

Always Remember

The Veterans of Foreign Wars reflects on 9/11 20 years later

Sep 10, 2021

WASHINGTON – It still hurts. The pain from the tremendous loss of life two decades ago comes rushing back with every glimpse of those images on the front covers of newspapers, on our television screens and in our newsfeeds. It's like an agonizing wound once thought healed that is reopened time and time again. For those of us who remember the horrific events of that day, we can never forget nor would we want to. It is for that reason the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) reflects on the terror attacks on our country, our fellow Americans that were killed, and the self-sacrifice of so many heroes born from Sept. 11, 2001.

Who would have thought that beautiful, yet fateful morning that any harm would come to our population? Everyday people starting off their day like any other, business men and women settling into their offices for the day, passengers boarding a plane, individuals doing what was routine and mundane in American life, nine months into the 21st century. American politics was focused on global warming, embryonic stem cell research, and the outcome of the Presidential election the year before. We had put the fears of Y2K well behind us and were eager for what the new millennium had in store for the future. We were oblivious to the hideous plan being devised against us.

Up until that day, we were not a country at war. Jihadi terrorism was something that the rest of the world had to deal with, or so it seemed. American society was relatively unfazed by any attempts from the outside to inflict fear or panic on our people. The Pentagon was focused on strategic deterrence and peacekeeping operations around the world. However, those of us in uniform serving abroad knew all too well the realities of the world we lived in.

From the Marine Barracks and U.S. embassy bombings in Lebanon during the early 80s; to the bombings of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia and the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in the 90s; and right up to the attack on the USS Cole in October of 2000, U.S. service members and diplomats have borne the brunt of terrorist targeting Americans. Even the 1993 World Trade Center bombing which killed six people and injured more than 1,000

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others failed to have the effect terrorists intended. It was almost like the military had inoculated mainland America against the virus of terrorism. Looking back now, it was only a matter of time before the infection would finally hit home.

It was at 8:46 a.m. Eastern Standard Time on that Tuesday morning when the first plane, American Airlines Flight 11, hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. Morning news shows began reporting on a plane crash in lower Manhattan, but were still unsure of the circumstances. Once information about a possible hijacking came to light, the second plane, United Airlines Flight 175, struck the South Tower of the World Trade Center at 9:03 a.m. The nation then realized we were under attack. Thirty-four minutes later, at 9:37 a.m., American Airlines Flight 77, crashes into the Pentagon collapsing part of the building. Then at 9:59 a.m., the burning WTC South Tower collapses. Four minutes later, at 10:03 a.m., United Airlines Flight 93, crashes in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. At 10:28 a.m., the WTC's North Tower collapsed. In just 102 minutes, 19 hijackers would succeed in terrorizing the entire country with the entire world watching in horror.

Yet, in the midst of this unimaginable tragedy, stories of unbelievable heroism were being reported from every location. Firefighters and law enforcement officers running into the burning World Trade Center buildings, rescuing hundreds of people. Service members leading others through the burning, smoldering Pentagon rubble to safety. Passengers of flight 93 who decided to fight back against hijackers to prevent them getting to their intended target. The courage and selfless sacrifice would come to define that day as much, if not more so than the attacks themselves.

The 9/11 attack would take the lives of 2,977 Americans, launch our military into the 20-year long war in Afghanistan, and change life as we knew it forever. Witnessing the video of Afghans desperately clinging to U.S. military aircraft during the August evacuation from Afghanistan is a painful reminder of the terror that brought us there to begin with.

This Patriot Day and National Day of Service and Remembrance, the VFW encourages every American to pause and honor the victims, reflect on the ordinary people who did extraordinary things, pay tribute to those who took the fight to the enemy and sacrificed to protect and defend our freedom, and for the next 20 years and beyond, never let Sept. 11, 2001, fade from our memory.

Always remember.