

Remembering 9/11 – 15th Anniversary

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

Our Own General Manager Remembers September 11, 2001

I remember just how beautiful a morning it was. I had just kissed my wife and my four-month-old son, who had dropped me off at the Springfield Metro stop. For those of you who are not familiar with Washington, DC, the Metro is a color-coded subway system that links all the major spots in and around the city. I was at the very bottom of the Blue Line, and I joined hundreds of other commuters that day racing to make the train at 5:30 a.m. While we lived only 11 miles from the Pentagon and the 14th Street Bridge, it could take over an hour and a half to reach that location in rush hour, and today, my destination was much further away, so taking the Metro was the logical option. I remember looking up as the sky began to brighten, and noticed there was not a cloud in the early Fall sky. I breathed in the air and boarded the train.

The Blue Line stays above ground until it reaches Reagan National Airport. I looked across the Potomac River when we were stopped there and I glimpsed the whole city, proud and marble-filled.

As we descended into the tunnel system, little did I know it would be the last time I would see it as such. We stopped at the Pentagon, and I watched as dozens of uniformed men and women got off the Metro and traveled up the escalator. I did not need to stop there that day, unlike recently when I was helping to put some new technology in for the Defense Information

Systems Agency, but several of my friends from my company did go to work there, renovating the Naval Operations Center. That NOC was going to be a place where hundreds of Navy personnel would work together on emergencies, but it was still being built, so we did not have a large crew there that day.

We continued through the city and I transferred to the Red Line, on my way up to the National Institutes of Health. When I finally got there at around 7:00 a.m., all was quiet. I called my wife from my desk to let her know I was safe and sound and got right to work. I followed up with some of my tasks with the Senate and White House Communications Agency, where we had just finished deploying a new technology, call BlackBerry. I wanted to see if they liked it as much as the NIH did, where we had over 1,000 people able to communicate instantaneously, which was something unique back then. My regular day, and regular life, was cut off forever at 8:58 a.m. Donna, my wife, called my desk phone. She told me there was something I

needed to see, a plane or something had just hit one of the twin towers. I needed to find a TV to see what was happening. My whole office went down to the break room and we turned on the TV, just in time to watch the second plane strike the South Tower. At that point, we went into lockdown mode. The entire campus of the NIH, normally a place where doctors attempted to cure cancer or stop an infectious disease, became a place of panic, with 10,000 people all attempting to call their loved ones. The phones became overloaded and no one could call. Then, at 9:38 a.m., we received a DC-wide alert. A plane hit the Pentagon. There were other planes on their way. We needed to shelter in place and divert all non-essential efforts away from DC. Finally, I was able to get through to Donna. She needed me home. I needed to be home to protect my family, who felt the impact of the plane only 11 miles away from my house. Yet, I was stuck in another state, with bridges being closed across

the Potomac River, which would seal me away from my family, and the Metro was closed and certainly damaged. One of my co-workers lived nearby, so I pleaded with her to get in the car right now and get us over the Maryland/Virginia border so we could both get home to our respective families. She paused for a moment and then we both bolted for the parking lot. We were able to pass the military police before they blocked the American



Legion Bridge. We picked up her son from school and she was able to drop me at the top of my driveway. I ran into my house to find my wife in tears, watching the TV and cradling our son. She is from New York and she looked up at me, asking what kind of world did we just bring our child into. We watched the towers fall and the burned hole of the building I had just traveled under earlier that day. I held them all day long because I did not have a good answer for her, and wept uncontrollably.

The next day, I asked my boss to transfer me to our National Security Program, since I had already been working with Richard Clark on the Strategy to Secure Cyberspace, and he had been talking about a group called Al-Qaeda. I began my COOP/COG/ECG efforts from there and each and every day of my life, I ask how can I ensure the safety of my family, my friends, my country, and now my Parish Family.

— Jean-Paul Boucher, General Manager