DAU Hosts 9/11 First Responder

Challenges and Logistics of Responding to Pentagon Terrorist Attack

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The Advanced Program Management Course (APMC), DAU's 14-week premier course offering for Level III certification in the Program Management career field, has now been replaced by the new six-week Program Management Office Course (PMT-352). However, two highly successful legacy programs from APMC are being carried over to the new PMT-352: the Distinguished Guest Lecturer (DGL) program and the Distinguished Visitor (DV) program. The DGL program features speakers who address the entire class, while the DV program features speakers who address individual sections in the classrooms.

As part of the DV program, DAU Professor Wayne Glass invited Thomas Hawkins Jr., Chief of the Alexandria Fire Department (located in Alexandria, Va.), to speak to Section D of the last APMC. Chief Hawkins talked to the students on the logistics of responding to the events of 9/ll at the Pentagon, tying it to the key elements of the APMC Logistics Management curricula taught by Glass. His observations and candid discussion surrounding the horrible events of that day proved to be of immense interest to the students, staff, and faculty who heard him speak on Aug. 12.

Pentagon during the 9/11 terrorist attack. Photo courtesy of Alexandria Fire Department

Everyday Operations

To provide the students a backdrop on how his department operates (Figure 1), Chief Hawkins began his remarks by describing the everyday operations of the Alexandria Fire Department. Currently, the department employs over 250 professional personnel, which include firefighters, paramedics, code enforcement, and administrative support. Among the department's specialized teams are the Northern Virginia Regional Hazardous Materials Team, Technical Rescue, Water Rescue, and Special Operations with the mission to:

- enhance quality of life through prevention, education, and community involvement;
- deliver responsive and caring emergency services;
- mitigate emergencies and disasters;
- prevent the loss of life and protect property; and
- enforce applicable codes and ordinances.

The department operates on a 24-hour system (from 8 a.m. to 8 a.m.); all the firefighters work a 56-hour week and maintain the same schedule, working the same shifts—which means that people working on the same shift are trained together, work together, and get to know each other better. Each division within the department has a different function. The truck companies do recovery and rescue; the engine companies provide water supply, sweep the fire, do the ladder work, and make sure everybody is fit for duty; and the medical units provide basic life support.

First Responder—Challenges and Primary Objective

After his overview of everyday operation, Hawkins talked about the chal-

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Thomas Hawkins Jr., Fire Chief, Alexandria Fire Department, talking to APMC students about the challenges and logistics of the response to 9/11. Photo by Army Sgt. Fahim Nassar

lenges and logistics of responding to the terrorist attack against the Pentagon, Sept. 11, 2001.

Total Chaos

"From the logistics point of view, [9/11] was a nightmare—all kinds of fire, police, federal, state agencies, military, relief agencies—plus every single congressman and senator coming down to see it." From a firefighting standpoint, Hawkins said that because it was such an exterior operation, this attack was different and complex. It involved a major aircraft on fire; a five-story, stone type of structure that collapsed, resulting in a major fire; and thousands of gallons of jet fuel burning within the building.

"Moreover," Hawkins said, "it was a crime scene; it was federal property; it was the nation's command center; it was the second biggest national disaster—the first having taken place only an hour before with the terrorist attacks against the twin towers of the World Trade Center."

Hawkins emphasized that prior to the attacks the department often talked about and planned for the worst-case scenario, particularly how to integrate public works such as the health department, police, fire department, and personnel department. "But never did we ever come up with any scenario anywhere close to this in all our years of operation. So needless to say it was *big*, we knew that, and nothing like that had ever been measured," he said.

According to Hawkins, gaining control was the primary objective. "There was total, total, total chaos," he observed. "And I don't care how much you plan or what you do, this was a chaotic situation and from my observation and years of service in the Fire Department, the biggest and most difficult thing to do is to control the chaos."

Establishing and maintaining command and control of the response to the Pentagon attack, he acknowledged, was daunting. Thousands of people and hundreds of pieces of firefighting equipment apparatus from more than a dozen different jurisdictions challenged the department's leadership to the utmost. "The actual experience of coordinating

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FIGURE 1: **Alexandria Fire Department Organizational Chart**

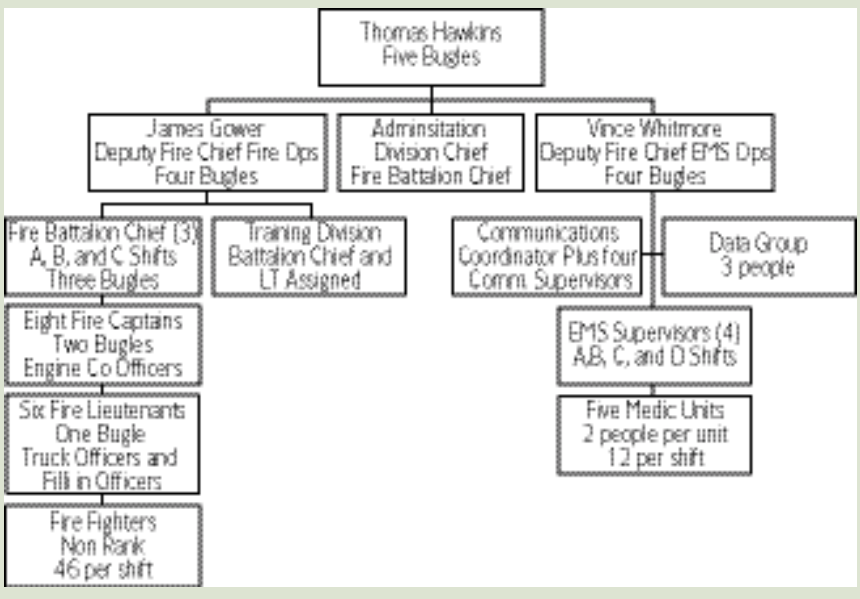

FIGURE 2: **Fire Units Responding to the Pentagon Attack**

Arlington, Va.
Ft. Meyer, Va.
Ft. Belvoir, Va.
Prince William Co., Va.
Fairfax Co., Va.
Loudon Co., Va.
Alexandria, Va.
Fairfax City, Va.
Montgomery Co., Md.
Prince George's Co., Md.
Frederick Co. Md.
Washington, D.C.
National Airport
Others

the multifaceted response—everyone with a legitimate right to be there—proved significantly more challenging than previously envisioned. It's hard to coordinate things in chaos," he said.

Hawkins emphasized that this kind of incident rescue involves a lot of practice and cooperation, and the Fire Department does not have the capabilities to practice this type of event. "We cannot go out and take our departments to do maneuvers like the military. We cannot go out and shoot for three days and have people camp out for a couple of days—it's just impossible. We just don't have the funding and the time. We do the best we can to get our people trained, and over the years we've been able to improve and get much more cooperation from our federal counterparts," he said.

Saving a National Treasure

Hawkins also stressed that the Pentagon, as a building, was a great challenge itself. The Pentagon is a highly visible and significant symbolic target, a structural fortress, populated by a large and highly disciplined workforce. The massive size of the Pentagon and the complexity of its various rings and floors compounded the challenge of the response force.

"It is true that the fire damage was contained to a relatively small area, but it was a relatively small area in one of the largest business complexes in the world," he said. Hawkins explained that the airliner struck a portion of the Pentagon undergoing renovation, which lowered the number of potential casualties since a portion of the impacted area had not yet been fully repopulated following recently completed upgrades. The sheer violence of the impact reduced chances for survival—those who were able to get out did so in the first few minutes.

The response, Hawkins added, was also challenged by the unique design and the sheer size of the Pentagon; therefore, a complete and accurate size-up of the incident site was not immediately performed. Teams of firefighters assigned suppression work on the Pentagon roof had difficulty finding access points from the fifth floor. Neither building engineers nor detailed structural drawings were available to assist them at that location.

Attacking the fire on the roof, he said, was particularly difficult. The thick wood-plank inner layer burned out of control, protected by a layer of concrete below and a thick slate roof above. The whole process involved a certain degree of guesswork to breach the roof ahead of a fire that could not be seen. "And with 27,000 people pouring out of the Pentagon, all I can tell you [is that] the Pentagon did not have a good evacuation plan, and it's the worst building in the world in which to fight a fire," he observed. "That is a lesson to be learned."

Lack of a Valid Dispatch System

Hawkins reported that another challenge was the lack of a valid dispatch system resulting in an overflow of self-dispatch. (Figure 2 lists the units, that responded to the Pentagon attack.) "There was never a dispatch—literally, people just responded. There was a fire truck from Bethesda, Md.; there were volunteer groups from Frederick, Md.; and many other units. How did they get there? It was the self-dispatch that created a lot of confusion," Hawkins noted. Calling it a lesson learned, Hawkins said that it is critical that response units from other locations coordinate with the host jurisdiction dispatch center before deploying to an incident site.

Recall System Flawed

Accountability of people going in seemed to be yet another issue—people were just coming and going as they pleased, he said. No one really knew how many other shifts came to the site. In the context of initial response, the recall system appeared to be seriously flawed. Firefighters returned to work in a timely fashion, but mostly on their own initiative and without clear instructions. Moreover, neither recalled personnel nor reserve apparatus was equipped to sustain the simultaneous engagement of multiple-duty shifts.

A lot of firefighters, Hawkins said, called for instruction but never got through. "Communication turned out to be a big challenge," he added. "Emergency traffic jammed the radio channels; in some cases portable radios were not preprogrammed to allow interoperability; in other cases, ambient noise made it hard or impossible to talk; cellular phones were useless during the first hours; the paging system worked, but few firefighters have pagers. So communication at the scene, in the first hours of the attack, was challenging to the extent that foot messengers became the most reliable means of communicating."

Adequacy of Logistical Support

"The success of a large-scale operation is often determined by adequacy of logistical support," Hawkins said. Logistics is a complex business of equipping, supplying, and sustaining the fire and rescue operations, he noted. As far as the firefighters, it includes providing the daily needs of engaged responders (clothing, food, health, rest and recuperation, shelter, and sanitation) as well as maintaining, repairing, replacing, and refueling the equipment. It involves acquisition, shipping, warehousing, inventory control, transportation, and many other functions.

Initially, Hawkins said, logistics support was not readily accessible. The main

concern at the scene of the Pentagon was maintaining and refueling all the firefighting and rescue apparatus arriving onsite and meeting the immediate needs of the firefighters. The refueling operation was enormous—at its peak, more than 500 items needed regular refueling (fire and rescue vehicles, generators, light towers, cooking stoves, heaters, etc.). Obtaining flashlights and batteries turned out to be a big issue. The firefighters relied on rechargeable flashlights with the battery power generally good for about six hours (it takes three hours to recharge them). "This works well under normal conditions," said Hawkins, "but the Pentagon situation was anything but normal." Stock levels of critical items, such as air bottles, breathing apparatus, radios, and radio batteries were inadequate.

However, Hawkins said logistics support and directions on feeding requirements, disaster relief, equipment supply, and other supply support were forthcoming from many souces. All the volunteers and organizations that participated in or supported the fire rescue operations needed logistical support. "No one was well prepared logistically for such a long-term operation as unfolded on 9/11. Supplies of emergency equipment, medical supplies, and critical high-demand items were insufficient."

As the rescue operation developed, he continued, local retailers, building suppliers, and companies specializing in firefighting equipment showed up offering help, and other jurisdictions as well as volunteer and rescue organizations were able to fill the needs. "It was teamwork—organizing, staffing up, and managing long-haul logistics functions," Hawkins emphasized.

Mitigators

Hawkins told the students that several factors conspired favorably to support the firefighters. First of all, the weather was clear and dry and, for the most part, remained so throughout the next 10 days. Rain and heavy winds would have severely complicated the circumstances.

Second, the Incident Command was established onsite within minutes of the attack, and its authority was never challenged. Additionally, because of an unrelated emergency 9-1-1 call—just one minute before the terrorist attack—significant numbers of units were already on the road near the Pentagon at the time of the attack.

Also, the fact that so many units from different divisions self-dispatched immediately to the scene enabled fire suppression to commence without hesitation. The rapid response also enabled the early provision of triage and treatment services for victims emerging from the Pentagon. "Also what helped was the fact that the firemen were working together on the same shifts," Hawkins noted. "The training, discipline, and character of the military personnel working in the Pentagon also proved invaluable in many ways," he emphasized.

Despite all the difficulties, the initial response to the Pentagon attack achieved a measure of success. All surviving seriously injured building occupants were rescued and hundreds of additional potential victims escaped safely. Fire suppression in the first 12 hours contained the damage without interrupting the critical worldwide military command and control activities of DoD during a major national security emergency. Despite the magnitude, complexity, and duration of operations, there were no fatalities or serious injuries among the fire and rescue personnel. This can be attributed, in large part, Hawkins said, to the skill level of the rescue personnel in core competencies, professionalism, training, and teamwork.

Important lessons were learned, he said, to better prepare for future events of similar scope.

Preparedness

Concluding his discussion on the Pentagon fire and rescue effort, Hawkins emphasized the following as areas for future improvement:

- Better coordination and adherence to current procedures
- More training in the area of Chemical/Bio events
- Logistics support
- Resource allocation
- More coordination of on-scene command (Divisions/Groups)
- More training for technical rescue teams
- More training for hazardous materials teams
- Regional dispatch center.

"*Many* did an incredible job—*many* risked their lives; and *many* will never be the same," he concluded.