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NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES

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First public hearing of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States

Statement of Craig Sincock to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States March 31, 2003

Mr. Chairman, Commissioners:

I am Dr. Craig Sincock of Woodbridge, Virginia. For me, it is an honor to come before you today as a citizen, an Army officer of 34 years, and a surviving spouse of September 11, 2001.

The Pentagon was my building and my wife Cheryle's building, I was first stationed there in 1985, my wife in 1987. Both of us went to work there, usually together, from those years until the events of 911. I worked in just about every corridor and most floors of that building. I met countless thousands of people, both military and civilian. Most of those people I consider as friends. My wife made several promotions

Current News

The Commission has released its final report. [\[more\]](#)

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throughout the years as an Army civil servant. She was excited about where she worked, who she worked for, and the fact that she was doing her small part to make the system work better. On the day her world ended, Cheryle got up at 3 AM, got dressed, and drove herself to work at 4:30. My last recollection of her was standing in our bedroom combing her hair. We said goodbye and I told her I would call her later to see if she wanted to come home early. This was one of those days when her illnesses made her very sick. But being sick never stopped her from work, from her duty.

I followed her to work about one half hour later. This was our normal schedule for about 15 years and although I was on leave, I went to work anyway. The leave was year-end that I had to use or lose. But that did not mean not doing my job. I credit my wife with showing me that side of the work ethic.

I called Cheryle at about 8:30. She sounded like she was hurting. In fact, she told me her head was "just pounding". That usually meant her blood pressure was elevated. But true to her form, she said no to going home at the time. I told her I had been invited to participate in a meeting in Rosslyn and should be back in the early afternoon. That was the last time I talked to my wife. I know I told her I loved her and for that I am so very grateful.

When the plane hit the Pentagon an hour later, I felt the shudder about 2 miles away in Rosslyn. When I looked out the window and saw the first plume of smoke go up, I simultaneously heard the TV announcer in a back room say that the south parking lot of the Pentagon had been hit. My heart stopped because I just knew that was where Cheryle worked and something told me she was in danger. I ran the 2 miles back to the Pentagon, through Arlington Cemetery. I spent that entire day, until 11:30 that night, working, praying, and hoping at the side of the building we called home. It was not until the next

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morning that I got the official word that Cheryle was on the missing list.

That is what happened to Cheryle and 183 others that day. What has happened to the families and friends since that day is another story. I like to think of 911 as the event and what we do now as the journey. Every once in awhile, someone or something will take us back to that day. Those are the triggers from the event. We hope that as time goes by, the triggers become less in frequency and their results less in depth.

This is the reason I said yes to coming before you today. What you do here, the results you obtain, and the recommendations you send forward, will, I sincerely hope, lesson those triggers for all of us. I found early on in my grieving process that to hold anger brought on resentment. And with resentment came sleepless nights, foggy days, and bad memories. So you won't hear anger from me. I won't talk about what people should have done for that would be to try to place blame somewhere. That may be part of what you end up doing but it is not part of my responsibility.

I will however, give some personal observations.

I watched that day as everyone with any authority tried to take charge of something, anything. But no one was really in charge. No matter how many times the scenario of a plane crashing into the Pentagon during take off or landing at National airport had been practiced, no one was prepared for this attack. I know many of the Defense Protective Service and there is not one of them that I would fault for not doing their job and then some. I know many of the building support personnel and they too are above reproach and blame. I have worked for many of the top level and mid levels managers of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. Each one of them and their subordinates did what their training and their

instincts directed them to do. Some of them died trying.

If there is anything to blame it is our systems, our bureaucracies and our inflexibility towards change. That is normal for bureaucracies and large systems. That is what happened on 911. Those who are used to change, are trained to respond to events demanding instant change, are the police, fire and rescue. Bureaucrats do not like change, in fact they fear it. For their program may go away and with it their existence.

So when these same bureaucrats tried to respond to 911 events, they were not prepared at all. We should not blame them for that because we have made them what they are. We do this with our antiquated programming, budget and execution methods. We do this by outsourcing almost everything we do until we make our government managers policy makers versus decision makers.

We cannot fault our fine non-profit organizations and the multitude of companies that responded to the needs starting within many hours of the tragedy. These people brought everything they could think of, provide every service they could, and extended themselves, usually at a loss of profit. But within months of the event, the attitude of these same people, not all of them to be sure, but a lot of them, went back to the way they had been before. They did what so many of our own citizens did. They reverted to what was comfortable and known. This is one of the prime laws of Systems Thinking that tells us a system always reverts to where it is comfortable.

Some of the organizations that responded had gone through similar incidence response before. Some of them already had response models they could modify quickly. But the vast majority of responders did not have a clue because this was so much bigger, so much different than anything they had seen before. And now almost

a year and a half has gone by and we still don't have any more models of crisis response than we had before. I am certain that some bureaucrats have probably worked on a few and spent a great deal of public funds to do so. But I suspect that when push comes to shove, God forbid, those models will have become shelf-ware. For until our bureaucracies start to train themselves on how to change, on how to be flexible and pliable, they will never be in a position to respond properly to events such as 911.

I trust that what you do here will be guided by finding answers, not placing blame. I trust that you will search out the truth, no matter where it leads, and pass that truth to those who can make changes that matter. I trust that you will do the next right thing. As you call your witnesses and try to find out what happened and why, please try to remember that those who were at the sites that day, those who lost loved ones and friends, those who were injured, are still going through their private and individualized trauma and grief processes. Some may be angry, many may be depressed, some may be distraught, and others may have their own agendas. Try to understand that each of these people will try to do their best given the circumstances that befell them. You are now part of their healing process. I know you will do right by them and right by our great country, the United States of America.

Thank you once again for the honor of being here today.

Dr. Craig W. Sincock is a retired US Army Chief Warrant Officer Five. He holds his doctorate in Engineering Management along with undergraduate degrees in Management, Computer Science and Electrical engineering.

Dr. Sincock spent 34 years in the Army starting in 1964 in the US Army Reserve. He transferred

to the Army National Guard in the 1970's and came to Washington DC and the Pentagon in 1985 when he accepted a full time support position to the Army with the National Guard Bureau.

Craig's wife Cheryle was killed in the Pentagon attack of 2001. The following month of October would have been there 25 year anniversary. Craig has a son and a daughter by his first marriage and he and Cheyrle raised her three daughters, Debby, Stacy and Michelle.

Craig started the peer support group the PentagonAngels, Inc. the week following the attack of 911. He has been active in support to the families of 911 since then. He continues to study and learn the grief processes and the effects of trauma on himself and then share his experiences with the other family members impacted by 911.

Dr. Sincock plans to continue his work on behalf of the families. He also has devoted himself to his community by becoming involved in Alexandria Christmas in April as a board member, the Lord Fairfax Silver Chapter of the US Army Warrant Officers Association as the president, the non-profit organization Americas Heroes of Freedom as a board member, and participation with other groups and activities for the families.

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The Commission closed on August 21, 2004. This site is archived.