



# 2nd Battalion 1st Infantry Chapter, Americal Division Veterans Association (ADVA)



WEBSITE: [www.b-2-1-196lib.com](http://www.b-2-1-196lib.com)

Volume 7

“A Soldier Once And Always”

January 2017

**Commanders Corner:** Well, finally a respite from all of the holiday hoopla of November and December. Hopefully all of you enjoyed your holidays and your families and friends. I don't know about your local weather but, it's been colder than a well diggers elbow around here. I'm finally pretty much over my bout with pneumonia and think I need some serious sunshine. Thinking I need that time in Florida and Thailand I talked about in last month's newsletter. I haven't been to Thailand in a couple of years so I'm trying to work out the logistics and dollars. The US Air Force did a hell of a job building golf courses over there while we were humping the bush. Our guys flying the unfriendly skies over Vietnam covering our asses deserved whatever they could get in the way of recreation when they got back to base after a long day. The last couple of times I was there, I stayed in a hotel that was started by a couple of American flyboys after they got done with their service hitches. If you ever get a hankering for the distinctive aroma and atmosphere of Asia, I'd suggest Pattaya. It's about an hour drive south of Bangkok. I should be getting all the information regarding the 2017 Americal reunion soon and will get it on the web site and in the newsletter as soon as I receive it. I do know it will be held in Minneapolis, MN and will be August 23-26. The base of operations will be at the Hilton Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport at the Mall of the Americas. I'm glad it will be in August instead of in the winter. It gets down right cold there. We'll be having our officer elections during our annual chapter meeting up there so, get your candidate nominations ready. Up for grabs are Commander, Vice-commander and Secretary/Treasurer. By the way, I won't be throwing my hat in the ring; after 6+ years of being the Grand Dragon Exalted Poobah Commander, I think it's time for a change. I had some bad news regarding one of our fellow members and comrade. Anthony "Tony" Muklewicz (B 2/1) passed away in December from cancer. Those of you who were acquainted with Tony know what a truly good guy he was and we send our condolences to his wife, Karen, and their family. We would like to welcome new members; Jerry D. Jeter (D 2/1) and Clarence Phinisee (A 2/1) and associate lifetime member John Henningson (3/82<sup>nd</sup> Artillery). John was a liaison officer attached to HHC 2/1 in '70-'71).



**Wreaths Across America:** Twenty-five years ago, rather than letting the 5,000 extra wreaths he had in stock go to waste, Morrill Worcester, a Maine businessman, donated them as remembrance wreaths in a gesture of his appreciation for the sacrifice of military service veterans. Those initial wreaths were placed at Arlington National Cemetery, and the effort has grown each year. Nationally, the 2016 Wreaths Across America Day effort placed 1.2 million wreaths at 1,228 cemeteries around the world. Wreaths Across America accomplished this by partnering with like-minded organizations that share common missions and goals to build greater awareness of the service and sacrifice that men and women in uniform, and their families inherently render. There is no cost to attend the annual ceremony or participate in Wreaths Across America. There are a number of ways for volunteers to get involved. "It's really easy to get involved," Pitts said. "Donations are always welcome, and anyone can sponsor a wreath." The Wreaths Across America has a Face book page. Wreaths Across America is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. For more detailed information about this initiative, the parent organization history and to find out how to sponsor a wreath, visit [www.WreathsAcrossAmerica.org](http://www.WreathsAcrossAmerica.org).

**Pres. Approves US Honor for Veterans of WWII Spies Agency:** President Obama has signed legislation that bestows one of the nation's highest civilian awards on veterans of the American World War II spy agency founded by a New Yorker. The OSS Congressional Gold Medal Act signed this week honors veterans of the Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the CIA and today's special operations forces. OSS veterans and members of the Virginia-based OSS Society had fought for years to get the special recognition for the spy agency, which ran intelligence networks and resistance operations behind enemy lines in Europe and Asia. The OSS was organized and led by Buffalo native Gen. William "Wild Bill" Donovan, a Medal of Honor recipient during World War I.

**Chuck**

*Keep safe and may the bond of battle never be broken!*



**VA To Eliminate 7 Compensable Disabilities December 12, 2016:** Not all service-connected medical conditions and injuries are incurred or exacerbated in the performance of military duties. For example, a qualifying injury can occur when a service member was at home or on leave, and a qualifying medical condition, such as multiple sclerosis, can develop independently of a service member's military duties. In 2015, VA paid 716,000 veterans a total of \$3.7 billion, the Congressional Budget Office estimates, to compensate for seven of the medical conditions that, according to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), military service is unlikely to cause or aggravate. Those conditions are arteriosclerotic heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, Crohn's disease, hemorrhoids, multiple sclerosis, osteoarthritis, and uterine fibroids. An argument in support of this option is that it would make the disability compensation system for military veterans more comparable to civilian systems. Few civilian employers offer long-term disability benefits, and among those that do, benefits do not typically compensate individuals for all medical problems that developed during employment. An argument against this option is that military service is not like a civilian job; instead, it confers unique benefits to society and imposes extraordinary risks on service members. By that logic, the pay and benefits that service members receive should reflect the hardships of military life, including compensating veterans who become disabled in any way during their military service.

Source: U.S. Congressional Budget Office

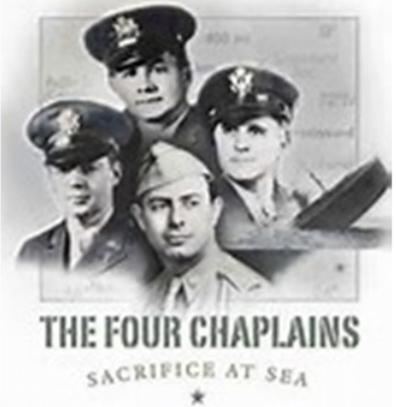
**Average BAH Rate Set to Increase for 2017, BAS Unchanged:** The Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rate will increase an average of \$41 per month nationwide Jan. 1, even as the calculation used to determine it shrinks the amount of housing costs it is designed to cover. BAH is recalculated annually using a snapshot of housing costs in each region. For 2017, the rate is designed to cover only 97 percent of troops' housing costs -- a one percent drop from last year and the third step in a congressional plan to reduce rates by five percent over five years. The rate also is no longer designed to cover the cost of rental insurance, a change that started in 2015. The Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS) rate for 2017 remains unchanged from 2016 at \$253.63 for officers and \$368.29 for enlisted personnel. BAS is calculated based on the average price of food as measured by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. BAH and BAS changes will be reflected in troops' Jan. 15 pay.

**Pentagon to Relieve Debt of Most Guardsmen:** Defense Department officials told lawmakers they hope to forgive about 90 percent of cases involving thousands of California National Guard members that auditors say received improper bonuses during the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. "It is my hope that by the end of the year, we will have something between 1,000 and 2,000 cases total out of the universe of 17,000 that are subject to review," Peter Levine, undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, told members of the House Armed Services Committee. Levine was among Pentagon and Army National Guard officials who testified at the Dec. 7 hearing to tell lawmakers how the Pentagon plans to resolve what some are calling a betrayal of the troops by next summer and prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future. "Compensation, whether it is a bonus for a service agreement or regular pay, is an obligation to our service members and their families that they should not have to worry about," said Rep. Joseph Heck.

**Try to make at least three people smile each day.**

## The Story of the four Army Chaplains:

The Dorchester a civilian cruise ship was built in 1926. It was commissioned by the U.S. Army in February 1942 and converted into a troop transport vessel. The ship departed from New York City on Jan. 23, 1943, carrying 904 people. The majority on board were army troops, but there was also a unit of Navy Armed Guards and a few civilian passengers. The destination was the Army Command Base at Narsarsuaq in southern Greenland. On the evening of Feb. 2, 1943, the convoy was about 150 miles from Greenland. The ships' crews were put on high alert when the Coast Guard picked up a German submarine on sonar. The soldiers on the Dorchester were ordered to sleep fully clothed, including wearing their life jackets. It is unlikely that many complied because their sleeping quarters were so stuffy. At 12:55 a.m. the Dorchester was hit by a torpedo launched from German submarine U-223. It exploded well below the waterline, near the engine room. The ship's lights went out immediately, and radio contact was cut off. The night was pitch black with no moon, and there were no flares or rockets to provide light until the Coast Guard cutters arrived. Men panicked in the total darkness, and many were trapped on the lower decks. Several lifeboats were smashed in the explosion. The ship listed sharply to starboard, preventing some lifeboats from being deployed, and others capsized due to overloading. There weren't enough life rafts to go around. The Dorchester sank, bow first, in about 25 minutes. Of the 904 men aboard, only 230 survived. Many of the men who perished succumbed to hypothermia within minutes in the 34 degree water. The four chaplains went down with the ship. They gave their lives so that others would have a chance to live. Within the next several months, their dramatic story became widely known. The chaplains "made their way on deck and began circulating among the troops, encouraging them, praying with them and assisting them into lifeboats and life-jackets...Dorchester survivors credit the chaplains with the saving of many lives by their success in persuading confused men to overcome their fear and not plunge overboard...Many of the survivors recalled seeing the chaplains on the forward deck distributing lifebelts. When the lifebelt supply ran out each chaplain removed his own priceless lifejacket and gave it to another man...The ship was sinking by the bow when the men in the water and in lifeboats saw the chaplains link arms and raise their voices in prayer. They were still on the deck together, praying, when the stricken ship made her final plunge." On Dec. 19, 1944, the "Four Chaplains" were posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and the Distinguished Service Cross.



**V**A to Let Vets Pre-Select Cemetery Burials Before Death: A rule change at the Veterans Affairs Department will allow veterans to apply for burial in national cemeteries before their death, rather than requiring family members to apply on their behalf after it. Veteran burial benefits previously were approved at the "time of need." For families, that meant waiting until after the veteran died to apply for the benefits via fax or email by sending in a copy of the veteran's DD-214 or separation documents and then following up by phone. The rule change instead allows veterans to be approved for burial in a VA national cemetery "pre-need," or before death, through a form submitted by fax, email or mail. The form can be filled out by the veteran or by someone else on his or her behalf. More than four million people are buried in VA cemeteries. Burial locations are assigned based on availability at the time of need, VA officials said. Although veterans cannot reserve a gravesite, they can indicate on the form a cemetery preference. Doing so allows VA officials to predict need at cemeteries, and may help inform decisions for those choosing a burial site after the veteran's death, officials said. The predetermination process qualifies veterans for burial in 135 cemeteries and 33 soldiers' lots operated by the VA nationwide. The process does not include Arlington National Cemetery, which is operated by the U.S. Army and uses a different application system. After receiving the burial benefits application, the VA will provide written notice of its decision regarding eligibility, officials said in a release. The decision and supporting documents will then be stored electronically by the VA to make burial arrangements faster when they are needed, they said. The change is an easy way for the VA to simplify the burial process for grieving families, officials with the Veterans of Foreign Wars said, and allow veterans to put their affairs in order. "We think it's something that's a no-nonsense, easy solution to ease the burden as people enter the later years of their lives," said Patrick Murray, an associate director for the VFW's national legislative service. "We tell people to be proactive, but in this [the VA said], 'Oops, you can't do this, you have to wait until you die,' " he said. "We view this as a common sense solution for a problem we're glad is being taken care of." Officials with the American Legion agreed. "A predetermination is the right thing to do. It allows the veteran and their family a small measure of comfort at a time when they can use any comfort they can get," Lou Cell, the Legion's national director for veterans affairs and rehabilitation, said in a statement. "The American Legion reviewed this policy when they were recommending these changes several months ago and assured the VA they had the American Legion's full support," he added. In addition to burial in a national cemetery, the VA provides most veterans who were not dishonorably discharged with a government headstone or marker, a burial flag and a presidential memorial certificate after death. Some veterans' survivors also qualify for burial allowances, designed to cover some burial and funeral costs. Predetermination forms can be submitted by fax to 1-855-840-8299, email Eligibility.PreNeed@va.gov or mail to the National Cemetery Scheduling Office, P.O. Box 510543, St. Louis, MO 63151, according to the VA.

Karen Muklewicz, wife of Anthony (Tony) Muklewicz, informed us Tony had passed away Dec.22, 2016. Many members knew him. He was a good friend. I had kept in touch with him then lost track. His wife told me that he battled cancer also known as agent orange the last 2 years. Just wanted to let you guys know. May He Rest in Peace.

Jesse Mendoza

**I**n Bashing Air Force One Costs, Trump Targets Defense Spending: In bashing plans for a potential \$4 billion program to upgrade the Air Force One presidential aircraft, Republican President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday seemed to signal a willingness to target excessive defense spending once in office. "Boeing is building a brand new 747 Air Force One for future presidents, but costs are out of control, more than \$4 billion," he tweeted. "Cancel order!" The remarks caught many industry observers by surprise. After all, he proposed a Reagan-like military buildup during his campaign. And the timing of his comments are also noteworthy. They came the day the Aerospace Industries Association — the defense lobby — was holding its annual holiday luncheon outside Washington, D.C., and a day after The Washington Post broke a story about how Pentagon leaders downplayed a study that showed the department could save upwards of \$125 billion over five years by reducing overhead and other wasteful spending. The Chicago-based aerospace giant was quick to respond to Trump's tweet, noting that it has only received a fraction of that amount for preliminary work on the program, which isn't expected to deliver a new plane until 2023. "We are currently under contract for \$170 million to help determine the capabilities of these complex military aircraft that serve the unique requirements of the president of the United States," Todd Blecher, a spokesman for Boeing, said in an emailed statement. "We look forward to working with the U.S. Air Force on subsequent phases of the program allowing us to deliver the best planes for the president at the best value for the American taxpayer," he added. The Air Force in May authorized Boeing to submit preliminary designs for the new 747-8s to replace the current VC-25A as part of the Presidential Aircraft Recapitalization, or PAR, program. The 747-8 is the latest model for Boeing's 747 aircraft. The service wants Boeing to modify two of the aircraft to include electrical power upgrades, a mission communication system, a medical facility, executive interior, a self-defense system, and autonomous ground operations capabilities. Speaking to reporters on Air Force One en route to Florida, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said the current Air Force One is "nearing the end of its projected life" and described the technical requirements for the upgraded aircraft as "unique." "I think the American people would expect that future U.S. presidents would benefit from unique and upgraded capabilities while they are traveling and representing the interests of the United States around the world," he said. Earnest also said the figure referenced by Trump doesn't "appear to reflect the nature of the financial agreement." Todd Harrison, director of the aerospace security project and defense budget analysis at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank in Washington, D.C., said the proposed cost for the program includes \$2.9 billion in funding for research, development, test and evaluation through fiscal 2021, as well as about \$1 billion in funding for procurement.

### HERE DEAD WE LIE

Because we did not choose  
To live and shame the land  
From which we sprung.  
Life, to be sure,  
Is nothing much to lose,  
But young men think it is,  
And we were young.

The poem by A E Housman

**Nurse Practitioners to Treat Vets Without Doctor Supervision:** The Veterans Affairs Department beginning next month will allow certain nurse practitioners to treat veterans without the supervision of doctors across the agency for the first time. The move is designed in part to shorten wait times for patients who are seeking treatment in underserved areas with physician shortages, according to a rule published Wednesday in the Federal Register. The regulatory change permits three types of nurse practitioners -- certified nurse practitioner (CNP), clinical nurse specialist (CNS), and certified nurse-midwife (CNM) -- "to practice to the full extent of their education, training and certification, without the clinical supervision or mandatory collaboration of physicians," it states. While 21 states and the District of Columbia already grant nurse practitioners so-called "full practice authority," the rule marks the first time the VA established a nationwide framework for such specialists to provide direct care to vets throughout its system. More than 5,000 nurse practitioners already provide clinical assessments, order and interpret diagnostic tests, make diagnoses and provide other treatments at VA facilities, according to the American Association of Nurse Practitioners. As it stands now, though, many states require NPs to work under a "collaborative agreement" with a physician, meaning nurses working at VA facilities without "full practice authority" don't enjoy direct access to patients. The rule, slated to take effect Jan. 13, "permits VA to use its health care resources more effectively and in a manner that is consistent with the role of APRNs in the non-VA health care sector, while maintaining the patient-centered, safe, high-quality health care that veterans receive from VA," it states. Organizations representing nurses and veterans welcomed the decision, while a group representing doctors opposed it.

**New War Rules Emphasize Need to Avoid Civilian Casualties:** The Pentagon has revised its rules of war to put more emphasis on the need to reduce civilian casualties and avoid "excessive harm" to people and property when planning and conducting attacks. The changes to the Law of War manual include a new section that lays out the need for commanders to weigh any potential military advantage gained by an attack against the potential for collateral civilian injuries or deaths. And it says the military should take "feasible precautions" when planning and conducting attacks. Precautions laid out in the manual reflect what commanders have been doing on the battlefield, including in Iraq and Syria, amid increased scrutiny of civilian casualties in the fight. But the changes formalize the current policies, updating the document that was released in June 2015. The updated manual was released Tuesday. Protecting civilians in armed conflict is critical, and it's important that our legal guidance is clear and practical," said Defense Department General Counsel Jennifer O'Connor. "This version of the manual provides greater clarity and also reflects important developments, such as the president's recent executive order on civilian casualties." The new version provides more details on the need to identify areas where military targets are more likely to be located and civilians less likely to be present. And it lays out examples of when the military has made decisions to forego an attack because of potential civilian casualties

**My grandson was visiting one day when he asked, "Grandpa, do you know how you and God are alike?" I mentally polished my halo and I said, "No, how are we alike?" "You're both old," he replied**

**VA Drug Prices to Change Feb. 27: Prescription drugs received through** the Department of Veterans Affairs for non-service connected conditions could cost many veterans less under a new rule that kicks in Feb. 27. Currently, the VA charges veterans who do not qualify for free health care \$8 or \$9 for a 30-day or less drug supply, depending on their category. Those costs were set to increase over time based on a Medical Consumer Price Index calculation. The new plan, however, will categorize drugs into tiers, similar to how medication is handled by Tricare. Tier 1 medications, described as "preferred generics," will cost \$5 for a 30-day or less supply. Tier 2, or "non-preferred generics," will cost \$8 for a 30-day or less supply. Tier 3, or "brand name," will cost \$11 for a 30-day or less supply. Officials estimate that most users will see a 10 to 50 percent reduction in the cost of the drugs they receive from the VA, according to the rule proposal posted to the federal register early this year. "By our estimate, 94 percent of co-payment eligible veterans would experience no cost increase, and 80 percent would realize a savings of between \$1 and \$5 per 30-day equivalent of medications," the proposal states. A series of seven criteria is used by the VA to determine which generic drugs are on the lower-cost "preferred generics" list, and which drugs are "non-preferred generics" and cost \$3 more per 30-day or less supply, according to the rule proposal. For example, generic drugs typically used to treat a common "chronic condition," such as hypertension, will be on the list, while topical creams, products used to treat musculoskeletal conditions, antihistamines and steroid-containing generics would not because they are typically used on an "as-needed basis," the document says. "VA estimates that at least 50 percent of all billable prescriptions would be in Tier 1, with no more than 35 percent in Tier 2, and approximately 15 percent in Tier 3," the rule proposal states. The annual drug co-payment cap for veterans in priority groups two through seven is \$700. Veterans who meet certain qualifications, including a disability rating above 50 percent or who qualify as low-income, can receive free health care from the VA and are not subject to the co-pay costs. *This article has been edited to reflect the correct date the price change begins after a document provided by the VA cited an incorrect start date. The correct date is Feb. 27.*

**Reservists to Get Equal Death Benefits Under Bill:** National Guard and Reserve members would receive the same death benefits as their active-duty counterparts under a bill expected to pass Congress this week. As it stands now, family members of Guardsmen and Reservists killed during inactive training receive a much smaller monthly payment than the Active component. In addition, survivors of active-duty members qualify for an additional payment designed to get around a rule that blocks them from receiving full death benefit payouts from both the Defense Department and the Veterans Affairs Department. But the allowance doesn't extend to those of Guardsmen and reservists killed on in-active training. The legislation includes language championed by Rep. Marc Veasey, a Texas Democrat, to fix this inequity. The bill was approved by the House and is expected to pass the Senate this week before heading to President Barack Obama's desk for his signature. "This long overdue change will now make available equal survivor benefits for all who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our country and will hopefully alleviate some of the financial stress experienced by our military families."

Keep praying for the recovery of **Don Hicks**. He fell from a ladder in October broken bones and screws were used to repair. He had them removed recently and is undergoing physical therapy.

**Ron (Ace) LeClair** just beat the dreaded **Prostrate Cancer**. He has been undergoing chemo treatments for over a year.

## **HERE'S A STORY OF 9 / 11 THAT I DID NOT KNOW, AND, I DOUBT MOST OF YOU KNEW...**

Pilots often claim that the two worst things that can happen to a pilot are:

- (1) Walking out to the aircraft knowing this will be your last flight or;
- (2) Walking out to the aircraft NOT knowing this will be your last flight.

This pilot's story adds another possibility.... The events of September 11, 2001, put two F-16 pilots into the sky with orders to bring down United Flight 93.

Late that Tuesday morning, Lt. Heather "Lucky" Penney was on a runway at Andrews Air Force Base and ready to fly. She had her hand on the throttle of an F-16 and she had her orders, "Bring down United Airlines Flight 93." The day's fourth hijacked airliner seemed to be hurtling toward Washington. Penney, one of the first two combat pilots in the air that morning, was told to stop it.

"I genuinely believed that was going to be the last time I took off," says Maj. Heather "Lucky" Penney, remembering the September 11 attacks and the initial U.S. reaction. The one thing she didn't have as she roared into the crystalline sky was live ammunition.... or missiles.... or anything at all to throw at a hostile aircraft.... except her own plane. So that was the plan. Because the surprise attacks were unfolding, in that innocent age, faster than they could arm war planes, Penney and her commanding officer planned to fly their jets straight into a Boeing 757. "We wouldn't be shooting it down. We'd be ramming the aircraft," Penney recalls of her charge that day. "I would essentially be a kamikaze pilot."

For years, Penney, one of the first generation of female combat pilots in the country, gave no interviews about her experiences on September 11 (which included, eventually, escorting Air Force One back into Washington's suddenly highly restricted airspace). But 14 years later, she is reflecting on one of the lesser-told tales of that endlessly examined morning: How the first counterpunch the U.S. Military prepared to throw at the attackers was effectively a suicide mission. "We had to protect the airspace any way we could," she said last week in her office at Lockheed Martin, where she is a director in the F-35 program. Penney, now a major but is still a petite blonde with a Colgate grin, is no longer a combat flier. She flew two tours in Iraq and she serves as a part-time National Guard pilot, mostly hauling VIPs around in a military Gulfstream. She takes the stick of her own vintage 1941 Taylorcraft tail-dragger whenever she can. But none of her thousands of hours in the air quite compare with the urgent rush of launching on what was supposed to be a one-way flight to a midair collision. First of her kind!

She was a rookie in the autumn of 2001, the first female F-16 pilot they'd ever had at the 121st Fighter Squadron of the D.C. Air National Guard. She had grown up smelling jet fuel. Her father flew jets in Vietnam and still races them. Penney got her pilot's license when she was a literature major at Purdue. She planned to be a teacher. But during a graduate program in American studies, Congress opened up combat aviation to women and Penney was nearly first in line. "I signed up immediately," she says. "I wanted to be a fighter pilot like my dad." On that Tuesday, they had just finished two weeks of air combat training in Nevada. They were sitting around a briefing table when someone looked in to say a plane had hit the World Trade Center in New York. When it happened once, they assumed it was some yahoo in a Cessna. When it happened again, they knew it was war.

But the surprise was complete. In the monumental confusion of those first hours, it was impossible to get clear orders. Nothing was ready. The jets were still equipped with dummy bullets from the training mission. As remarkable as it seems now, there were no armed aircraft standing by and no system in place to scramble them over Washington. Before that morning, all eyes were looking outward, still scanning the old Cold War threat paths for planes and missiles coming over the polar ice cap. "There was no perceived threat at the time, especially one coming from the homeland like that," says Col. George Degnon, vice commander of the 113th Wing at Andrews. "It was a little bit of a helpless feeling, but we did everything humanly possible to get the aircraft armed and in the air. It was amazing to see people react."

A third plane hit the Pentagon, and almost at once came word that a fourth plane could be on the way, maybe more. The jets would be armed within an hour, but somebody had to fly now, weapons or no weapons. "Lucky, you're coming with me," barked Col. Marc Sasseville. They were gearing up in the pre-flight life-support area when Sasseville, struggling into his flight suit, met her eye. "I'm going to go for the cockpit," Sasseville said. She replied without hesitating, "I'll take the tail." It was a plan ..... and a pact. 'Let's go!'

She climbed in, rushed to power up the engine, screamed for her ground crew to pull the chocks. The crew chief still had his headphones plugged into the fuselage as she nudged the throttle forward. He ran along pulling safety pins from the jet as it moved forward. She muttered a fighter pilot's prayer - "God, don't let me [expletive] up"- and followed Sasseville into the sky. They screamed over the smoldering Pentagon, heading northwest at more than 400 mph, flying low and scanning the clear horizon. Her commander had time to think about the best place to hit the enemy. "We don't train to bring down airliners," said Sasseville, now stationed at the Pentagon. "If you just hit the engine, it could still glide and you could guide it to a target. My thought was the cockpit or the wing."

He also thought about his ejection seat. Would there be an instant just before impact? "I was hoping to do both at the same time," he says. "It probably wasn't going to work, but that's what I was hoping." Penney worried about missing the target if she tried to bail out. "If you eject and your jet soars through without impact..." she trails off, the thought of failing more dreadful than the thought of dying.

But she didn't have to die. She didn't have to knock down an airliner full of kids and salesmen and girlfriends. They did that themselves. It would be hours before Penney and Sasseville learned that United 93 had already gone down in Pennsylvania, an insurrection by hostages willing to do just what the two Guard pilots had been willing to do: Anything, and everything.

"The real heroes are the passengers on Flight 93 who were willing to sacrifice themselves," Penney says. "I was just an accidental witness to history." She and Sasseville flew the rest of the day, clearing the airspace, escorting the president, looking down onto a city that would soon be sending them to war. She's a single mom of two girls now. She still loves to fly. And she still thinks often of that extraordinary ride down the runway a decade ago. "I genuinely believed that was going to be the last time I took off," she says.