

Talking with Retired Lt. Kevin Shaeffer, USN and Lt. Blanca Shaeffer, USN



The story of Navy Lt. Kevin Shaeffer is one of courage, bravery and incredible determination. Shaeffer sustained serious injury when the Navy Command Center where he worked exploded in a ball of fire after terrorists flew a hijacked airliner into the southwestern wedge of the Pentagon. Shaeffer was the only one of 30 people in his immediate vicinity to survive the 9-11 attacks.

Lt. Shaeffer's injuries were among the worst of the 140 people wounded in the Pentagon attack. He suffered severe burns on 42 percent of his body, lost most of the skin on his arms, hands and back, and inhaled jet fuel, which damaged his lungs. His heart stopped twice on October 4, 2001. Upon escaping the Navy Command Center, Lt. Shaeffer was assisted by Army Sgt. First Class Steve Workman, who received the Soldier's Medal for his heroism in finding Lt. Shaeffer and transferring him to medical personnel. The Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Vern Clark presented the Purple Heart to Lt. Shaeffer for the injuries he sustained during the Pentagon attack. Lt. Shaeffer has undergone 17 surgeries and plans to return to work soon.

The Pentagon's Navy Command Center is manned 24 x 7 with 40 to 50 personnel. One of the missions of the Command Center is to monitor news events around the world. Lt. Shaeffer said, "We quickly knew what was going on in New York City after the first plane hit the first tower. We were watching big-screen TVs and stood up a watch to start logging events and tracking things for the Navy. And then we saw the second plane hit and knew it wasn't an accident."

CHIPS: What is the mission of the Navy Command Center?

Lt. Kevin Shaeffer: Basically, the Center's mission is to constantly monitor global events while keeping up with the latest status of all U.S. Naval assets operating worldwide. The men and women who work there are charged with keeping our Navy leadership updated with exactly what's happening in the world, as it directly relates to Navy operations and other geo-political security and military issues.

CHIPS: What was your job in the Command Center?

Lt. Kevin Shaeffer: I was an Action Officer who worked in the N513 Branch, Navy Strategies and Concepts. Though the 8 to 10 of us in the Branch were physically located there, we didn't



In the CHIPS Winter 2003 issue, I introduced you to an amazing individual, retired Lt. Kevin Shaeffer, who sustained serious burns on 42 percent of his body when hijacked Flight 77 crashed into the Navy Command Center in the Pentagon on 9-11. To my distress I found I had misspelled Shaeffer's name. Our sincerest apologies to both Lt. Blanca Shaeffer and Lt. Kevin Shaeffer — and our thanks for their graciousness and understanding. Above from left to right: Lt. Blanca Shaeffer, CNO Adm. Vern Clark and retired Lt. Kevin Shaeffer, Oct. 2002.

have direct responsibilities with the watch functions of the Command Center. We did, however, frequently work with the personnel of the Command Center in completing many taskings.

CHIPS: I read where the Center's watch immediately began tracking the terrorist attacks. What other kinds of support could the Command Center have provided had it not been hit?

Lt. Kevin Shaeffer: Had the Command Center not been destroyed it surely would have been able to provide the highest levels of our Navy leadership with updates as to

exactly what was occurring. One of my last mental "snapshots" of the space just prior to the impact of Flight 77 was of the watch section and watch leaders actively engaged in logging and recording the events in New York City. I remember seeing the watch captain and my supervisor, Capt. Bob Dolan, discussing the situation and recall admiring how professionally they were handling things. Of course events were happening so quickly that no formal tasking on exactly what to do came down, but they all responded in exactly the way they were trained.

CHIPS: I have read that you are interested in working in the public service sector, especially in the area of Homeland Security. So many areas of Homeland Security involve increasingly sophisticated and complex IT — do you have a special focus area?

Lt. Kevin Shaeffer: You're exactly right, the Secretary of Homeland Security has recently stressed the role that technological advances will play in contributing to the success of preventing future terrorist attacks. However, at this time I'm focused on possibly contributing my skills and my experiences in a broader manner. I feel uniquely blessed with the ability to forcefully convey the importance of the many facets of Homeland Security. I'm looking to play an active role as an advocate for ensuring that we continue to do everything that is necessary to protect our security.

CHIPS: I've read and heard the courageous history of your long and painful recovery, but the most humbling statement I heard you make is when you told Adm. Clark, that you were a survivor not a hero, that the military personnel serving in defense of

freedom were the real heroes. What message do you have for our warfighters?

Lt. Kevin Shaeffer: We are so indebted to the courage and sacrifice of those in uniform. I want each and every one of them to know that I, as one of the first casualties of this war on terrorism, am honored by their commitment to protect this great country of ours.

CHIPS: Blanca, what was your job at the Naval Surface Warfare Center?

Lt. Blanca Shaeffer: At NSWC Dahlgren, Va., I was the Strategic Systems Programs (SSP) Project Officer. I'm an Engineering Duty Officer (EDO) who works in SSP on the Trident Missile Program and on the new SSGN program. [Four Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) are being converted to guided missile submarines (SSGN).]

CHIPS: I've read where your husband said, "I thought that [Navy Command Center] was the safest place in the world ... even as we were watching what was unfolding up in New York City, we never thought that we were in any kind of danger, at any kind of risk... What were you doing and where were you on 9-11?"

Lt. Blanca Shaeffer: I was on travel for work in Pittsfield, Mass. I had flown there on September 10, and was supposed to fly back on September 12. When I found out that Kevin was in the hospital, several co-workers and I rented a large SUV to drive back. We drove through the night, arriving at Washington Hospital Center at 3 a.m.

CHIPS: Your bravery and courage have been equal to Kevin's during these difficult months. I've read where both you and your husband have said how supportive "the Navy family" has been. I also read where one of the Pentagon survivors said he felt sorry for the survivors and families of the victims from the World Trade Towers tragedy because they didn't have the support system the Navy has provided.

Lt. Blanca Shaeffer: The Navy offered support in ways that were beyond what I expected. They did things like organize a list of people who brought food to me and to Kevin's family while we

were at the hospital day and night, they started prayer chains (some of which still continue today!), and spent hours by our sides to make sure we had everything we needed, including emotional support.

CHIPS: Do you think the Navy and other Services are better prepared to deal with disaster preparedness and response than civil organizations because the military are better trained to deal with life and death situations?

Lt. Blanca Shaeffer: Yes, I do believe the Services are better trained to deal with these sorts of situations. It's not just dealing with life and death situations though. It's also being accustomed to supporting each other through any sort of crisis that might come up. We're accustomed to our friends deploying and leaving their families at home. Sometimes those families at home rely on their Navy family for their support system.

CHIPS: Do you think this ordeal has made you a better Naval officer? What message or advice do you have for our Navy family of military members, civilian employees and contractors as we face the continuing war on terrorism?

Lt. Blanca Shaeffer: It's made me more aware of the kinds of things that a Naval officer needs to think about when someone in their unit needs the support that Kevin and I did during his months in the hospital. The message that I'd like to pass on to the military overseas during these times is that those of us back home are praying for their safety and success. We never forget the sacrifices they are making for the rest of us back home.

CHIPS: Kevin, what do you think others could learn from your experience?

Lt. Kevin Shaeffer: If years from now, people remember anything about me and my story, I'd like them to remember a simple phrase — "Never give up, Never forget. Never give up when things get tough. Never forget what it felt like on that day in September."



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Thank you for your past participation and support of Connecting Technology Symposiums. Your interest and contributions have been – and continue to be greatly appreciated. New challenges face the staffs of Connecting Technology and the DON IT Umbrella Program as we continue to provide total support for our warfighters. Therefore, it is with deep regret that we must announce that Connecting Technology Spring 2003 is cancelled. The importance of your continued support for the DON IT Umbrella Program in purchasing from pre-competed contracts and Blanket Purchasing Agreements remains a key focus for us and provides cost savings for you, which can be used for the Navy's warfighting mission.

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The Connecting Technology and DON IT Umbrella Program Staffs