

TURN ON THE TV; WE'RE UNDER ATTACK

The Vietnam War is recognized as the first American war to be viewed on television by the general public. Parents, a wife or fiancé, perhaps a brother or sister, actually saw the pain in a loved one's face as a medic patched his wounds or damaged limbs. A persistent rumor claims one mother saw her son die on the small screen, but evidence is lacking.

Americans witnessed bombs floating to earth then igniting in red/orange infernos, saw napalm scorching jungles and rice paddies, an aircraft carrier smoldering from accidental detonations on the flight deck, American aviators paraded through the streets of Hanoi, and flag-draped coffins loaded and unloaded with the remains of young men who lost their lives in one of America's most unpopular conflicts.

The Tet Offensive of '68 shocked the nation into believing the war was lost when in reality the US military crushed the Viet Cong into non-existence and so badly devastated their allies, the North Vietnamese Army, that it took a full two years for the NVA to recover. It mattered little. The news media, including the venerated CBS correspondent Walter Cronkite, tossed in the towel, soon to be followed by the populace.

Thrown into the mix of misperceptions and slanted news reporting was the shockwave that disturbed the entire world when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4,

1968. The efforts of American soldiers who thundered out of base camps to defeat the communist forces in conclusive battles became back page news as American cities burned and the distaste of Martial Law ruled the land.

President John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. all fell for their causes just like the boys in Vietnam. Their assassinations, along with a misunderstood war in Southeast Asia being fought half-assed by political leaders in Washington, DC, shaped an enduring legacy for the 1960s. This was a period of death and destruction and division, all played out on small screens in millions of dens and living rooms throughout our great nation.

The worst was yet to come, or more appropriately, yet to be televised.

On September 11, 2001 Americans saw the beginning of a long protracted war on their television sets. We got hit and hit hard; our nation was stunned that the vast Pacific Ocean and The Pond no longer protected our shores. Much like pre-Pearl Harbor omens, we failed to notice warnings and failed to disseminate telltale Intelligence. More appalling, a terrorist organization called Al Qaeda led by Osama Bin Laden had declared war on the United States and we dusted off the threat like dandruff on a shoulder.

‘Too cocky’ could describe America’s lack of concern for a Saudi terrorist hiding in Afghanistan, but Monday morning quarterbacking is best left to conspiracy buffoons. Truth is, we were caught off guard. The ensuing embarrassment and

anger resulted in hasty decisions and Intelligence blunders on where, what, and who we were going to kill in revenge. As of 2017, 16 years after 9/11, we're still killing. This is not a battle against International Terrorism or an Overseas Contingency Operation; America is in a life or death Holy War. If and when we quit killing, the killing will return to our own shores.

Albeit, as we watched the Twin Towers tumble and saw the Pentagon crumble, then witnessed smoke rumble into the sky above Shanksville, PA, the majority of us did so from the comfort of our homes or workplaces. But for those who were there, for those who suffered and watched friends die, for the firemen and first responders, their perception of the 9/11 catastrophe was not a small screen event. Theirs was a harsh reality.

SHE WAS THERE ON 9/11



*Terri's bunk
Fort Jackson*

Terri

May 7 '92

Teresa "Terri" Prieto was working at the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 when hi-jacked American Airlines Flight 77 hit the west side of the building. Sixty four passengers and crew died instantly, plus another 125 military and civilian personnel died inside the Pentagon.

Terri said, “Four of the casualties inside the Pentagon were my friends. When I shut my eyes it’s still vivid, like it only happened yesterday.” Seven years would pass before she penned her private story of the catastrophe; talking about it took a lot longer.

Her journey began in high school when an Army recruiter stirred her interest in the military. A Florida native, Terri recalled “After graduation I drove to Tampa for a physical and to begin the processing, but that’s as far as I got.” Laid off from her civilian accounting job in 1991, Terri’s interest in the Army resurfaced. She said, “I pounded the pavement looking for work and I refused to accept unemployment. I wanted a job, not charity, and I knew the Army had plenty of jobs. I enlisted after discussing the options with my first husband.”



SERVING HER COUNTRY

Terri took basic training and attended Personnel school at Fort Jackson, SC. In July of '92, she boarded a chartered airliner and flew non-stop to Rhein-Main AFB, Frankfurt, Germany. She was assigned to 5th Corp, Personnel Center in the Abrams Headquarters Complex. Her main job was processing evaluation reports on officers and enlisted men.

She recalled, “My daughter and first husband joined me in September and we finally moved into on-base housing. My

daughter attended the American school. My husband found employment at the PX across the street from our base. The commissary had a Popeye's Chicken, Burger King, and Chi Chi's Mexican Restaurant. We thought it a bit strange that the McDonald's in Germany served beer but charged you for ketchup." During her deployment the family visited Paris, dined at the Moulin Rouge café, ascended the Eiffel Tower, explored Hitler's Eagles Nest in Berchtesgaden and defied death on the German Autobahn.

Terri's appointment with destiny inched closer after being assigned to Fort Myer, Virginia next to Arlington National Cemetery. Even though she'd reenlisted, Terri understood her military days were nearly over. She recalled, "While in Germany I was diagnosed with Morton's Neuroma, that's a podiatric disease caused by the lack of fat cells in the feet. I was essentially rubbing bone on bone when marching or jogging. I cried from the pain." She underwent surgery to cut the nerves in her feet to ease the discomfort. "It didn't help much," Terri stated.

While still battling Morton's Neuroma, Terri was given the opportunity to work a civilian gig as a computer consultant for a private contractor inside the Pentagon. She said, "The Army allowed lateral moves, so I left the Army and started working in the Pentagon the next day."

The Pentagon has five floors, five sides and five rings. The rings start in the interior as A and B, separated from outer rings C, D, and E by an avenue for truck deliveries. The outer E ring was targeted on 9/11.



PENTAGON SECURITY CAMERA PHOTO OF FLIGHT 77

Amazingly, Terri received the first indication of an attack via email. She recalled, “One of my friends emailed me and said the Pentagon was on fire. I didn’t believe her. I was on the opposite side of the building and didn’t feel the impact. About that same time my supervisor received a call and was told a helicopter had struck the west E ring. He bolted out of the building then security personnel began emergency evacuations. My coworker and I tried to swipe our security cards to leave but one of the security officers shouted, ‘Don’t swipe, just get outa here!’, so we ran from the building to a grassy area on the other side of the parking lot. Then we noticed the huge pillars of smoke billowing from the west E ring, and that’s when I realized it wasn’t a helicopter that hit the Pentagon.”

Although scared and confused, Terri said that the Pentagon personnel felt a sense of comfort when fighter jets arrived

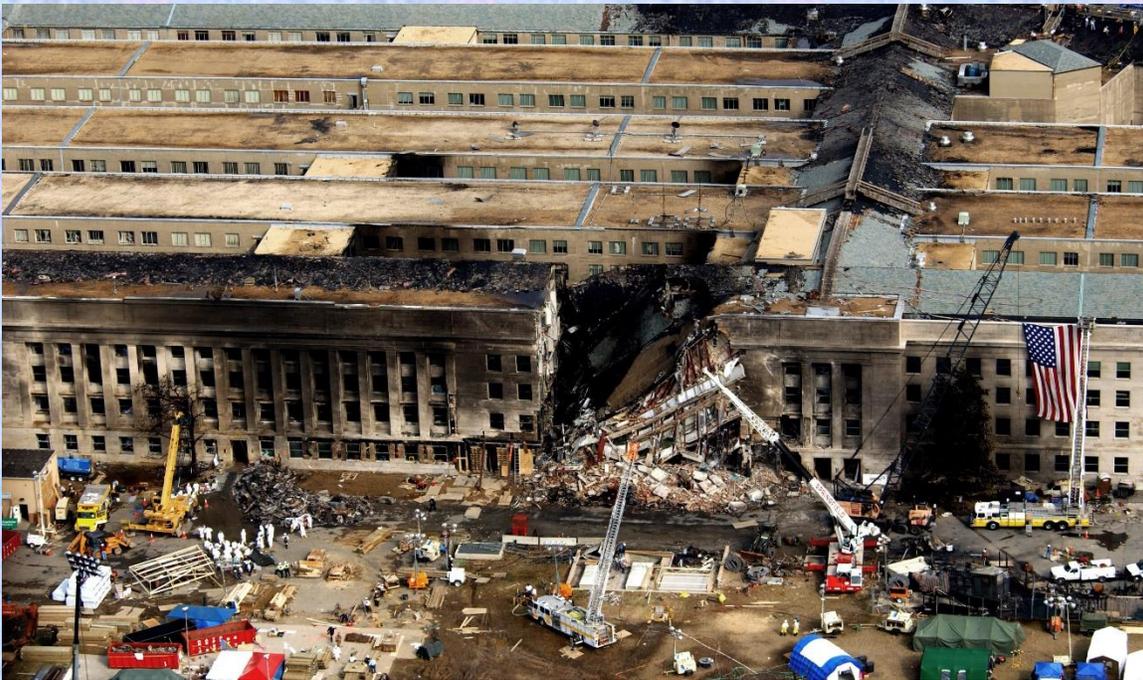
overhead. “We were glad to see the jets because security officers kept shouting, ‘Move back! Move back! Another plane is inbound!’ The ‘other’ plane was the one that went down Shanksville, but I doubt if anybody that day actually knew where it was headed.”



TERRI: “THEY ONLY WON THE FIRST ROUND”

Terri was told to go home. She fought traffic jams, picked up isolated individuals and stranded families, and tried to call her family. “No way,” Terri said, shaking her head. “My cellphone was useless due to overloaded airwaves. I finally got through later in the day and was able to talk to all of my family members.” Terri returned to work on 9/12 as fear and sadness gripped the nation.

She said of the next morning, “I was really proud to see the American flag draped over the side of the Pentagon, it was like our nation was saying, ‘They only won the first round.’ And by the way, one of my friends actually saw the airliner slam into the Pentagon so the conspiracy freaks need to get a life!”



THE AFTERMATH OF AMERICAN AIRLINES FLIGHT 77

Terri and her coworkers noticed that the vending machines had been vandalized, or so they believed. She explained, “We found out the firemen and other rescue personnel had broken into the machines on 9/11 for the soft drinks in order to stay hydrated and give fluids to the survivors.”

Terri kept her memories bottled up for years. Both a victim and survivor, she’s happy to be alive but still questions why so many of her friends paid the ultimate price for just being an American while she was spared. Stress and nightmares

plague her to this very day. “It’s getting easier,” she stated during the interview. “But I will never get over 9/11. We weren’t the men and women that saw the attack on TV, we were the ones that experienced the tragedy first hand, saw it, smelled it, breathed it, and lived to tell the tale. We will never forget 9/11. I hope our country doesn’t either.”



When asked her final thoughts, she replied, “It’s strange what comes to your mind after all these years, but I hark back to the hot dog stand in the middle of the Pentagon’s courtyard, with five sides and a pointed roof. For several years the Soviet Union thought it was a ballistic missile silo.”

“What a cruel thing is war: to separate and destroy families and friends, and mar the purest joys and happiness God has granted us in this world; to fill our hearts with hatred instead of love for our neighbors and to devastate the fair face of this beautiful world.”

- General Robert E. Lee, in a letter to his wife on Christmas Day, 1862 -

