

## PICKING UP THE PIECES

By John Guandolo '89

A year has passed since the tragedies of September 11th. As a 1989 Naval Academy graduate, a former Marine infantry officer, and now as an FBI agent working at the FBI's Washington, DC, Field Office (WFO), I, like all Americans, find the impact of that day, and the subsequent events, to be substantial. My involvement with these events, both personally and professionally, has greatly affected me, but it has also given me a renewed confidence in America and her people.

Tuesday morning, September 11, 2001—at approximately 9 a.m., while out of town conducting SWAT training, the WFO SWAT team was notified of the events unfolding on television. My reaction was similar to the millions of sinking hearts felt all over the country. We (the SWAT team) contacted our office in Washington, DC, which ordered us back immediately for duty. We drove up Interstate-95 north in a convoy of SWAT vehicles with lights flashing and sirens screaming. We listened to all of the reports on the radio, tried to comprehend it all, and attempted to determine what it meant for our future, as an organization (FBI), and as a nation. As our convoy approached Washington, all traffic was diverted onto the beltway, away from DC. Our vehicles were allowed to pass through in order to drive to our office, and as we continued north, the Pentagon came into view. During our transit, we had been conversing frequently between our vehicles on our FBI radios. We were discussing the situation, plans for the rest of the day, security issues, and the up-to-the-minute news. Yet, as we crested the hill just prior to the Pentagon and got our first glimpse of that amazing building, it chilled us. The image of that great structure, wounded, was almost too much to bear. Our radios went silent, and it appeared as if everyone was letting it all sink in. After our

arrival at our office, we spent the rest of the day and all of the night, reviewing and drawing up plans for the days to come, and providing physical security for our own Washington Field Office.

The work began at the Pentagon immediately. Fire and rescue units were augmented by arriving Search and Rescue (SAR) Teams. The SAR Teams came from all over the country, and began their work of attempting to locate and retrieve any survivors at the crash site, and shoring up the structure to make it safer for continued rescue efforts. These teams are made up of medical personnel, dog teams, structural engineers, fire personnel, and others, task organized for just such an incident. They come from all over the country and are highly qualified with a lot of real world experience. Teams arrived from Fairfax, VA, Montgomery County, MD, Tennessee, and elsewhere, to assist in the operation. FBI personnel began setting up shop at the Pentagon, as did many other federal agencies.

Initially, the monumental task of coordinating the recovery efforts was organized by FEMA, the SAR Teams, the Pentagon officials, and the arriving federal, state, and local agencies. In the FBI, there are several entities that respond to attacks of this nature, domestically and overseas, when American lives are lost. Previous examples of FBI deployments of this nature include the bombing of COLE in Yemen, the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998, and the bombings in Saudi Arabia in 1995. Agents were assigned to investigate the actual attack on the Pentagon and all of the leads that were developed from that investigation. In this case, that means just about every agent in the office was participating in some capacity or another, and there are approximately 800 agents in the Washington Field Office.

### My Mid (continued)

Academy ring and put it on in front of his wedding ring. Bob kissed me lightly on the lips. He said he'd see me later.

It was a gloriously sunny day in Metro DC as I began my drive to work. Bob and I spoke each morning via my cell phone after I dropped the kids at school. It was 8:55 a.m. when Bob called to tell me a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. I didn't know what to say. He also told me he had no meetings scheduled that day. If I needed him, he would be in his office. He ended with, "Have a

good day. I love you." That was the last time I spoke to my Mid. After learning a second plane hit the Twin Towers, I tried frantically to reach him at work, but couldn't get through to his office. As I continued to try and call him, I learned a plane slammed into the Pentagon. A pain surged through my stomach like a knife. I didn't know where his office was located. He and the rest of his department had just moved into a newly renovated section of the Pentagon. It seemed like an eternity before we received any official word.

On 16 September, an FBI agent contacted my brother. The agent told my brother he was a 1989 graduate of the Naval Academy and he was part of the search and recovery efforts at the Pentagon. He had some news for us. He had seen something shiny among the ash and gravel and immediately recognized it as a USNA ring. He pulled the ring out of the debris and stuck it deep into his pocket, knowing later he would be able to track down the owner using the inscription inside the ring. He knew it belonged to a

Responding to such scenes are agents with a myriad of skills and responsibilities to include Hazardous Material Response Teams (HMRT), Evidence Recovery Teams (ERT), medical support, technical/communications teams, and the command structure that accompanies all of these folks. The SWAT team provided physical protection for the attorney general and the FBI director, physical security at the Pentagon itself, and other missions that came up during this time. Initially, the SAR teams did the searching for the first couple days until it was determined there were no survivors in the wreckage. Then the job of evidence recovery and recovering the remains and personal affects of the victims became the priority.

Teams of agents from several different agencies entered the Pentagon and began combing through the rubble one room at a time. The rubble was cleared from some of the upper levels and pushed to a central area, where it was loaded on trucks and moved to the north parking lot. There, hundreds of agents and support personnel literally raked through the debris looking for critical pieces of information. Inside the Pentagon, mini-front end loaders moved about, clearing areas, looking for remains and evidence. I cannot say enough about the efforts of the contractors driving the huge cranes, the dump trucks and the front end loaders. They dealt with as much of the human remains and debris as anyone else out there, and their service cannot be overstated. Inside the Pentagon each team from ERT was accompanied by a HazMat trained agent and a medic. The FBI teams' missions at the Pentagon included recovering bodies from the site and assisting with the morgue operation, taking custody of any evidence found, and assisting other organizations with a myriad of things that came up on a daily basis.

One look at the Pentagon, and nobody wanted to go home until the job was done.

Everyone wore the full-body protective suits, with face masks and eye protection. In the middle of most afternoons, everyone baked in those suits, and water was the beverage of the day—every day. After each trip into the Pentagon, everyone walked through decontamination stations to remove the protective gear and get cleaned off. As an agent who is also a paramedic, I assisted with the recovery of remains and evidence, as well as acted as a safety officer of sorts for some of the teams. Most of the injuries we saw included cuts and gashes from working in that kind of environment, a few cases of heat exhaustion, and some pulmonary (lung) problems.

Handling the remains of Americans who worked at the Pentagon was a job no one enjoyed, but the importance of our work helped everyone push through each day. Initially, our days began before 5 a.m. and lasted into the evening. Most of us also had follow-on duties at the office

that required our attention, and 18 to 20 hour days were not unusual. It remained that way for all agents working at the Pentagon or following leads related to the September 11th incident for the first few weeks with no days off. The operation at the Pentagon ran 24 hours a day. No one cared, though. One look at the Pentagon, and nobody wanted to go home until the job was done.

Out of this tremendous disaster came moments of great tenderness, goodness, and caring, and I would be remiss if I failed to share them with you. The overall support for the operation was overwhelming. Businesses, church groups, the Salvation Army, Red Cross, and citizens provided food, daily supplies, drinks, snacks, and whatever anyone seemed to

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## My Mid

shipmate. He knew the tradition: Midshipmen should inscribe the inside of their ring with their name, because if lost, that is how the ring will find its way home. Bob's ring did find its way home to me. My brother picked up the ring on Sunday, 17 September, weeks before Bob was officially declared dead. When the ring came home, I promptly put it on a gold chain that Bob had given me and placed it around my neck. I wear it proudly each day just like I did for the Ring Dance 21 years earlier.

Now, each night when I go to bed, I place it on his night-stand like Bob had always done. The ring means all the love and the memories of our happy union—and more: To me, his ring personifies Bob's life.

I received no other personal effects of Bob's. His remains were buried at sea in January. I never saw his wedding ring again even though he wore them on the same finger. But, thanks to the tradition of the Naval Academy ring and a patriotic grad named John Guandolo, Bob found his way home.

Bob remains in part with me—through his USNA '81 class ring. †

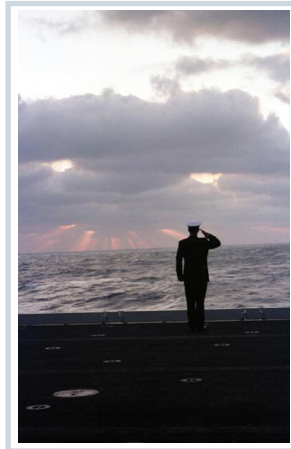


Picking Up the Pieces (continued)

Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy (Carolla V. Bennett)

need. These support organizations cannot be thanked or praised enough. These groups set up in the Pentagon parking lot and in the surrounding areas, and supported us 24 hours a day. Folks came from all over the country to volunteer with these organizations. They fed us, and kept us filled with liquids, and all kinds of assorted goodies, free of charge. Their spirit and enthusiasm carried us through, even on the worst days. To see the rescue and recovery teams, construction workers and engineers, fire/police/EMS workers, active duty and reserve military personnel from all branches of the service, NCIS, Army CID, EPA, NTSB, FEMA, ATF, FAA, FBI, and so many others working together for a common cause was incredibly motivating. As an agent, it gave me great confidence that the public service entities in this country are filled with hard working, decent Americans, simply trying to accomplish the mission. As a paramedic, it was incredible to see many various medical assets come together and work towards a common goal. These groups included the Pentagon's Medical Clinic, Air Force/Army/Navy medical staffs in GP tents on site, local EMS, and doctors and paramedics from the rescue teams. The exclamation point to this joint effort was watching the firefighters secure Old Glory to the top of the Pentagon, as President Bush walked into the crash site one afternoon. It was awe inspiring and moving to all who were there.

An added bonus for me was running into my former USNA '89 classmate John Woodson, who continues to work on the project to renovate the Pentagon. We saw each other regularly and even found time to harass some of the West Point graduates (all in good fun, of course) who were also on scene assisting. I saw several other USNA graduates along the way, all of



whom were serving various government agencies proudly.

The Sunday following the 11th produced a surprising miracle of sorts, and also brought the events of September 11th home to me in an extremely personal manner. Sunday morning, the FBI ERT/Hazmat teams were doing what they had been doing for the last several days—searching for human remains and evidence. I was assigned to support one of the teams as a medic, and was inside the Pentagon when one of the members of a SAR Team found something he thought was important, as far as personal effects go. When I saw it at a distance, I immediately recognized it as a Naval Academy Ring. I felt a wave of emotions come over me

as this tragic event began to take on very personal meaning. I understood immediately that I had a personal responsibility to handle the ring, and the importance of this act to the family of the graduate to whom the ring belonged. I knew, also, this would be a closure of sorts for the wife and other loved ones of the deceased serviceman. The ring belonged to the U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1981. The name inscribed in script writing on the inside was Robert Edward Dolan. I took the ring, cleaned it off, and found it to be in surprisingly excellent condition. Finding Sunday's *Washington Post*, I scrolled through the names of all of the people missing and presumed dead in the attack on the Pentagon who were listed prominently on the front page of one of the paper's sections. There I found Commander Robert Dolan's name. I found myself with an incredible sense of duty to return this ring as soon as possible, and, in that vein, contacted the Dolan family. I was fortunate enough to reach Captain Mark Tempestelli '79, Commander Dolan's brother-in-law. After sharing my

A Father's Salute by Stephanie Dunn

“Welcome to the Navy, Mrs. Dunn!”

That is how my adventure began. It was a balmy day in October of 1999. My new husband, Lieutenant Commander Patrick Dunn, and I had just walked down the aisle and under the arch of naval officer's swords. We were married and we were the happiest couple in the world. The “swat” from the naval officer behind me was a lot harder than I had ever expected. Little did I know that the strength and courage I had that day to withstand the welcome of the Navy would carry me

through the next year and 11 months of my marriage. Until it ended by the mindless act of September 11th.

There is no greater pain in this world than loosing your soul mate and best friend...your husband. I experienced this pain on that awful day in September 2001. What was I going to do without the love of my life? How was I going to give birth to our child in March of 2002 without Pat at my side? But most of all, how was I going to raise the child without him? Where was this new journey taking me? How

was I going to pick up the pieces of my shattered life and somehow put them back together? I had to find a way and I had to find the strength and courage to do so. I was on my own and my life would never be the same.

I found a lot of strength from my unborn child. She was keeping me alive and helping me survive. I knew I had to take care of myself in order to take care of her. She was all I had left of my dear husband and I was not going to let anything happen to her. As the months passed prior to her birth, I

morning's events with Mark, we agreed to meet near the Navy annex just up from the Pentagon. As I sat in my car awaiting his arrival, I could not help feeling closer to this tragedy than I had previously. Oddly enough, Ray Charles' "America the Beautiful" began playing on the radio, which gave the moment an odd and surreal feel to it. Just a moment later, Mark and two of Commander Dolan's close friends arrived, and we exchanged greetings. Anyone who has attended any service academy understands that returning someone's lost class ring, in and of itself, is a momentous event. Under these circumstances, I cannot imagine a more emotion-filled moment surrounding the return of such a ring. Such a simple maneuver as handing someone an inanimate object is transformed into a life experience. To our great fulfillment, my wife, Gretchen, and I were asked to attend Robert Dolan's memorial service a few weeks later at the Naval Academy chapel. Meeting Bob's wife, Lisa, their children, family, friends, classmates, and the other USNA wives who had lost their husbands, was stirring to us. Being present that day highlighted our regret at never having known the tremendous naval officer and amazing man, that was Bob Dolan. The entire episode helped us realize that out of even the greatest of tragedies, the bonds of USNA graduates and naval officers, and the camaraderie of our shipmates, known and unknown to us, are always there to lift us up in times when they are needed the most.

Two and a half weeks after the disbelief of September 11th, our work at the Pentagon was done. The Pentagon site and the north parking lot, where we sifted through much of the debris from the Pentagon, were turned back over to the Defense Department. The sights and smells of a tragedy none of us could have imagined in our own back yard, were history—although the slash through the Pentagon was still readily visible. Today, there are many questions about what the various

federal agencies did and did not do prior to the 11th. As an agent who has seen this all from the inside, it is difficult not to be frustrated and angry by much of what is being said and written about the various federal agencies regarding the events of September 11th. This is especially true when some of the comments come from individuals who never have and never will know what sacrifice and service is all about. There is much that is not being reported regarding additional terrorist plots that have been thwarted, prior to and after September 11th, but this news is apparently not interesting enough for dissemination by our national media outlets. In the end, however, I believe these criticism will only make our organizations, and the government in general, more capable in the future.

It is good to know, however, that when the stunning blow was sent our way on September 11th all walks of life from the local, state, and federal level came together to clean up the aftermath of this attack. Organized volunteers and individual citizens came forward to help in any way they could. Military personnel busted their butts doing whatever needed doing. The planners, engineers, and contractors, were looking to the future and getting the Pentagon back in one piece. It would be easy to hang our heads in sadness over the events of the 11th and keep our heads down. However, the American spirit is alive and well. We as USNA graduates, and military officers everywhere, can stand tall knowing that America's foundation is strong, and, as this experience has once again proven, communities of our citizens are still our greatest asset in times of trial.

*John Guandolo is a 1989 Naval Academy graduate, who took a commission in the U.S. Marine Corps. Following service as an infantry officer in 2d Battalion, 2d Marines as a rifle platoon commander in Desert Shield/Storm in Kuwait, he spent four and a half years as a platoon commander and parachute/dive officer with 2d Force Reconnaissance Company. He left the Marines in 1996 and has been a special agent with the FBI since that time. †*

Dunn

became more and more aware that I was going to be okay, that we were going to be okay. I didn't have a complete family for her to grow up with, but I knew I had to make up for all that she had lost. The thing that broke my heart the most was that she would never hear her daddy's voice. She would never know what it was like to be

swallowed in his arms. But most of all she would never know the wonderful man that she would have called dad. Somehow I had to find the courage from within to help her to know Pat.

What is courage and how was I going to find it? All my courage prior to his death came from him. He was the reason I rose in the morning and

the reason I closed my eyes at night. In my eyes, he was the courageous one, not me. He was a naval officer. He was trained to fight wars and drive ships. He was the picture of courage and now it was up to me to become that.

Courage is the hardest thing to find in this world. I certainly had not idea how I was going to find it, let alone

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