

Army War College students share their 9/11 remembrances

By Elena Patton 10 September 2021



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During a break, they heard the news. “There has been some kind of accident. A plane hit one of

the towers,” said Brown, remembering. “By the next break, the world was upside-down because it wasn’t an accident.”

“As law enforcement officers, when something happens, or there is a fire, we are the ones that run to it, not away from it. We felt helpless, being so far away.”

Today, Brown works in the Office of Field Operation for the U.S Customs and Border Protection. The agency was reorganized under the Department of Homeland Security, a department created in response to the 9/11 attacks.

She was on the job when the Department of Homeland Security was established on March 1, 2003.

“9/11 became a pivot point for people to be galvanized around a mission common spirit towards something that was certainly bigger than yourself, said Brown.

“It sure strengthened a lot of relationships. I am confident today that the partnership and collaboration, particularly the way we work at the federal level, is completely different from the way it was.

“We are all moving in the same direction because we understand what is at stake. There is a lot of comfort in knowing the strength behind those partnerships,” Brown.

Col. Troy Alexander was an Infantry officer assigned to Fort Riley, Kansas approaching the end of his service obligation in September 2001 and had already submitted his paperwork.

Alexander was talking about his next, post-military steps with a colleague—his NCO and mentor—when they heard the news of the attacks.

Immediately following the conversation, Alexander went to his battalion commander to stop the paperwork.

“I had spent my entire career preparing for—something, and I didn’t believe it was the right thing to do to leave the Army when something had actually come,” said Alexander, who spoke of the sheer magnitude of the attack.

“The one thing that was certain to me, that at a time of uncertainty, I needed to be in the realm or in the right form to make some type of difference,” said Alexander.

Looking back, Alexander spoke of interactions with international partners.

“Since 9/11, I have had great opportunities to interact with our international partners and hear their perspective, which has enriched me as a professional . . . so I can be a better leader.

“[When] constantly interacting with our international partners, it helps me understand that those relationships we build throughout the world are impactful . . . Without the support of our international partners, we couldn’t achieve anything,” said Alexander.

Army Lt. Col. Whitney Jensen was a young lieutenant deployed to Kosovo on September 11, 2001, when she and a New York-based military police company watched events unfold on a small television screen.

Now a student in the Army War College Class of 2022, she recalls empathizing with her unit members as they watched NYC their first-responder colleagues perish at the World Trade Center.

It was not until two days later that Jensen realized she had suffered her own loss. Her aunt Suzanne Calley was on Flight 77, the plane that crashed into the Pentagon.

Fourteen years later, Jensen was stationed at the Pentagon. That is the first time she went to the Flight 77 memorial, she said.

“Every day that I walked into the Pentagon . . . past that memorial, I was reminded of the service I had done and why we were there,” said Jensen.

While stationed there, she and her twin sister held a joint promotion ceremony at the memorial chapel that is part of the memorial, in remembrance of all the ‘Aunt Suzannes’.

Her recent assignment as the New York City Army Recruiting Commander gave her an opportunity to connect with those who had gone through similar loss.

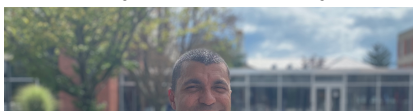
Jensen recognizes that a whole generation of service members was involved in the mission in Afghanistan and have no memory of 9/11.

“Yet, they are part of this link of ‘We will never forget’,” said Jensen. “We continue to show ways to pay homage to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice.”

“You start by telling stories like this,” she said.

“Everything we have done in the last 20 years when we talk about the military or talk about policy and strategy vis-à-vis terrorism or extremism ties back to 9/11 in some form or fashion,” said Jensen.

“The events of the last few weeks only underscore how 9/11 will continue to shape operations, and policy and diplomacy and military operations for generations to come.”





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Stationed at the Pentagon in 2015, Lt. Col. Whitney Jensen (left) and her sister Lt. Col. Asheleigh Gellner (right), held a joint promotion ceremony at the memorial chapel that is part of the Flight 77 memorial, in remembrance of their Aunt Suzanne.