagon?

54 [REDACTED]: We slept here the first night and we went night shift -- I'm  
55 trying to get this right. The next day, which was on the 12th, we showed up at 2000 or  
56 something like that.

57 [REDACTED]: And what did you do there?

58 [REDACTED]: What did we do? We -- actually the first night for the first  
59 four hours I think we secured the hallways in the Pentagon, the corridors leading into the  
60 impact area. It was pretty smoky and smelly still at that point.

61 And then the last four hours of our eight to twelve hour mission there the first night,  
62 we cleared debris just to the left of the impact area on the first floor. There was a lot of  
63 debris still in there, you know.

64 [REDACTED]: Now, how did they set up? Did they operate by platoon?

65 [REDACTED]: Right, we would rotate platoons.

66 [REDACTED]: Okay.

67 [REDACTED]: So when we rotated into what I think they called light

68 labor, which was, you know, taking the debris out, another platoon rotated into the

69 Pentagon for the security. And I believe we had one platoon that was standing by for

70 detail, heavy labor or anything else that came up.

71 [REDACTED]: Now, what was your immediate reaction on seeing the Pentagon

72 and the damaged area from after having the experience of having seen the plane before

73 then? Did you see it on TV, pictures on TV prior to going over there on the 11th?

74 [REDACTED]: No.

75 [REDACTED]: Okay, you --

76 [REDACTED]: Well, no, I probably had. I can't really recollect if I saw it.

77 [REDACTED]: What was your first impression of actually seeing the Pentagon

78 with the --

79 [REDACTED]: Well, I was pretty much in awe. I mean, I spent a couple

80 weeks there and every time, you know, I would still stand there and stare at it. It never

81 really faded away on the horrific, you know, happenings that happened there.

82 Inside, though, was really unbelievable. I mean, I would never have expected to see

83 the devastation and the fire and the personal effects and all that laying around.

84 [REDACTED]: Now, did you or your platoon work with the fire and rescue

85 personnel during the time you were there?

86 [REDACTED]: Yes, we did. They would tell us -- I guess they were  
87 driven by the engineers on the ground because when we went in the first night, you know, I  
88 didn't know how unstable the building was. It hadn't even begun to be shored up yet, from  
89 what I understand.

90 And that's all we were doing. We were clearing a beeline to positions that needed  
91 to be shored up first and they would direct us on where they wanted us to clear. They were  
92 pretty happy that we -- you know, they said we did in two and a half hours what it would  
93 have took them 24 hours to do. I don't know true that was, but.

94 [REDACTED]: Now, so you cleared the routes and they did the actual shoring  
95 work?

96 [REDACTED]: Correct. We'd get in there, would shore, you know. If  
97 anybody found a body or parts or whatever, we would notify, you know, someone outside.  
98 We just continued to move debris in a big chain. Airplane parts in one pile and building  
99 parts in another.

100 [REDACTED]: Where were they putting the piles at?

101 [REDACTED]: Right outside. They had created an entrance, created one  
102 or maybe they took down the door or whatever. But there was a big entrance just to the left  
103 of the impact area, about 15, 20 meters.

104 [REDACTED]: Okay. What measures were taken to protect your safety that first  
105 night? Or what was your uniform?

106 [REDACTED]: Our uniform for the first two nights, sir, was strictly  
107 BDUs and a mask and a set of goggles. A red or a construction helmet and black Army  
108 work gloves. You know, just standard issue. So it was not a whole lot, you know.

109 And the horn would go off and we would just, you know, evacuate the building in  
110 an orderly manner. There were soldiers that were going in in the, I forget the name, the  
111 Tyvek suits or whatever, the white protective suits. But for the first two nights we went in  
112 there just in BDUs.

113 [REDACTED]: When did you get the white protective suits?

114 [REDACTED]: It was our third night there, third or fourth time that we  
115 went back in the Pentagon.

116 [REDACTED]: And did you keep wearing them every day after that?

117 [REDACTED]: Yes, after that.

118 [REDACTED]: Okay, would you describe those for me, please?

119 [REDACTED]: They were a white rubbery suit. I'm not sure of the  
120 material but it's just, it's pretty thin. And they had booties on the bottom. It's just like an  
121 overall. We wore two pair initially and then later towards the mission we'd just wear one  
122 suit.

123 We had rubber boots such as a fireman boot or something like that, and you would  
124 tape it up with 100-mile-an-hour tape, duct tape. We also had latex gloves on. On top of  
125 that you had rubber gloves like dishwashing gloves on top and you would tape that in or  
126 tape the sleeve over the gloves. And we would wear leather work gloves as well. Plus the

127 hat.

128 And at that time they started trying to get us full face masks rather than the two-  
129 piece, safety goggles and the respirator over your mouth.

130 [REDACTED]: How was it working in those?

131 [REDACTED]: Pretty good. There was a couple nights before we got the  
132 full face masks that, you know, you could still -- there was quite a stench in there and that's  
133 something I won't forget, you know, the mixture of smoke and fuel and to me it just  
134 smelled like decay in there, you know.

135 And that would seep through occasionally, you know, until you got a good mask.  
136 Every time we went there we got a different mask for about the first week and then we  
137 started just keeping our own.

138 [REDACTED]: What was your emotional reaction to the wreckage?

139 [REDACTED]: I was just glad to help out, really. I mean, I would rather  
140 be there than anywhere else because I felt like I was doing something. I wasn't sure how I  
141 was going to react at first, you know, because I haven't seen a whole lot of dead bodies, you  
142 know. I've seen the occasional in my 18 years, but I handled it pretty well.

143 I mean, I think the thing that got me through it is seeing, you know, horror movies  
144 and stuff like that. To me when I was there and I saw the bodies it just, you know, didn't  
145 seem real. Like I was looking at a wax museum or something like that. And then  
146 afterwards I would contemplate it more, you know.

147 [REDACTED]: So you were getting through with saying, "I'm in something that's



148 false"?

149 [REDACTED]: Right. Yeah.

150 [REDACTED]: Now, your company was doing the night shift?

151 [REDACTED]: Right, we did the night shift up until just the last few days

152 of our tour.

153 [REDACTED]: How did you get through that? Did you get enough sleep during

154 the days?

155 [REDACTED]: That was a little rough. The soldiers were kind of walking

156 zombies at first because we would come back and we would have, you know, have to prep

157 for the next mission.

158 And then you have soldiers that live maybe 20 miles away so they'd have to drive.

159 And we were driving, leaving post in civilian clothes, so they had to get here in time to

160 change back into BDUs. They had to take showers before they left.

161 So they weren't getting much sleep for about the first week and then after that the

162 first sergeant was a lot better at letting us go immediately. You know, after you took a

163 shower you put on civvies. You fell into a routine so it got easier.

164 [REDACTED]: Now, give me an example of the routine of a typical night's work

165 there after the first couple days.

166 [REDACTED]: Well, we'd show up probably about 1800 or so. We'd

167 show up and while the chain of command was receiving briefings we were rotating out,

168 relieving the next company, the company that would be leaving. So that would, you know,

169 maybe take half an hour to get situated.

170 And then they would receive briefings on what we were to do that night and how  
171 the rotation was going to work, or they knew how the rotation was going to work but they'd  
172 just refine it a little bit.

173 The soldiers would pretty much take advantage of all the free chow out there  
174 initially. They'd go and they'd eat dinner and then we'd get busy, either rotate in the  
175 building where you could work anywhere from four to five hours, you know, or we also  
176 rotated to the north parking lot where some companies would help sift debris. Actually, we  
177 never did that.

178 We just pulled security for the north parking lot. There were some instances that  
179 happened there as far as trying to keep the people away, confiscating film and this and that.

180 So we did that a couple nights and that would be a full shift. Your eight hours would be  
181 just securing the north parking lot, the FBI site.

182 Or we would rotate in securing the Pentagon once again and inside the building.

183 [REDACTED]: Now, when you were doing the security it was just your presence  
184 there. Was this armed security or --

185 [REDACTED]: It was just our presence. I wish it was armed. But the FBI  
186 had a lot of weapons out there, so if we needed something we would just contact them.

187 [REDACTED]: Why you do you say wish it was armed?

188 [REDACTED]: Well, you know, we felt we were soldiers, if you're on  
189 guard you just feel a little bit better.

190 [REDACTED]: Okay, the routine is a soldier on guard has his rifle and magazine?

191 [REDACTED]: Exactly. And we're out there with a flashlight, that's it.

192 [REDACTED]: How did your troops hold up under this?

193 [REDACTED]: They did pretty good. You know, a good chain of  
194 command keeps them from panicking. When they would blow the horn and we'd be in the  
195 building you could see the tendency to just take off running, you know. You'd have to keep  
196 them orderly in existing and, you know, trying to get a count.

197 You know, a big thing in the Army, if they see their leader is calm then they're  
198 going to be calm. They held up pretty good. I heard a couple instances in other platoons  
199 where soldiers had a little difficulty dealing with the traumatic scenes in there, but our guys  
200 did pretty good.

201 [REDACTED]: What was done for soldiers who saw the traumatic scenes or for  
202 your own soldiers to help them?

203 [REDACTED]: Well, we just monitored them, looked at them. They had  
204 a debriefing site out there but I think that debriefing site was pretty much for if you went in  
205 there to actually carry bodies out.

206 You know, we just pretty much would work debris and, you know, you would sight  
207 something and you would inform somebody. But we never actually had to go in and load  
208 bodies and carry them out.

209 We had numerous family support groups here for the spouses. Our chain of  
210 command would talk to us every day we'd come back, "Watch for these signs, watch for

211 these symptoms." The whole chain of command was pretty active in monitoring the  
212 soldiers.

213 [REDACTED]: Now, do you have a family here?

214 [REDACTED]: I did. They're -- my wife is currently back in Georgia  
215 visiting family.

216 [REDACTED]: Okay, so were you living off post or do you live here on post?

217 [REDACTED]: I live off post, about six and a half miles from here.

218 [REDACTED]: And how is she doing?

219 [REDACTED]: Actually she had left the 9th of September, so she called  
220 me on the 11th here, asked how I was doing, you know. I told her I'm doing fine and so on.

221

222 [REDACTED]: Okay, so she called to find out if you were safe then?

223 [REDACTED]: Right. Right.

224 [REDACTED]: I heard people talk about the chaplains being out there. Did you  
225 observe them?

226 [REDACTED]: Right, we had a lot. Marine chaplains, Army chaplains,  
227 civilian priests and so on. A lot of them out there. They would come up to us and talk to  
228 us prior to getting into the building, kind of hang out and, "Hey, how is everybody doing?"  
229 You know, sit down and talk with us maybe once or twice.

230 Of course, they were always accessible. If anybody wanted to talk to them, you  
231 know, it wouldn't be a problem.

232 [REDACTED]: How did the soldiers react to that?

233 [REDACTED]: I think they liked to see it, you know. They liked to see it.

234 I didn't see a lot of them taking a lot of use of them out there. That's not very good

235 wording. I didn't see a lot of them utilizing them out there. Not in my platoon, anyway,

236 you know.

237 [REDACTED]: What was done in the way of -- with the chaplains we have the

238 psychological aspect of the morale, the letting out of tension. What else was done in the

239 way of trying to keep up the troop morale?

240 [REDACTED]: Other than the chaplains, just the chain of command trying

241 to make sure you had the max amount of time off. You know, they didn't keep you there

242 and mess with you too long so you could go home and get some rest.

243 You know, just motivational talks from the chain of command. The first sergeant,

244 the company commander. "You guys are doing a great job out there. The FBI and

245 engineers said that, you know, you cleared what would have took them a whole day," and

246 this and that.

247 You know, I think motivation was pretty high because everybody wanted to help

248 out.

249 [REDACTED]: What about Red Cross, Salvation Army? I've heard Burger King

250 and McDonald's were all out there.

251 [REDACTED]: Right.

252 [REDACTED]: Did they --

253 [REDACTED]: Just real nice to you. You know, "How you doing?"

254 Everybody was real impressed by those agencies that you just listed. We're also, you

255 know, looking forward to our next CFC campaign to give to the Red Cross and Salvation

256 Army. The soldiers were pretty impressed.

257 [REDACTED]: So they made sure that you had food and water and Gatorade and

258 stuff?

259 [REDACTED]: Right. Right. They were friendly when you walked up

260 there. You know, "Hey, you guys are doing a great job," and this and that.

261 [REDACTED]: Just a positive attitude?

262 [REDACTED]: Right, exactly.

263 [REDACTED]: Is there any particular scene or event that took place that stands

264 out in your mind?

265 [REDACTED]: I would have to say when someone shoveled an ear off the

266 floor in front of me. That sounds out pretty good.

267 However, we came across a scene that had three -- two Naval officers and a female

268 secretary. You know, the Naval officer was sitting in his chair. His watch had stopped at

269 the moment of impact.

270 Another one was laying on the floor. And the secretary was kind of laying near the

271 first officer, face down, and all you could see was the back of her, you know, hair. That

272 scene right there, you know, pretty much stands out in my mind.

273 [REDACTED]: And then you called the FBI in and --

274 [REDACTED]: Actually, someone else had discovered that scene. Our  
275 platoon was in there moving debris to shore up another area and our route was right by that  
276 scene. So they were there. They were marked for future photography and removal. But  
277 they were there at the time.

278 [REDACTED]: So you and your guys were being moved past that?

279 [REDACTED]: Right.

280 [REDACTED]: How did your guys react? Did they --

281 [REDACTED]: You know, we -- how did they react? They reacted pretty  
282 positively. We didn't see a whole lot of carnage in there, you know.

283 And everyone wanted to -- not to sound wrong, but to take a bigger part of it, you  
284 know. And so I think they were glad to see that they, you know, got the full effect of the  
285 Pentagon, you know, and the disaster. And they reacted okay, good.

286 [REDACTED]: So that will be probably the incident you remember the most, or is  
287 there something else?

288 [REDACTED]: That and watching the plane fly over. I think that was the  
289 most shook up I was, was when the plane flew over and I knew something was wrong.  
290 You know, we had just got done watching the World Trade Center.

291 [REDACTED]: Now, did your platoon -- did they keep platoon cohesion during  
292 the rotations?

293 [REDACTED]: Absolutely.

294 [REDACTED]: Okay.

295 [REDACTED]: Yeah, squad and platoon.

296 [REDACTED]: Now, if a platoon member, let's say, came up on something, let's  
297 say a sight such as this, and said, "I can't go back in there. I can't take it anymore." Was he  
298 allowed then --

299 [REDACTED]: Right, we weren't going to make him go back in.

300 [REDACTED]: Okay.

301 [REDACTED]: Right. You know, they had the only senior enlisted and  
302 officers handling the bodies in there when they did have to do that. So, you know, that's  
303 the way we were briefed.

304 Like I said, we never did partake in that. but we weren't going to make a PFC or a  
305 specialist, you know, grab a deceased soldier or whatever, civilian working at the Pentagon  
306 and put them in a body bag. All they were going to do is just carry them out.

307 [REDACTED]: (Inaudible.)

308 [REDACTED]: Right. Well, carry the bodies.

309 [REDACTED]: Oh, carry them out after they're bagged.

310 [REDACTED]: Right, exactly.

311 [REDACTED]: Well, SGT Boatwright, do you have anything else that I should  
312 have asked you about?

313 [REDACTED]: No, that's pretty much it. That's all I can really think of.

314 [REDACTED]: All right, then this concludes the interview. Thank you.

315 (The interview was concluded.)