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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 Shawn Kelley to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States April 1, 2003

Good afternoon, my name is Shawn Kelley, and I am an Assistant Chief with the Arlington County Fire Department and was one of the incident commanders throughout the rescue and recovery efforts at the Pentagon. On behalf of the Arlington County Government and the men and women of the fire services in Northern Virginia and Washington DC area, thank you for allowing me to address you today.

Like most fire departments in the region, the ACFD participated in regional disaster drills consisting of hospital or college dorm fires, mass transportation accidents, and even structural collapses, but never did we think that of training for an incident that combined an airliner crash into a large building, structural

Current News

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

The Chair and Vice Chair have released a statement regarding the Commission's closing. [\[more\]](#)

The Commission closed August 21, 2004. [\[more\]](#)

Commission Members

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Chair

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Vice Chair

collapse, along with a large building fire. Following the March 1995 sarin nerve agent attack in a Tokyo subway that killed 12 commuters and injured hundreds more, the Arlington County Fire Department recognized that America's first responders were not trained or equipped to handle such emergencies. Our training changed its focus toward large scale incident management.

From the moment American Airlines Flight #77 crashed into the west side of the Pentagon at 09:38 a.m., and for the subsequent 10 days, this was a major fire and rescue incident, the responsibility of the Arlington County Fire Department (ACFD).

The destruction caused by the attack was immediate and catastrophic. The 270,000 pounds of metal and jet fuel hurling into the solid mass of the Pentagon is the equivalent in weight of as diesel train locomotive, except it is traveling at more than 400 miles per hour. More than 600,000 airframe bolts and rivets and 60 miles of wire were instantly transformed into white-hot shrapnel. The resulting impact, penetration, and burning fuel had catastrophic effects to the five floors and three rings in and around Pentagon Corridors 4 and 5.

This act of evil cost the lives of 189 persons in the Pentagon attack, 184 innocent victims, and the 5 terrorist perpetrators of the criminal attack.

Though the ACFD did not feel its response to the terrorist attack on the Pentagon was extraordinary, it did not happen by chance. The ACFD's preparedness was the result of years of hard work, re-organization, extensive contemporary training, and updated command staff education.

The successful response to the terrorist attack on the Pentagon can be attributed to the efforts

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of ordinary men and women performing in extraordinary fashion. These efforts are described throughout an After Action Report (AAR) that was prepared for Arlington County by Titan Systems Corporation. It was accomplished through a grant from, and the support of, the Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Domestic Preparedness.

This AAR describes the activities of Arlington County and the supporting jurisdictions, government agencies, and other organizations in response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the Pentagon. It is organized into four principal annexes and four supporting appendices. Annex A is Fire Department Operations and includes EMS activities. Annex B is about the response of local area hospitals and clinics. Annex C covers local, federal and private law enforcement agencies. Annex D is the Emergency Management and the Emergency Operations Center that supported the first responders and citizens of Arlington County.

Although the response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the Pentagon is commendable, the AAR contains 235 recommendations and lessons learned, each of which must be understood within the context and setting of the Pentagon response.

The first segment describes "Capabilities Others Should Emulate" and speaks to ICS and Unified Command, Mutual Aid and Outside Support, Arlington County CEMP, Employee Assistance Program, Training, Exercises, and Shared Experiences.

The final segment describes "Challenges that Must Be Met" and speaks to Self-Dispatching, Fixed and Mobile Command and Control Facilities, Communications, Logistics, and Hospital Coordination.

The ACFD is addressing these challenges by

updating its communications system, the purchase of a dedicated command vehicle, establishment of a Logistics section within the Department, and ongoing coordination with the local and regional hospitals.

In summary, the response to the September 11 terrorist attack on the Pentagon was successful by any measure. Although the tragic loss of life from this horrific event could not be avoided, it was minimized. Had it not been for the heroic actions of the response force and the military and civilian occupants of the Pentagon, clearly the number of victims could have been much higher. Damage, although severe, was constrained in area and the fire was brought quickly under control. The fact that the response force did not suffer a single fatality or serious injury is testimony to the training, professionalism, and leadership of Arlington County and the response community.

Terrorism, in any manifestation, is an insidious phenomenon. It strikes without warning, often targeting innocent people. It is not intended to defeat an enemy by overwhelming military force, but to undermine and weaken its resolve. If the terrorists intended to weaken our resolve by attacking the Pentagon, they failed. In the words of our County Manager Ron Carlee, "The cowardly and evil effort to terrorize our community and our country served only to unite us more strongly than ever before."

Thank you.

Shawn Kelley is the Assistant Fire Chief and Chief Fire Marshal for the Arlington County Fire Department. When an airliner crashed into the Pentagon on September 11, the Arlington County Fire Department was first on the scene, and was in charge of the site through the long rescue and recovery process. Assistant Chief Kelley was one of the key commanders on the scene.

A 23-year veteran of the Department, Chief Kelley has been Chief Fire Marshal for five years. He is also a life member of the Ballston Volunteer Fire Department.

Mr. Kelley is a nationally registered EMT paramedic and founder of the Department's Technical Rescue Team. He was the County's first certified fire protection specialist and certified fire and explosives investigator, and commander of the Department's bomb squad. He has received numerous commendations for high quality service to the county and community, as well as several citations for bravery.

In addition to active involvement in civic and community organizations, Mr. Kelley has served as chairman of the Northern Virginia Fire Marshals, and a member of the Executive Board of the National Fire Protection Association Education Section.

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States
The Commission closed on August 21, 2004. This site is archived.