

Comments of Bob Boehmer

09/11 Memorial Ceremony

East Georgia State College

09/11/2015

Good morning,

Thanks you for joining us at East Georgia State College this morning for this ceremony commemorating the events of September 11, 2001 and honoring the heroism on that day and every day since then of our active and retired firefighters, law enforcement officers, emergency services personnel, 911 operators, paramedics, doctors, nurses and members of our military forces. Please join me in recognizing all of them with a warm round of applause.

First, I ask each of you to silently recall where you were on September 11, 2001 when you first learned of the attack on our beloved county. I was walking to teach a class that morning on the beautiful north campus of the University of Georgia. It had not occurred to me that morning that I enjoyed that luxury because of the protection provided to us each and every day by the heroes we honor this morning. It should have.

Then a colleague --- a librarian – stopped me and recounted what she had just heard about an unfolding tragedy in the northeast United States. I did not at that moment even begin to understand the magnitude of what was taking place. I had not yet seen the news reports of the literally thousands of acts of heroism which had been performed and were yet to be performed as the tragedy unfolded and in the face of depravity.

Today, September 11, is a day when we stop together as a nation to remind ourselves of those acts of heroism. It is essential that, even though each one of us now knows the story now by heart, that we repeatedly retell the story to assure that we never take those acts of heroism for granted.

In the words of the New York Times on the day following the tragedy, here is the story:

“Hijackers rammed jetliners into each of New York’s World Trade Center towers yesterday, toppling both in a hellish storm of ash, glass, smoke and leaping victims, while a third jetliner crashed into the Pentagon in Virginia. There was no official count, but President Bush said thousands had perished, and in the immediate aftermath the calamity was already being ranked the worst and most audacious terror attack in American history.

The attacks seemed carefully coordinated. The hijacked planes were all en route to California, and therefore gorged with fuel, and their departures were spaced within an hour and 40 minutes. The first, American Airlines Flight 11, a Boeing 767 out of Boston for Los Angeles, crashed into the north tower at 8:48 a.m. Eighteen minutes later, United Airlines Flight 175, also headed from Boston to Los Angeles, plowed into the south tower.

Then an American Airlines Boeing 757, Flight 77, left Washington's Dulles International Airport bound for Los Angeles, but instead hit the western part of the Pentagon, the military headquarters where 24,000 people work, at 9:40 a.m. Finally, United Airlines Flight 93, a Boeing 757 flying from Newark to San Francisco, crashed near Pittsburgh, raising the possibility that its hijackers had failed in whatever their mission was."

Although we did not yet know on the day that New York Times article was written, we now know that 2,753 people were killed when American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 intentionally crashed into the World Trade Center – a total of 2,977 people were killed in New York City, Washington D.C. and outside of Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The victims were as young as two and as old as 85. It has taken, since that day, over 3.1 million hours of dangerous & difficult labor to clean up over 1.8 million tons of debris at a cost of \$750 million. We also know now that 343 of the victims were New York City firefighters, 23 were New York City police officers and 37 were officers at the Port Authority.

Picture in your minds' eye the images of those firefighters and officers running directly towards the danger in the towering inferno to save lives of others. Although often less dramatic and not so widely reported, similar acts of heroism are performed each day as these heroes make the lives and liberty we enjoy possible. We stand together today to remember and to extend to them our heartfelt thanks.

In closing, let us remind ourselves of the words of Abraham Lincoln written for another situation yet applicable to today's memorial:

"But, in a large sense – we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow – this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great remaining task before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Thank you.