

A View Through Yellow Tinted Windows:

Colonel Pamela Hodge



Pentagon Chapel stained glass window dedicated in the memory of those who died in the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001.

www.strategypage.com

The catastrophic events of September 11, 2001, naturally changed the perception most Americans had about homeland security. It was a day in American history that would always carry a weighted feeling. 9/11 was a day where many banded together to become a unified nation; when heroes emerged from the most ordinary of men and women. It was a day when people began to question humanity, our freedom and even God. Colonel Pamela Hodge was such a person.

Colonel Hodge, a Texas native and graduate of Prairie View A&M University, was commissioned a Second Lieutenant through Officer Training School at Medina AFB, TX, in 1981. She eventually became a Masters Degree level engineer, earned a Command Space Badge, and is an Acquisition Professional Development Level III certified Program Manager. Currently she has duty at the National Geospatial-intelligence Agency. Before retiring from the military, Colonel Hodge served her duty at the National Geospatial-intelligence Agency.

On 9/11, Colonel Hodge was assigned to the Pentagon on the Joint Staff. Even though on mute, the duty area TV was always on CNN. What she was about to see flash across the screen would impact her life and millions of Americans. American Flight 11 crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York. Gathering around the tube with rapt attention they watched as the second plane, United Flight 175 crashed into the south tower.

“First I want to say, I don’t have a personal story as to a loved one loss in the tragedy. Nor was I physically injured.” Colonel Hodge explains, rehashing a memory that would be embedded forever. In the commencement of her vivid tale, a subterranean rumble unearthed as she asked a visibly shaken woman if she needed help.

“The woman said she was okay and that she was trying to get out of the Pentagon because a truck or something had gone into the building.” Colonel Hodge went further to explain, “To walk the E-ring is a 1.1 mile of walking.” After the woman denied assistance, Colonel Hodge reached her destination in the air force area. An alarm sounded requesting people to evacuate the building.

“I headed back to the duty area to make sure others knew to evacuate the building.” They went to the rally point; still, the gravity of what happened had yet to unfold. With several orders to duck and cover, the crowd was ordered to move further away from the building. Tension began mounting.

Without her car keys, Colonel Hodge was unable to leave the site. Luckily she had her cell and attempted to contact her family. Although the mobile networks were

overwhelmed; she eventually managed to leave a message for her son who was away at college. Another call was placed to Cindy Lord to get a message to her husband and mother in Texas. “I call her ‘Angel of Mercy,’” she adds thoughtfully.

Mixed rumors consisting of the state department to the Capitol and the F-15 kept swirling. “Immediately, tension melted away. It was akin to a child in their mother’s arms,” Colonel Hodge describes. “I was confident that whether the threat was on the ground or in the air, the F15 was a match for it.” The F15 is a well-equipped fire aircraft equipped. “It’s one of the finest crafts. I’m kind of biased because many years ago I did maintenance on it. You can definitely recognize the dual engine plane.”

After a while, the crowd was told to disperse. On her trek back, Colonel Hodge passed a triage site. They were using whatever vehicles they could find to transform into a makeshift ambulance service. Not knowing her fate, she volunteered to lead the caravan to the nearest hospital and help bring back med supplies for the triage site.

A female passenger in the rear of the vehicle was bandaged and overwrought, not realizing the extent of her injuries. The woman was not responding well. Colonel Hodge finally grasped that the woman wanted to use her phone.

“I had a moment of shame.” She informs. “When I was asked to share my cell, I was thinking the battery could go out. I still had to reach my own family.” Deep within she knew God would sustain the battery and she made the call for the injured passenger.

On the way to the hospital they passed her son’s school. Her maternal instincts wanted to reach out to him but looking at the faces around her, she knew they were depending on her guidance to the hospital. Later she learned that her friend, was able to reach another friend, who found a way

to get a message to her son.

It wasn't until after returning from the hospital that Colonel Hodge stood across from the crash site, realizing the severity of what happened. American Flight 77 had crashed into the Pentagon. Engulfed in flames, a large section of the Pentagon collapsed making the visibility of the crash nearly impossible. The triage moved twice ending at an underpass near the road she was trying cross. 'Traveling nurses' on

Local ambulances with medical supplies came to relieve them. The building buckled in other areas as she walked towards her car. Her husband had finally gotten a message and picked her up from the site.

"It was surreal. I couldn't believe what I was seeing." She remembers sitting on a grassy knoll and staring at the collapsed building. "I was furious that those people had lost their lives. Even more so, the civilians weren't the ones who pledged an

appreciate the structure of the Pentagon. The wedge that the plane crashed into was the only section that had been renovated. The blast windows, much maligned before then, have a yellow tinge. "I used to hate them; those yellow tinted blast windows." Colonel Hodge recollects, "I used to stand at the window and watch the sun rise. When they put the film on the window, it distorted the view. But after 9/11 I had great respect for those windows."

The lightly colored film acts like an invisible coat of armor, making the glass stronger and somewhat impenetrable to small ballistic attacks. Colonel Hodge further learned that the strength of the renovated section kept the entire building from being compromised and the blast windows prevented further disfiguring injuries. She readily agrees with the comparison of viewing life not through rose-colored glasses, but yellow tinted windows.

Determined to not live in fear. She vowed to live the abundant life God promised. In an effort to embrace that vow, she and her family flew on an American flight. "I wore an American flag pendant for one year, which is in violation of the uniform code. At that time, it would have taken somebody of a little more seniority to make me take it off." Her laughter penetrates the air momentarily before she sobers.

"From the Chapel area of the Pentagon, you can see the place of the triage site." She explains. "I go there to remember. I love it. The commemorative stained glass has the oath of office on it." Moments pass before she continues. "No matter what's happened, I know God is in charge." •



©Kandie Delley. Kandie Delley is a writer based in North Texas. In addition to her contributions to WOW! Magazine, her published work has appeared in *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Dallas Weekly*, *Xclusive Magazine*, *The Sacramento Observer* and music publication, *Down Magazine*. She's currently writing a stage play and completing her second novel. www.kandiedelley.com and kdwrites@wordpress.com



Reconstruction of the Pentagon continues nearly around-the-clock as construction crews pour cement for floors and walls on Feb. 6, 2001, to replace those damaged in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the building. DoD photo by Grant Greenwalt.

duty at hospitals in DC had stopped by to help on their way back to their hotels. Teams were formed separating people with medical experience from those without.

"I started to think that I'd done enough. Yet these people were asking me to go into a burning building and risk my life even further." Another talk with God was warranted. Facing the odds before her, she found peace in God's Word.

"I remembered what He said in Psalms 139. He said my days were numbered before I was born. If I believed that's what God said, then I would die there or sitting on my sofa. That's when I came to realization that I wasn't going home."

Colonel Hodge stayed, preparing to do something she never imagined she would have to do. Fortunately, the searing heat and menacing flames were too much to send people into the burning building.

oath to give their lives for our country." She quickly composes her emotion. "I asked God how he could allow innocent lives to die."

Admitting her moments of uncertainty, Colonel Hodge's faith and Trust in God made it possible for her to find resolve. Her promise was to not forget the victims of 9-11; that she would do anything in her power so that their deaths would be respected. That 9-11 would not be the loss of America's freedom.

"I went through a time of rage. I was infuriated that people brought terror to our home, {America}." Passion filled her voice in reflection. She goes on to explain that military vehicles outside the pentagon, prior to September 11th, would not have been accepted. Yet in one day all that had changed.

Much later she would grow to truly