



Office of the Chancellor

September 11, 2001 | 25 Years On

Twenty-five years later, some questions still require no explanation. They are questions that define a generational experience.

Our grandparents asked one another, “*Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?*” Some of our parents remembered exactly where they were when President Kennedy was assassinated. For many of our generation, the defining question remains:

“Where were you on September 11th?”

For me, it was my stateroom aboard the USS PELELIU, moored in Darwin, Australia. We had just completed a week of training ashore, and the Marines and Sailors were on the town, enjoying a night of liberty. About 2000, my deputy knocked on my door and said, “New York is under attack.”

Marines and Sailors streamed back to the ships of the Amphibious Ready Group. Leaders convened our Crisis Action Team, and people glued themselves to the cable television news broadcasts.

Uncertainty about the scope of the attacks, how long they might be sustained, and how widely they might be conducted predominated in those early hours. We were certain, however, that we would be part of any United States response. We were forward deployed, trained, and ready for whatever missions a combatant commander might assign to a Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable).

Within days, we were conducting humanitarian operations in East Timor. By late September, we were in Pakistan, supporting Special Operations Forces. By October, we were the quick reaction force for the initial U.S. raid into Afghanistan—and our first firefight was under our belt. By November, we were 400 miles inland, south of Kandahar, as the first U.S. conventional forces in the conflict.

Within days, partners and allies began arriving, and joint and combined operations against the Taliban and terrorists were in full swing. These and other operations would continue for the next 25 years.

The Global War on Terror colored our collective understanding of what is possible with the help of allies, partners, and that of the interagency. It also shaped the professional lives of an entire generation of military officers, intelligence professionals, diplomats, law enforcement leaders, partners, and allies.



While it is worth remembering the confusion of those first hours and days, it is equally worth remembering the bravery and sacrifice of that day—some of which were known almost immediately, while others took longer to understand.

We visit Shanksville, Pennsylvania, as part of the CISA curriculum for a purpose. The events of the last minutes of Flight 93 are part of the American fabric. They include the deeds of people who, like us, were ready to defend others, even at the cost of their own lives.

For many of us here at CISA, 9/11 was a “summons of the trumpet.”^[i] Some joined the military in response. Others crafted curricula that enabled approaches to the Global War on Terror grounded in theory, practical experience, and sober scholarship about terrorism.

The careers represented here at CISA were forged in the decades that followed 9/11—in campaigns, partnerships, and conflicts that spanned continents and domains. Whether serving in uniform, supporting coalition operations, advising foreign partners, or confronting emerging threats, many of us have spent nearly our entire professional lives responding to the strategic consequences of that morning.

And so, as we mark **9/11, 25 Years On**, we do more than remember the events of a single day. We reflect on the quarter-century that followed: the lessons learned, the sacrifices made, the alliances strengthened, and the evolving character of conflict itself.

For a community dedicated to understanding irregular warfare, there may be no more relevant anniversary.

Twenty-five years on, the question remains important—not simply because of where we were that day, but because of what we have done since.

The story of 9/11 is not simply a story about a moment of attack. It is the story of a generation of leaders who answered the call that followed.

Here at CISA, we see that story still being written.

Gregg P. Olson, Chancellor

^[i] The phrase “**Summons of the Trumpet**” is most famously associated with the 1978 book *Summons of the Trumpet: U.S.–Vietnam in Perspective* by **Dave Richard Palmer**. While it might sound Biblical, it is not!