



9/11: Attack on the Wires

The AT&T Network

Commentary:

Far from the unfolding chaos in lower Manhattan is a high security underground command centre for AT&T global operations. AT&T claims that it's the largest and most sophisticated command and control operation of its kind, anywhere in the world. Denise Streker was the network manager in charge on Sept 11th.

Denise Streker

As a shift manager I have been through many disasters at this point; earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, fires, bombings, overseas war. I mean the list could be long.

Commentary

September 11th would be most tumultuous days in the history of long distance calling.

Dave Johnson:

We have 3 large screens on the wallboards - and it's not so much that someone is actually watching them, but you will immediately pick up out of the corner of your eye if something unique happens.

CNN News Reporter

This just in, you are looking at obviously a very disturbing live shot there. That is the World Trade Centre and we have unconfirmed reports this morning that a plane has crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Centre.

Dave Johnson:

Now from our point of view when it comes to running the network it's not as significant when the event occurs, a significant time frame for us is when the news media starts reporting it.

Denise Streker:

We stood in a state of shock for about a minute and then at that point we knew the AT&T was going to be requesting a lot of data and a lot of calls going through it.

Dave Johnson:

When there is an emergency situation people will immediately grab the telephone and try and call a loved one, a business associate, family or friend in the impact area. We get into what is called a focused overload on the network. Millions of people across the country and around the world try to call New York City all at one time.

Denise Streker:

So at that point we started assembling teams, we'd taken the network operations centre and broken up into segments. One might be international, one might be the data IP internet, another consul might the transport medium.

Commentary:

AT&T would prepare to cope with unprecedented demand. The New York City infrastructure would prepare to cope with unprecedented destruction...

One of New York City's most important telephone exchanges, on West Street, next to the World Trade Centre complex - received a near fatal blow when a thousand tons of steel came crashing down on four and a half million voice and data lines. Wall Street was disrupted, hundreds of thousands of residents lost service, and New York City's emergency 911 phone network was in jeopardy.