

Q: This is [REDACTED] (sp?), from the Center of Military History. This interview is unclassified. If you could state your name for me?

A: Specialist [REDACTED].

Q: OK. And are you doing this interview under your own will?

A: Yeah.

Q: OK. And do you give the Center of Military History all access to your recording?

A: Yeah.

Q: OK. All right, we're just going to talk a little bit about, like I said, what happened to you and tell me a little bit about your career.

A: Well, I'm an Air Traffic Controller, and actually, I know other (inaudible) at the Pentagon Heliport, and --

Q: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

A: (inaudible), yes.

Q: Wow. OK, how long have you been in the military?

A: About five years this past September.

Q: Oh, that's great. OK. Family?

A: Well, I'm married. I have a husband. Other than that, just my immediate family.

Q: (inaudible)

A: Yeah, my husband's stationed here -- he's actually in Charlie Company.

Q: Oh wow. Aviation (inaudible)?

A: Yes.

Q: OK. All right. And please tell me a little bit how a normal day for you would have been on September 10, the day before. What kind of normal things would go on in your area?

A: OK, well, a normal day was -- we go in and where -- we report to work at 7:15 in the morning, cause the heliport opens at 7:30, and we pretty much standard -- we go through opening procedures to open the facility and become operational. And we talked at any of the VIP aircraft that come in, which (inaudible) every day. And we normally close at 5:30, and pretty much close up and go home.

Q: What kind of things do you do while you're there? Sit and look at a screen, or (inaudible) --

A: Well, it's a VFI Heliport, and it's unique in the sense that we really don't have any airspace or anything. We're out there, since it's the Pentagon, and the One-Star General and above -- they come in for their meetings and things like that. So whoever -- they -- I mean, they call and request permission to come in, and we're pretty much there for them. OK.

Q: How many people usually on a shift?

A: Two.

Q: Just two?

A: Yeah, that's all.

Q: You and --

A: Oh, Mr. [REDACTED] (sp?) -- [REDACTED] (sp?).

Q: OK. All right. Now, September 11. Where were you when you heard about the Trade Center?

A: I was in the Heliport tower, and actually we were watching the news. We normally watch the news in the morning to see what's going on for the day, because, like I said, we don't really much -- have much traffic and things, so we'll watch the news. And so, that morning, we caught the -- well, the first report of the one airplane hitting the towers. And then so, well, it caught our attention, and we continued watching. And as a matter of fact, I -- my husband called -- he was at the range that day -- and just to see how I was doing. And I discussed it with him, like, "Well, it's on the news. A plane hit in New York and stuff at the Trade Tower." And while I was on the phone with him, I was watching the television and the second one hit. And I -- and they mentioned terrorist attack and stuff. And, I was like, "Oh, they're saying it's a terrorist attack. Another plane hit," and all this. And at the time, he couldn't

really talk. He was on his cell phone. He's like, "well, I'm breaking up. I have to talk to you later." I was, "OK." So Mr. [REDACTED] (sp?) and I continued watching the news talking about what would happen. Like, "Oh my goodness." Then, it was mentioned that if it is a terrorist attack then the Pentagon is probably -- is a prime target. And we pretty much were just trying to -- wait and see what happened. I mean, we got a phone call from security, saying they were going to heighten security, which we were like, "OK. That seems typical," since the situation -- they referenced it to New York. And that day we already had a high level of security, because we actually were expecting the President to come in two hours.

Q: You were expecting the President to come into the Pentagon?

A: Mm-hmm.

Q: Oh my God.

A: Yeah, he was scheduled -- I want to say 11:00 -- I'm not really sure now. I know it was like -- it was like about two hours or less from combat -- the situation started coming about and then, obviously after everything happened, we were like, "Well, he's probably not coming."

Q: Right.

A: And then we actually saw his -- when he was in Florida, and they showed how when he got the news and stuff like that,

and then he was going somewhere or -- obviously, his plans got changed.

Q: How did you feel when -- you know, first you saw the one plane hit the Trade Center, and then you were on the phone with your husband, and you heard that the second one, or saw that the second one hit?

A: Well, when the first one hit, Mr. [REDACTED] (sp?) and I were discussing how the flight path of the aircraft are so close to that area, so as a controller, we were like, "Someone messed up. A pilot messed up, or a controller."

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, "Someone's going to be in trouble." So we were discussing the different possibilities of that, but then when the second one hit, at first, there was just this amazement, like, "What's going on? How did that happen?" And then they said, "The terrorist attack." And I said, "Oh my -- oh my Goodness. What's going on?" It's not -- nothing that anyone really expected to happen.

Q: No.

A: So, Mr. [REDACTED] (sp?) started getting a little nervous. And he was like -- I won't say panicking or freaking out, but you could tell he was a little on edge. Like, "Oh my goodness." And, myself, I was -- I guess, in a way, like in a denial. I really didn't realize that it was going to

evolve into what it did, because I was saying -- I was like, "No, it's OK. It's not" -- I mean, I was like, "Sure, it's tragic," but I didn't think it was going to end up being as large of an incident as it was. And, I mean, I feel bad right now when we talk about it, because I was -- we were discussing it more like a -- not, like, humorous, but, like, we took it -- we were discussing it lightly. You know?

Q: Right.

A: Like, "Oh." I was like, "Oh, it's OK. Calm down, nothing's wrong," and stuff. And actually at the time, since they called for heightened security, I was like -- we don't really break for lunch, we bring our stuff in, so I needed -- I wanted to get my stuff out of my truck, before the security guards and everything were roaming around (inaudible), I have a hard time and I can sit in the tower. So, I went to leave, and we can always watch the flight path of the aircraft going into Reagan National.

Q: Right.

A: And so, jokingly, I was like, "Well, make sure you watch out for the planes."

Q: Oh no.

A: Right. (laughter)

Q: (laughter)

A: And he was like, "You're funny." And so I went downstairs, thinking nothing of it. And I actually had to go to the bathroom, so I was like, "OK, well, let me go to the bathroom." And once I was getting ready to leave the restroom, is when I heard the aircraft that hit the Pentagon. And you hear the descent, and then it hit, and the building shook, and the lights went out, and the ceiling caved in. And then, I was like, "Oh my God."

Q: So were you right there where the plane hit?

A: Yeah, I was in the -- the plane flew over the Heliport, like over the pad area --

Q: Right.

A: -- and so, our actual tower was less than 100 feet from where it hit, and it just -- we ended up being very lucky, because the tower's not attached to the Pentagon itself, so when -- it got affected by the blast, but as far as, like, the flames and then the destruction of the Pentagon, we weren't really affected because it's far enough away from the building that it didn't really --

Q: Did you lose power and stuff in the --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: How do you handle losing power in some place that's so important that you have power to see where all the planes are (inaudible)?

A: Well --

Q: Communicate to each other?

A: Well, what happened is, once it hit and everything, I just made my way out of the restroom, and we had to go through the VIP lounge, and I saw one of the firemen. (inaudible), he asked me if I was OK, and I was like, "██████s upstairs." And I heard him screaming, he was like, "Kidd, where are you?" And I was like, "I'm here! Where are you? Are you OK?" And he's like, "I'm all right." And I was like, "Are you coming?" And he's like, "Yeah, I'm coming down." So then he came down, and I followed him outside. And then we saw where the plane hit.

Q: Wow.

A: And we kind of stood there, and -- for a minute, like all crying and, you know --

Q: Right

A: -- in awe and amazed, because I was like, "Oh my" -- because I noticed my car, and I was like, "Oh my God, I was on my way out to my car" (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)
--

Q: Was your car destroyed?

A: Yes, both of our cars were completely destroyed.

Q: Oh God.

A: Well, so -- and I was like -- and since it was so close, we were like, "Oh my God, it's so close. It could have been us," and all that. And then Mr. [REDACTED] kept telling us, like, "I saw it. I saw it coming. I saw it. I saw it." I was like, "Oh my Goodness," and, "What's going on?" And then they start telling everybody to get -- to move away from the building and go off to the side. So we went over there, and then after that, I just -- I was -- everyone was trying to use their cell phones. I was like, "I've got to call my husband."

Q: Right.

A: And it was definitely crazy. (laughter)

Q: So was there any structural damage to your building, where you work?

A: Yes, I haven't seen it since then. I actually just went back to work at the Pentagon yesterday, but we're on a different site, on the other side of the building. What I've been told from our maintenance, and the people who have seen the building, that the building actually shifted.

Q: Oh.

A: The stairwell has come up away from the wall, and obviously the ceiling's been -- and equipment's been damaged from everything falling.

Q: And there was just the two of you in the building at the time?

A: Well, Mr. [REDACTED] and I were the only controllers there, and then we had three fire crew members that (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

Q: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

A: Yeah, everything -- everyone got out OK with minor injuries.

Q: So after you get outside -- and I realize you tried to use your cell phone, and everyone was saying that they couldn't use their phones, their phones weren't working -- where did you go from there? Did you see people coming out of the Pentagon, or --

A: Yeah, the people were still coming out, and everyone was pretty much going in a same direction. I saw a lady get carried out by somebody, and someone else had a small child that was crying. No thoughts really, I would say, like, registered. I was just kind of, like, trying to soak everything in, and, like it wasn't -- it -- I couldn't believe that it was happening. And, like, no one really had an explanation. And it almost felt, like, with what happened at New York, then it happened with us, it almost felt like it was going to be more after that.

Q: Right, you were worried about --

A: We're just scared, yeah.

Q: -- another attack. What did you think, knowing about aviation and all, about how he actually hit the Pentagon? How the plane actually came around, and the Pentagon being so low to the ground and everything, it wouldn't seem like a hard target. Is that, or --

A: Well --

Q: -- for a large plane to --

A: Well, like I said, when Mr. [REDACTED] and I were talking about it, we were discussing like, with what happened in New York, that we're right next to Reagan National, and, like, the planes come in there --

Q: Right.

A: -- and we can watch them all day, you know? So, the possibility of it happening, like, we -- the way we thought while we were discussing it was that, like, all someone had to do was have plans to land at National, and instead of landing, divert and hit the Pentagon. So when it happened, it didn't -- it made sense that it happened, in light of the situation. But it kind of stemmed off more to the fact, like, "Why didn't anyone -- how didn't anyone know?" Or because we weren't notified."

__: (multiple conversations; inaudible)

(break in tape)

Q: Anyways, OK, so you got out, and you're standing on the lawn, I'm assuming, in front of the Pentagon. You see all the people coming out of the building. Did you try to -- did you have any hands-on, or were they just moving people aside? I know they grabbed up several people to run with, you know, gurneys and things.

A: Right. Well, initially, everyone was just pushed off to the side, and then -- and I don't know how long after that, but they were like -- they started calling for groups of people to go over, so then people just started wandering over, and then they're like, "OK, I need medics. I need people who are qualified." And one person asked, "Is combat lifesaver good enough?" They're like, "Yeah, that's good enough. You're -- anybody like that, get in groups of" -- I think it was four, whatever. "Pair up," and all that stuff.

Q: Right.

A: And, so when they started breaking everybody off, I went to get in a group, and Mr. [REDACTED]'s like, "Are you going to be OK?" And I was like, "Yeah, I want to help." And he was like, "Well, you should go get checked out." Because -- well, I had blood on my shirt, but it ended up being from Mr. [REDACTED], because whenever -- we initially went out, and

crying and what have you, he gave me a hug and he burned and cut his hand.

Q: Ow.

A: So -- but -- and then, I'm still crying. I'm -- I was trying to help. He's like, "You should probably just go off to the side." Because there was the people that were on the other side of the building, that we're --

Q: Right.

A: -- helping, so they were a little bit calmer, and things like that. So we went to the side, and then we went over to the triage area, and then someone came to me and asked me if I was all right, and, "Calm down, it's going to be OK," and all that. And I mentioned that my throat was bothering me, so they put me on oxygen for mild smoke inhalation, and I kind of got checked over, and sat there, and calmed down for a little bit.

Q: Wow. How long was it before you were able to actually contact your husband?

A: Well, I didn't talk to him -- what ended up happening is there was a man with a cell phone and I guess he got on the phone with an operator. And so when I was sitting down with the oxygen, he was asking, like, "Is anyone trying to contact anybody?" And I -- so, obviously, I was like, "Well, I am." He was like, "What's your name? Who are you

trying to contact? What's the phone number?" And then he called the operator, and he's like "OK." And then he just went on, and that -- got the same information from the other people. So, what my husband told me is, since he was at the range -- I used his work number, because I didn't know any other number to get a hold of him (inaudible). But -- so they called his work, and one of his coworkers, Sergeant [REDACTED] (sp?), answered the phone. And they were like, "Is [REDACTED] there?" And he was like, "No, no." And they're like, "Well, I hope this makes sense to you, but [REDACTED] is OK." And they're like, "That makes perfect sense." And so they relayed the information to my husband, and that's how he knew that I was all right.

Q: I know (inaudible) the range, so that it took them a long time to get working. You -- were you worried about his safety at all?

A: Actually, I didn't really think as far as like anything had happened to him. I was concerned for him and my family. I'm like, "What are they thinking?" Because my family don't necessarily know exactly where I work at the building. They just know that I work there.

Q: You were over there, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

A: And then, my mother, obviously like any other mother, is very worrisome. So -- and then my husband -- since he

wasn't -- and somewhat close, I didn't want him to think anything worse than what it was.

Q: Well, after you got home, finally, after the day was over, how did you leave that area? How did you get out of the area?

A: Actually, there was a --

Q: Obviously, your cars are destroyed.

A: (laughter)

Q: (laughter)

A: There was a female -- she was a psychologist, and she was in the area, and she ended up talking to me for a little bit, and then offered me a ride home -- Mr. [REDACTED] and myself a ride home (inaudible). So we took her up on that.
(laughter)

Q: So anything that you can think of that could have been done -- you would have done differently, or would have everyone do differently, as far as security?

A: Well --

Q: Was there any way -- I realize there was no way to really stop something like that to happen, you know, from happening --

A: Right.

Q: -- but is there any -- things are obviously more upscale in the security area now. Do you wish they were like that

before, or is there anything in particular that you would like to see?

A: Well, it's hard to say, because there's -- I mean, this from a Patroller standpoint -- there's really nothing as far as their job is concerned in their part of what happened. There's not much you can do. Like, the aircrafts hijacked, I mean, you would -- I mean, you're no longer in control, so there's not much to do about that. And it's sad when you hear that they were trained from -- in our schools, and they used our own people and our own technology against us. So, I mean, then that poses a concern on the people who are immigrating to our country -- their background checks, and -- but how can you ever be -- there's -- I may never really be sure. And so -- and then, as far as, like, what happened at the Pentagon and in the course of events, I don't think it could have happened any differently, that would have made it any better, because even if they would have been able to evacuate the building, it still -- I think it just may -- would have made the situation more chaotic --

Q: Right.

A: -- and it would have been -- it may have be even worse than what it was. So --

Q: OK. Well, if you could think back to that day, which probably isn't the best thing you could do (laughter), but if you could think back to the day, what your most -- the scene that sticks out most in your mind -- one picture that, when you say "September 11," kind of springs to mind?

A: Well, the sound of the aircraft, and then my -- first looking at the crash site.

Q: Yeah. Are you -- do you feel like a different person today than you were then?

A: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think something that large and (inaudible) in any -- with anybody, it'll change them in some way. It may -- I mean, I'm more aware -- more cautious with things like that, and it makes you reprioritize and think about life a little bit more than you did before, because anybody start taking things for granted, and so when something like that happens, you like -- you take another look at everything and appreciate everything that's around and what you have.

Q: That's all the questions I have. Do you have anything else you want to throw into the history books while you have the chance? (laughter)

A: (laughter) No, I don't think so. I mean --

Q: OK.

A: It's --

End - NEIT-295 [REDACTED]