



## Former Agents of the FBI Foundation Oral History Heritage Project

Subject: Attacks of September 11, 2001 -15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Interview

Interviewee: Kevin Brock Oral History Interview on June 7, 2016 in Fairfax County, Virginia by Telephone. Special Agent Service Dates: 1983-2007

Assigned Locations: FBIHQ, Washington, DC

Interviewer: David J. Williams, Special Agent Service Dates: 1972-2001

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### Summary:

On September 11, 2001, Kevin Brock was the Special Assistant to Deputy Director Tom Pickard at FBI Headquarters in Washington, DC. In this interview, he discusses activities in the Strategic Information and Operations Center (SIOC) on the day of the attacks and the challenges of the investigation with information that was coming in very quickly. The morning began with one of the first weekly Tuesday meetings the Special Assistants had with the new Director Robert Mueller. While they were reviewing notes after the meeting, the Special Assistants were informed that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City. On hearing of the second plane, they realized it was a terrorist attack and not simply a misguided aircraft. And, when the plane hit the Pentagon, they realized it was extensive. The magnitude of what had happened was made clear when Director Mueller assigned Deputy Director Pickard as the Case Agent for the events. When they learned that Flight 93 was ten minutes outside of Washington, DC, the next message was a Presidential order to shoot the plane down, quickly followed by information about the crash. They then learned of the crash in Shanksville. Close coordination was required between New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania and by the end of the day the names of all nineteen hijackers were up on the boards. The Anthrax cases began showing up a few days later and became a high-profile case on its own. It was unknown if there was a connection and close coordination was required with the executives in the SIOC.

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**Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Interview of Former Special Agent,  
Kevin Brock,  
David J. Williams, Interviewing Agent  
June 7, 2016**

David J. Williams

(W): My name is David Williams. I am a retired Special Agent with the FBI, and I am taking part in the Society of Former Agents of the FBI's, "9/11 Oral History Project," where we're doing a series of interviews with people who have been involved in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America.

We're doing this, of course, it's the Fifteenth Year Anniversary of those attacks, and this interview is being recorded, and it will be transcribed, and it will go forward through the Society of Former Agents of the FBI and eventually to the Library of Congress.

Today, I am going to be interviewing Kevin Brock. Kevin is a retired Special Agent with the FBI, retired as an Assistant Director, and he was intimately involved in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks at FBI Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Kevin, how are you doing today?

Kevin Brock

(B): Very well David, thank you.

W: Okay, and we are doing this interview in Fairfax County, Virginia by telephone, and Kevin has agreed that this will be, of course, recorded. So let us move forward and go right to the first question if we can.

Kevin, if you can, tell us a little bit about of what your duties were on the day of 9/11 and where you were.

B: Certainly. At the time, I was the Special Assistant to the Deputy Director of the FBI who, on 9/11, was Tom Pickard, and my office was on the seventh floor close by Tom at FBI Headquarters. On the morning of 9/11, we had just concluded a weekly Tuesday morning meeting with the Director of the FBI and Deputy Director Pickard.

The Director of the FBI was Robert Mueller and he had been Director for exactly one week. He had started the Tuesday before on September 4, 2001.

W: So, he was relatively new to the job.

B: Yes, he was brand new and that, I think, contributed to some of the interesting dynamics that I am about to relate to you.

W: Okay, and you were in the FBI Headquarters Building at the time and how did you first learn that America was under attack?

B: As I mentioned, Director Mueller had decided to have weekly meetings on Tuesday mornings. We had just concluded one of his first meetings, and I was back in my office across the hall from the Deputy Director's Office with a couple of other special assistants going over the meeting that we had just had. Usually those meetings involved task sheets for all of us. The Deputy Director's executive assistant, Veronica Nemecek, stuck her head in my office and said, "A plane has crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City." We're mobilizing everybody, and Tom is going to head down to the SIOC," which was the Bureau's tactical command post at headquarters for special events. She added, "I suggest you guys make your way down there."

So, like most Americans upon hearing the first report, I had the impression that it might have been a misguided small plane that had wandered off track and crashed into the building. As we were making our way down to SIOC, however, we got information about the second plane, and then we fully understood that this was a coordinated attack on America.

W: When you first heard of the plane going into the World Trade Center were your initial thoughts that this was an act of terrorism or did you just think it was a misguided aircraft?

B: Well, initially, as I mentioned, when we heard about one plane we thought it was a misguided aircraft. With the second plane we knew that it was a terrorist attack, and most of us, as I recall, immediately started suspecting al Qaeda. Soon thereafter of course, we heard about the plane crashing into the Pentagon, so the attack wasn't limited to New York. We realized the attack was extensive, coordinated, and planned. But most importantly, it raised significant questions about what else is still yet to come, and where would those attacks happen.

W: Was that a big part of your thinking at the time about other follow-on attacks or the potential for following attacks?

B: It absolutely was, and it kind of led into some of the dynamics that unfolded right after that. So, let me just tell you this story: As we got

down into the SIOC there was, as you know Dave as a former Agent, a period of fog and chaos similar to every crisis situation where everybody tries to figure out what's going on and who should be doing what. This was no exception.

By the time we got down there, SIOC had about fifty or sixty people already in place starting to figure out roles and responsibilities. Robert Mueller, the new Director, I think rightly, took a moment and gathered everybody together in a large open space in the SIOC to make a few comments.

I remember thinking at that time; this poor guy has been on the job for one week. He doesn't know the FBI very well. We don't know him very well, and all of us were sensing that this was a pivotal moment in the history of the FBI. But I have to say he handled it very, very well, and he actually articulated how this day would likely change the FBI.

"Obviously the country is under attack," he said. "I think will likely change things for the FBI." I remember thinking it was remarkable that the impact of this day was already starting to set in on the executive leadership. He said, "We're going to be working some long, hard hours here. I'm going to rely on your dedication that you've always had to see us through this crisis."

He then said, "I've named Tom Pickard as the Case Agent for this event." That was a very interesting thing to say. The Deputy Director of the FBI is not normally called upon nor used to being a Case Agent on any case. But I think he said that in order to drive home the magnitude of what we were dealing with. He then asked everybody to get to work and work hard, and I thought he set the right leadership tone and did the right thing.

We went into the executive conference room in SIOC where the Director set up shop along with Tom Pickard and a number of the Assistant Directors. I was in there as the Special Assistant to Pickard primarily to help execute orders and decisions that they were making on the fly.

B: We, like the rest of America, were watching the events unfold on television, and we started to get reports about possible other hijacked planes that might still be out there. I recall clearly that the initial information was that there were eight planes that had been hijacked. Now three had already crashed and so that was obviously quite worrisome.

We had a representative from the FAA in the SIOC giving us direct communication with FAA, as they were tracking these planes and trying to

account for what planes might be involved in the hijacking. I think you will recall an FAA order went out to ground all planes currently in flight in an attempt to kind of clear the fog of all the misinformation. But initially there was a report of eight hijacked planes.

That started to get whittled down over the next half hour or so to where it was verified there was one more plane still in the air and that was Flight 93, which had taken off from Newark Airport and was heading, by that time, on a course for Washington, D.C. And, of course, nobody knew what the exact target was.

But shortly after we got that information, we received word that the Vice President, through the President's orders, had ordered the military to shoot Flight 93 down.

W: Wow.

B: And the impact of that statement on our conference room was bracing. The room went completely silent as we all absorbed the unprecedented decision of an American President ordering military action against an American commercial flight to protect whatever the attack target was. Nobody spoke for probably fifteen or twenty seconds until the new Director, Robert Mueller, finally broke the silence and said, "This might be a good time to say a prayer."

That really impacted me at the time. I remember thinking here's a guy who's probably going to be worth following. There's really nothing else to say at that point that would in any way be comforting or meaningful. I think it captured all the feelings and emotions that we were all feeling at that time.

The confusion continued. I remember as the south tower of the World Trade Center came down, we thought that some sort of secondary explosion had happened. Nobody was prepared for the idea...

W: You're speaking now of the World Trade Center?

B: ....The World Trade Center, yes. Nobody was prepared for the idea that the buildings were actually going to collapse, and so there was a lot of confusion over what had just happened as we saw this plume of dust and smoke go up.

Later on that day at about four o'clock on Nine-Eleven, Tom Pickard led a conference call with all the Special Agents in Charge of the FBI to review

the day, gather information, and to give direction. And it came time for the Assistant Director of the New York office to speak.

Barry Mawn was the Assistant Director in Charge of the New York office and had actually barely escaped death himself that day. He had gone down to the World Trade Center and, as the first building came down, he had to run for his life. He was with an Assistant U.S. Attorney, David Kelley. They began running, and Barry, at the last second, was able to duck into a small restaurant. David Kelley actually had to dive to the ground next to a curb and let the dust blow over him. So they both had close call.

Barry's now on the phone at four o'clock with Tom Pickard and the rest of us. Tom asked Barry something about the "crime scene" at the World Trade Center. I'll never forget Barry Mawn's response. In his thick Boston accent he said, "Tom, Tom, there is no crime scene," and again the room went completely silent.

The impact of the day was setting in on everybody involved, and Barry was exactly right; there was obliteration and we weren't used to dealing with these kinds of things or processing them. Those are just some of the impressions I had as the day unfolded. It was quite intense and obviously impacted all those involved.

Most of us sat in that room for the next sixty days straight without taking any time off, but I was proud of the FBI. By the end of that day, by the end of 9/11, we had the names of all the hijackers. We had them up on the boards.

- W: How was that achieved? Do you remember how did we find out so quickly?
- B: It was really dealing with the airlines and going through the process of elimination and coming up with the names. We had all nineteen within a few hours. I remember that.
- B: I remember when the first hijacker was identified. Somebody came in to the conference room to report that a passport had been recovered, sitting on a pile of rubble, open faced and intact. Not much was intact from those airplanes, but it was a passport from one of the nineteen hijackers. His first name was, S-a-t-a-m. I can't remember his last name.

At first we thought they had said "Satan," which would have been fitting. But actually the Arabic name was Satam. It was remarkable that this was

one of the few intact things that they recovered from the airplane, and that's how we started learning who had carried out these attacks.

W: Kevin, if you go back, you had mentioned earlier, Flight 93 and that it had turned around and it was apparently headed for Washington, D.C. How much after that report did you get the information that that flight had crashed into an open field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania? Was there a long gap there or was that kind of...?

B: There was a little bit. It was a sequence where the FAA guy, I remember, stuck his head into the conference room and said, "Flight 93 is estimated to be ten minutes outside of Washington, D.C." Then he stuck his head in a second time and said, "It's estimated to be five minutes outside of Washington, D.C." Obviously, I think it was more than five minutes away, but this was the information he was getting and relaying to us.

In between the time when he first told us that it was on course for D.C., we received the information of the President's order to shoot down the plane, and then some time obviously subsequent to that, we heard about the crash.

W: Was there any feeling at all that this aircraft was headed toward FBI Headquarters?

B: There was actually. There was some concern about that, not overtly spoken about a lot, but Bin Laden was certainly aware of the FBI because the Bureau had some investigative success against al Qaeda.

Just kind of a brief and a funny anecdote in an unfunny day: right after the FAA guy stuck his head in and said that the plane was about five minutes out, the brand new HVAC system that had just been installed in the SIOC kicked on, and it literally sounded like a jet taking off.

W: Oh my goodness.

B: It was very loud and everyone was looking at each other around the table and finally Tom Pickard said, "What the hell is that?" It kind of signified a little bit the anxieties that I think all of us were feeling about not knowing where the next attack might strike.

So, it was a moment of reflection. Let's put it that way.

W: So I would assume that in your assignment, if you can call it that per se, was to execute the mandates coming from the Deputy Director and the

Director of the FBI to make sure that somebody had the responsibility to cover their mandates and making sure it got done. Would that be correct?

B: That and keeping them briefed up, giving them information that they needed, you know, things that special assistants are designed to do; keep the boss briefed up and then relay things that he wanted relayed to the right parties.

W: Did you find that you faced any particular challenges in getting that done? I mean beside the fact that we had multiple crime scenes even though the words "crime scene" are probably inappropriate but maybe the same multiple points of attack. Did that cause particular challenges in the investigation as it began to unfold?

B: It did, and I think it took us a little while to organize around what we were learning. We fairly quickly got the subjects, all the nineteen hijackers identified. We then placed them on the appropriate airplanes, and then we had to come up with an organizing principle regarding the follow-on investigation.

Because, remember, at that point we didn't know how wide the conspiracy was, what attacks might follow this attack either later that day or in days to follow. So it wasn't totally a reactive investigation at that point. We were concerned about getting intelligence we needed to discern if anything else was happening.

But organizing the vast amount of information that was coming in very quickly was a challenge. It took us a little while to do, and I remember participating in that process. It was almost like being back on a squad with regular agents but, instead, you're sitting there with Assistant Directors and above and so it was interesting how it unfolded.

W: I would say that this had to be just one of the most incredible experiences that you would have had in your career. You mentioned the people that were already filing into the SIOC, the Operations Center. Did it continue to grow and expand and, if so, how did you maintain order among the number of people coming in there?

B: It expanded significantly, and SIOC at that time was, while relatively new construction, not nearly as big as it needed to be for an event like this. So every computer and desk was used. We had, obviously, representatives from across the Intelligence Community and law enforcement there. If I remember correctly, the investigation continued to be organized around the flights themselves.

With nothing else to go on you have to organize your investigative procedures and game plan somehow, so it seemed to me we did it around the four flights themselves and kind of broke it up and organized SIOC along those lines.

W: How were you able to coordinate the efforts of all the field offices? I would have to assume, that beside Washington and New York and Pittsburgh, which covers Shanksville, Pennsylvania, I would have to think that many of the other field offices were involved in this thing. How did you approach that? Let's put it that way.

B: Yeah, well, I think it was interesting from this standpoint: FBI Headquarters was directly involved in spearheading the World Trade Center and Pentagon investigations which, as you know, is not standard operating procedure. Headquarters traditionally managed from a program standpoint not an actual investigation standpoint.

The attacks in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania were consolidated into a case that was codenamed "PENTTBOM." (a combination of "Pentagon" and "Twin Towers"). I recall some controversy over the name but can't remember the details.

So, the field offices, WFO and New York, were obviously organizing around a case that would flow to those offices. But there was close coordination with the headquarters executives in SIOC.

W: A few days after the 9/11 attacks, we started to see the first introduction of anthrax through the postal system. Do you remember that, and can you kind of put that into perspective as to how that was received at FBI Headquarters?

B: I do recall that. It was almost like pouring salt into the wound because that investigation, on its own, was a high impact, high profile, major case. And, of course, because it was nearly concurrent with the attacks by al Qaeda, we didn't know whether this was coordinated or not. We didn't know if it was part of an ongoing al Qaeda conspiracy and it took awhile to determine that it was actually a separate actor.

But, one of those anthrax envelopes was sent to the FBI among others. I remember that somehow Tom Pickard, the Deputy Director, became directly involved in the anthrax case to the degree where he actually had to go and get swabbed to make sure that he had not been exposed to anthrax.

I don't recall what his potential exposure might have been, but he did have to go get swabbed. I remember him describing for us something that wasn't just a general procedure. It was apparently quite painful and the way he described it made us all thankful that we didn't have to go through it.

W: I could imagine, yes. It might be related to some of the more touching moments of your experience. Can you think of anything else that just kind of got a tear from your heart strings?

B: Well...

W: Hello.

B: Yeah, I'm here. I'm thinking.

W: We can come back. You can just kick that in if you think later on. How about heroic efforts? Did you see anybody going way above and beyond the call of duty and the response from the FBI?

B: Well certainly I recall Special Agent Lenny Hatton of the New York office giving his life that day, because he ran towards danger and not away from it.

B: We recall John O'Neill who had retired from the FBI the Friday before 9/11 and reported to his new job as head of security for the World Trade Center on Monday...only to be killed the next day, trying to rescue people, by the very organization that he spent so many years investigating in the FBI. So that's impactful.

W: Yeah.

B: The emotional thing...I mean it's hard for me to talk about it even now. But everything kind of hit me coming home on the evening of 9/11, finally leaving close to midnight, walking out of FBI Headquarters and being able to smell the smoke from the Pentagon. I hadn't been outside all day. As I made my way home to Ellicott City, Maryland, and drove into the cul-de-sac where I lived, I saw all these candles on the ground that had been lit and flowers.

W: Wow.

B: And the neighborhood had come together spontaneously that night and they pulled my wife and family out to express their appreciation for what

the Bureau must be going through, and it was just an outpouring of support, and it was very touching.

W: I could well imagine that would be the case, yes. Kevin...

B: The best part of all that however, was that all the neighborhood moms kept making chocolate chip cookies and bringing them to our house which I dutifully brought to SIOC every day.

W: You brought all of them to SIOC, Kevin?

B: I may have taken some tax out of it on the way. But we had a lot of chocolate chip cookies in SIOC from my neighborhood for several weeks, so it was great.

W: Okay, very good. You've been very, very enlightening here. As a matter of fact, your sharing of the emotional aspects of this is very moving even to me and, having been through it myself, it's just a different perspective.

I thank you very much. Is there anything else you would like to add to this Kevin?

B: No, thanks for the privilege. I appreciate it.

W: Very good, thank you so much and we'll be concluding now. This is Dave Williams's interview with Kevin Brock on June the 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and we are concluding.