

Where Were You on 9/11?

The VFW reflects on the 21st anniversary of the terror attacks on America

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WASHINGTON — Where were you on 9/11?

It's a question so many of us have repeated over the past two decades. It's a way we relate to one another as we reflect on the day of one of the most horrific attacks on the American people in U.S. history – Sept. 11, 2001. For the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), we join the rest of the country this Sunday in remembering and honoring the lives of so many who were tragically taken from us during the terroristic events that took place in New York City, Washington D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania twenty-one years ago.

Every generation seems to have their own day in history that impacted them. Tragic events like the attack on Pearl Harbor and the assassinations of the President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., were mournful memories etched in everyone's minds at the time. If we were alive then, we remember for the most part where we were, what we were doing and how we heard the news. However, the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, were unlike anything ever seen before because for the first time in history, death and destruction on a massive scale was actually televised and updated in real time.

It was at 8:46 a.m. Eastern Standard Time on that Tuesday morning when the first plane, American Airlines Flight 11, hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. The second plane, United Airlines Flight 175, struck the South Tower of the World Trade Center at 9:03 a.m. News anchors announced that planes were being hijacked and used by terrorists as guided missiles ... the nation was under attack. Thirty-four minutes later, at 9:37 a.m., American Airlines Flight 77, crashes into the Pentagon collapsing part of the building. Then at 9:59 a.m., the burning WTC South Tower collapses. Four minutes later, at 10:03 a.m., United Airlines Flight 93, crashes in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. At 10:28 a.m., the WTC's North Tower collapsed. In just 102 minutes, 19 hijackers would succeed in taking the lives of 2,977 Americans and terrorizing the entire country with the entire world watching in horror.

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Yet, in the midst of this unimaginable tragedy, stories of unbelievable heroism were being reported from every location. Firefighters and law enforcement officers running into the burning World Trade Center buildings, rescuing hundreds of people. Service members leading others through the burning, smoldering Pentagon rubble to safety. Passengers of flight 93 who decided to fight back against hijackers to prevent them getting to their intended target. The selfless sacrifice would come to define that day as much, if not more so than the attacks themselves.

Our world looks much different today. The wars that came after Sept. 11, 2001 are over. While the fight against terrorism still remains, what's left of the persistent conflict in the middle east looks like it too will soon draw to a close. There are men and women entering service that weren't even alive twenty-one years ago. But for those of us who were in uniform or were deciding to join the military, nothing strengthened our resolve to "support and defend" our Constitution, our nation and our way of life more than 9/11. Like the rest of our fellow Americans who were present then, that day changed us forever.

This Patriot Day and National Day of Service and Remembrance, the VFW encourages every American to pause and honor the victims, reflect on the extraordinary courage of first responders and ordinary citizens alike, pay tribute to those who took the fight to the enemy and sacrificed to protect and defend our freedom, and never let Sept. 11, 2001, fade from our memory.

Always remember.