

History recorded in art

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Two large paintings portraying what Air National Guard pilots saw as they first flew over the flaming Pentagon and the smoking World Trade Center towers last Sept. 11 were unveiled by the Air Force on September's first Wednesday at the Pentagon.

Secretary of the Air Force Dr. James Roche and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. John Jumper praised the paintings for capturing the tragic event in American history, and the members of the North Dakota and Massachusetts Air National Guard who scrambled skyward to defend their country.

Jumper said that the paintings, which will hang in Corridor 9 of the Pentagon, illustrate the horror and spirit of the moment.



Senator Dorgan speaks during the Air Force unveiling.

"In those airplanes were pilots who had to contemplate doing the unthinkable," Jumper said. "It's what all of us are trained to do, but none of us ever thought we might have to do someday. And that is, to deal with the imponderable situation of having to confront one of our own airplanes, in our own skies, filled with our own citizens."

Major Dean Eckmann from North Dakota's 119th Fighter Wing is the pilot in the painting of an F-16 jet fighter making a low pass over the Pentagon about five minutes after a hijacked airliner crashed into the west side. That painting is titled "First Pass, Defenders Over Washington."

"This is like looking at a picture. It's just like I saw it," marveled Eckmann who said he was vectored to the Pentagon after taking off from Langley Air Force Base on coastal Virginia where the unit nicknamed the "Happy Hooligans" maintains an alert detachment.

Lieutenant Colonel Tim Duffy from Massachusetts' 102nd Fighter Wing, based at Otis Air National Guard Base on Cape Cod, is the pilot in the painting of an F-15 banking left over the smoking towers of the World Trade Center in New York City before they collapsed. That painting is titled "Ground Zero, Eagles on Station."

"The whole morning was very surreal," said Duffy, a pilot for 19 years and a veteran of Desert Storm. "It felt like we were in the middle of a bad movie. Here we were flying combat air patrols over Manhattan. Never in our wildest dreams did we ever picture ourselves doing that."

The artist, Rick Herter of Kalamazoo, Mich., presented the 75 by 44-inch paintings to the Air Force one week before the first anniversary of the terrorist attacks.

The paintings, sponsored by Rolls-Royce North America and Boeing Integrated Defense Systems, are now part of the Air Force Art Collection.

Herter said the paintings are tributes to the military men and women who put in long hours defending America.

"Most of us go to bed each night and don't give those people a second thought," he said. "We live in a country that has been safe and secure for so long, and we have taken it for granted because our warriors are so good at what they do."

"It's very appropriate that these paintings are featured here at the Pentagon," Herter added, "because it is this building and many of the individuals in this building that bears the scars of that morning."

Other members of the Air Guard wings, among the first members of the American military to respond to the crisis, were also



General William J. Begert, commander, of Pacific Air Forces, and air component commander for the commander in chief, U.S. Pacific Command, Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii details the paintings of the F-16 over the Pentagon to Senator Byron L. Dorgan of South Dakota.



An F-15 fighter of the 102nd Fighter Wing, Massachusetts Air National Guard, flies over the World Trade Center in this painting by Rick Herter.

present when the paintings were displayed for the first time.

Those from the North Dakota wing included two other pilots, Maj. Brad Derrig and Capt. Craig Borgstrom, as well as Tech. Sergeants Jay Jonson, Tom Lawrence and Brad Jernberg, the crew chiefs who launched the jet fighters from Langley.

Others from the Massachusetts Air Guard wing were Maj. Dan Nash, the pilot who flew with Duffy, and Master Sgt. Wing Ng and Staff Sgt. Jim Stiers, the two crew chiefs.

"It's a once in a lifetime honor to be invited to something like this by the Secretary of the Air Force," said Lawrence, who had previously experienced the horror of terrorism.

He was serving with the active Air Force in Saudi Arabia when the Khobar Towers were bombed in the military complex near Dhahran and 19 American servicemen were killed on June 25, 1996.

"The training kicked in when the horn went off and we did our job to launch those planes," recalled Lawrence about the memorable morning of Sept. 11. "We didn't have time to reflect about why we were doing this until after the planes had taken off. Then it all set in."

This article can be found online at: <http://www.ngb.army.mil/onguard/31/10/article.asp?aid=1318>