

FBI BRIEFING

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: FBI Washington Field Office Brief on Pentagon Response and Incident Cmd System

Type of event: Briefing

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Special Access Issues: None

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Team Number: 8

Location: FBI Headquarters

Participants - Non-Commission: Tom O'Connor (WFO), Jim Rice (WFO ASAC), John Perren (WFO ASAC), Pat O'Brien (FBI HQ), Larry Medford (WFO CT ASAC), Christopher Combs (SSA Weapons of Mass Destruction Unit), ASAC Robert Blecksmith

Participants - Commission: Kevin Shaeffer, Mark Bittinger, John Azzarello, George Delgrosso

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SA Tom O'Connor conducted a briefing of the WFO response to the September 11th Pentagon attack, and then SA Chris Combs presented an overview of the Incident Command System implemented at the Pentagon. Some information presented in the briefs mirrored what is found in the Arlington County After-Action Report (AAR) for the Pentagon response (Annex C, C-44 - C-61). This MFR documents information not already found in the AAR.

As background, SA O'Connor described the close working relationship that the WFO had with Arlington County Fire Department, prior to 9/11. ASAC Jim Rice mentioned that "our people are hand-picked, and many have previous police department or fire department backgrounds." WFO and ACFD conducted "joint training" regularly and often responded jointly to real-world calls. In fact, on September 8, 2001, the WFO led a WMD Field Training Exercise that included FBI members and the ACFD. SA Christopher Combs led the training exercise for the FBI and had, prior to 9/11, fostered a close working relationship with ACFD.

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Notes:

- Two ACPD officers witnessed the crash, identified the aircraft as an American Airlines plane, made the call to the ACFD, and then immediately made the call to "Let the FBI know."
- SA Tom O'Connor was on the scene within 10 minutes. He was the SA in charge of the FBI's Evidence Recovery Team (ERT). Ultimately, there were five (5) ERTs at the Pentagon response. His primary focus was to clear the area, secure the scene, and begin evidence preservation + documentation (especially photographic). The same ERT that responded to the Pentagon had also responded to several international terrorism events (Riyad, USS COLE, African Embassies). The FBI sent an 8-man WFO ERT to the USS COLE. Every response scene is important not just in a criminal prosecution sense, but also for collecting valuable intelligence on terrorists and their operating characteristics (this point underscored with mention of Sam Gonzalez, who is an individual who now travels the country presenting the lessons learned from the Oklahoma City bombing).
- Jim Rice, who participated in every FBI international terrorism response (except USS COLE) manned the WFO Command Center during the Pentagon response.
- ASAC Rice noted that he personally, from the WFO Command Center, made phone contact with the FAA Command Center immediately after the Pentagon attack.
- Each ERT at the Pentagon was assigned a FEMA Urban Search and Rescue Team Leader. The FBI and FEMA teams immediately exchanged radios because they didn't have interoperable radio systems. According to SA O'Connor and ASAC Rice, the communication between the FBI and FEMA was never a problem and functioned exceptionally well. SA Combs added that "interoperable systems" can be both good and bad in crisis response. He remarked that channels often get overloaded. "We found the exchange of people and radios to function much better," said SA Combs. SA O'Connor added, "It really did work well." ASAC Rice mentioned that the ACU-1000 (interop. System) only allows frequency sharing, not the ability to share dispatch calling, reachback, etc. ASAC Perren said in sum, "Interoperability is a great thing, but it would get overloaded in an event like this."
- Kevin NOTE: Do any "pre-positioned" radio exchange programs exist between departments that are likely to respond to future terrorist attacks? Would that be a good idea?

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- SA Combs noted that he is in the process of establishing a joint training program between the FBI and FEMA (ERT and USAR Teams).
- Body recovery was a very stressful task. The departments assisting in the recovery included, FBI, ACFD, Fairfax County Fire Department, Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS), Defense Criminal Investigative Service (DCIS), etc. It was decided early on that those individuals with previous experience in remains recover would handle the task. In all, over 3000 "red bags" of human remains were recovered. The locations where all remains were found were recorded – everything "down to the thumbnail size piece," according to ASAC Rice. The ERTs attempted to recover the remains as fast as possible, so as to not get disrupted by the structural clean-up and debris removal. This took exceptional coordination with the USAR Teams.
- Pentagon Renovation (PENREN) also assisted in the response. Their structural engineers acted as liaisons with the ERTs and the ACFD Collapse Rescue Teams. PENREN built everything that was required to assist the response, including roads, fences, walls, tents, etc.
- KEVIN'S NOTE: What if PENREN did not exist? Who would have been able to do the necessary things that they did?
- The FBI's Hazardous Materials Response Units (HMRUs) now are equipped with structural shoring materials and training to increase their ability to respond with FEMA's USAR Teams. This was not the case on 9/11.
- FBI's Rapid Deployment Unit/Teams in D.C., NYC, LA, MIA now have civil engineers attached (WFO has two). The RDUs can deploy anywhere in the world and be self sufficient for up to 60 days. At the Pentagon, WFO's RDU responded and their equipment/supplies were "used by everyone" and it was essentially a "one-stop-shop" for responder's needs.
- HMRUs now deploy with RDUs
- All ERTs went in to Pentagon with FBI (not ACFD) paramedics, because ACFD pm's not allowed in danger or "hot zones."
- The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology works regularly with the FBI, and did so in the Pentagon response.
- The Pentagon's Northern Parking Lot became debris storage and inspection area.

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- All responding departments/agencies had EAPs and DoD also provided military chaplains for counseling of first responders.
- The Joint Operations Center (JOC) established for the Pentagon response, was set up at FT. Meyer's community center. A pre-existing MOU existed and the center was hard-wired pre-9/11. All that was required was to bring the equipment and plug it in – called a “JOC-in-the-box.”

Briefing from SA Chris Combs: Incident Command System (ICS) at the Pentagon Response:

- SA Combs arrived at the Pentagon within 6 min. of the attack.
- A Unified Command was immediately established (btw. ACFD, FBI, DPS, ACPD), with the ACFD established as the Incident Commander.
- The evacuation of all first responders prior to the Pentagon's partial collapse was “100% effective because of the Unified Command System. The UCS saved lives!” – SA Combs.
- The FBI's Strategic Information Operations Center (SIOC) and the WFO Command Center passed along critical information for the first responders via SA Combs. Although the SIOC did pass along some erroneous information regarding additional incoming hijacked aircraft, that effected building evacuations of first responders, SA Combs said that the worst thing that could have happened would have been if the next hijacked a/c was able to “take out” the first responders.
- SWAT deployed around the Unified Command post while other agents and police officers patrolled areas around the Pentagon, looking for suspicious behavior (other terrorist or sympathizers seeking eyewitness accounts).
- The UCS was set up first near the impact area, then moved to the VA State Police Barracks on the Navy Annex hill – it was then moved back closer to the site because they lost around 50% of their command element (the ACFD did not relocate, and the split up of FBI and ACFD created confusion and disrupted effective and full communication). Once it was permanently established near the impact site, the FBI and AC maintained “constant connectivity.”
- According to ASAC Rice, and SAC Blecksmith, the FBI is using the WFO emergency response to the Pentagon as “the standard” to be emulated by other field offices.

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- ASAC Rice noted that he personally, from the WFO Command Center, made contact with the FAA Command Center immediately after the Pentagon attack.
- The Pentagon response can be broken up into three phases: Phase I (Crisis Management: Rescue and Recovery – ACFD), Phase II (Crime Scene investigation – FBI), Phase III (Consequence Management – FEMA). According to SA Combs, the Crisis and Consequence Management actually occurred simultaneously.

General Notes of Interest:

- The PENTTBOM investigation was established roughly October 10th, when the original WFO ASAC investigation of the Pentagon was transferred to HQ. It “evolved,” and the WFO investigation was not immediately taken over by HQ.
- Kevin asks if there have been any JOC reforms post-9/11, Answer “Yes.”: Greater redundancy and multiple sites have been pre-identified and outfitted. All agents receive training in Crisis Management, and receive training at a level one step above their current level (should the need arise to “fill in” for a superior). Also, there are now NORTHCOM liaisons with the major Field Offices (and will be incorporated into future JOCs).
- Mark asks about the BATF – FBI relationship during the Pentagon response: According to ASAC Rice, what created the tensions was “the political agenda at the top levels of ATF. They came rolling in to insert – and assert – themselves into the UCS. Everyone else came to help. They came to insert themselves. However, the ATF guys on the scene were great.” Kevin’s translation = the leadership/supervisors of ATF and FBI clashed, while the agents responding on scene worked together effectively.