

## MATT RERES

When the Pentagon was attacked on Sept. 11, I was returning to my office two corridors from the impact. As hundreds fled through the corridors, I hurried to my office and found it deserted — safes were open, computers were on, files sat on desks, along with coffee cups still steaming.

I began calling to find out whether our staff was safe. And my phone began ringing. I received countless phone calls and innumerable e-mail messages. All were the same: “How are you? How is everyone there? What can I do to help?” Those questions came from military and civilian offices worldwide — from both the public and private sectors, from people I hadn’t heard from in 25 years.

By the time I left that afternoon, I could barely see 20 feet in front of me because of the smoke. I crawled through corridors as black as Osama’s soul to the center courtyard where I was greeted by firemen,



police, security and FBI agents.

When I got home that evening, my wife told me of the many friends and family who called her throughout the day, asking about me and what they could do to help.

The next morning, I arrived at the Pentagon before light to see the building still burning. Despite the fires, I and the others who reported for duty were of one thought: “To hell with these terrorists — We are Americans!” And with us came other Americans who were not federal employees. They brought to the Pentagon gifts of food, prayers and the constant question, “What can we do to help?”

As terrible a day as Sept. 11 was, it was still my best day as a federal employee because it demonstrated to me with absolute clarity that the American spirit is indomitable, that Americans care about people and America shall prevail.

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