

# ‘I TOO SLEPT AMONG OUR DEAD’

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I was on the right aisle in seat 11H on a plane scheduled to depart for London at 8:30 a.m. but delayed on the runway at JFK. I was headed for a conference in Geneva devoted to protecting critical infrastructure—those links that sustain the telecommunications, energy, financial, transportation, health, and government services.

I was proofreading a manuscript about the future of law and strategy, to be published the following spring by Knopf, titled, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History*. In that manuscript, I had written:

“For five centuries only a State could destroy another State. We are entering a period, however, when very small numbers of persons, operating with the enormous power of modern computers, biogenetics, air transport and even nuclear weapons, can deal lethal blows to any country.”

I am used to flight delays; I was neither restless nor bored. I began talking to the young woman on my right, looking over her shoulder toward Manhattan. As I stared at the twin towers that dominated the skyline, one lateral section of the gray tower on the right began to pour forth black smoke. I pointed to this, and said, “Those are the World

Trade towers.” The young woman said, “I’ll call my mother,” and produced a cell phone. She reported that a small plane had struck the World Trade Center.

I considered the various possibilities: a traffic helicopter making too tight a turn; a light plane with a daredevil pilot showing off for his girlfriend; a fire that was mistakenly attributed to a plane crash; and of course, a deliberate attack by terrorists.

For I had long been aware that a particular, loose network of terrorists might well attack the World Trade Center. In my last memo to President Clinton’s national security adviser, before returning to university life, I had written that Osama bin Laden would attack the U.S. homeland within the next two years.

I continued to stare out the window. Most passengers seemed unaware of the events unfolding. The pilot made no announcement. Then I saw a flaming orange sun unfurl out of the center of the second tower, and it was obvious what was happening.

I managed to get off the plane and book a rental car. At the curb, there was pandemonium. I had to separate two men, one of whom had tried to take the other’s cab. When I finally reached the rental car lot, a heavy-set man emerged from an office and said in shaken tones, to no one in particular, that he had just seen one of the towers collapse.

People milled about the lot; some

were crying. I felt especially lucid; I desperately wanted to return to Manhattan. I thought blood might be needed. I also thought the manifests for other flights—including mine—should be immediately checked and perhaps persons detained. All the bridges and tunnels were closed, however. Cell phone traffic was intermittent, as satellites jammed. The radio reported various rumors. I headed north to New Haven, pulling off the road to attempt calls to friends and former colleagues.

Later I added an afterword to my manuscript, connecting the attacks of September 11 to the turning point I believe they represent. That afterword begins with a passage from Joseph Conrad:

“For mankind is delightful in its pride, its assurance, and its indomitable tenacity. It will sleep on a battlefield among its own dead.”

Eventually, I made it back into the city, where I too slept among our dead interred beneath rubble. Now each morning in Austin, I read the brief obituaries of the victims of the attacks. My throat aches with suppressed anguish as I read of the remembered daughters and sons, the engagements to marry that will never be fulfilled, the now-stranded children, the gallantry of the rescuers, and the last words of the doomed.

That day, my dominant mood was intense concern; today, it is determination.