



PENTAGON FORCE PROTECTION AGENCY  
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

## PRESS RELEASE

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### PENTAGON ANTI-TERRORISM, FORCE PROTECTION: **Antiterrorism Officer, Zelma Owens**

*Story and Photos by Paul Taylor, PFPA Public Affairs*

“It was a loud boom and the building shook. I thought somebody had pushed one of those big safes and knocked it over, and I thought ‘Why would somebody do that?’” said Zelma Owens recalling where she was on Sept. 11, 2001 when the Pentagon came under attack by terrorists.

A uniformed officer with the Defense Protective Service at the time, she was in a hallway of Federal Office Building Two. “Then everybody started coming out of their offices screaming ‘We’ve been hit! We’ve been hit!’” she said.

For Owens, that was the beginning of a long series of days with little rest spent helping secure the site, establishing a force protection perimeter, and managing the massive influx of investigators, rescuers and others involved with the recovery effort. It also placed her firmly on a career path that led her to her current job.

Today, Owens still works for the Pentagon Force Protection Agency (PFPA). However, she has traded in her uniform for civilian attire serving in the Antiterrorism/Force Protection Directorate as an antiterrorism officer (ATO).

“We act as liaisons to the leased facilities,” explained Owens. “We advise them on their antiterrorism plans. That means helping them conduct vulnerability assessments, threat assessments, and criticality assessments.

“For me, it’s actually helping people to go through the process of determining how they are going to respond to certain types of emergencies. That’s what I like about the job.”

In addition to her duties as an ATO which make her responsible for developing and maintaining the AT/FP plans for more than 20 Department of Defense (DoD) leased facilities, Owens also contributes to the AT/FP directorate mission by serving as AT/FP rep to the training directorate for table top exercises.

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**AT Officer, Zelma Owens**  
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“Zelma is one of my budding super stars,” said AT/FP Director Jim Pelkofski. “The more I get to know her and the more I learn her talents; the more I lean on her and the more tasks and responsibilities I push her way. I’ve very much placed her in an operational role within the organization because I see that kind of talent in her. I really think highly of her; she has a great attitude; she has a great level of knowledge!”

It’s knowledge earned on the job since starting with the Pentagon Police in 1997. Prior to Sept. 11, 2001, she had become a liaison from the Police Department to AT/FP.

“That was my first experience with AT/FP and my interest grew,” she said.

She said that growth occurred to a large degree in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attack.

“We had to identify guard positions, define how many officers were going to work each post, what their hours would be, and we had to do it quickly,” she said. “That was my first experience in helping to develop mitigation measures for an AT plan.”

She went on to earn two promotions within PPD making it to the rank of Lieutenant and becoming responsible for random antiterrorism measures on the reservation. Then in 2006 she interviewed for and was hired into her current position with AT/FP.

It is a job she’s very interested in and one she’s passionate about. All you have to do is ask her why she thinks it’s important.

“Saving lives,” she said. “I’m in the business of saving lives.”

**- PFPA -**

**NOTE TO MEDIA:** Below thumbnail photos are available as high-resolution .jpg files upon request.

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Zelma Owens poses for a photo at the Pentagon Memorial. She holds a picture she keeps on the wall of her office of herself with then Defense Protective Service Director and Chief John Jester (left) and DPS AT/FP Robert Guzzo reviewing AT/FP mitigation measures for the Pentagon in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attack.

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