Telecom in Time of Tragedy. From a newspaper interview on September 12, 2001.

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TELECOM IN TIME OF TRAGEDY

by

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[From interview by Business News New Jersey on September 12, 2001.]

The telecommunication system survived the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that were committed on September 11, 2001 — a day which will be remembered and symbolized with Pearl Harbor.

The survivability and reliability of the telecommunication network in times of disaster had been adequately addressed with the appropriate technological redundancy and safeguards already in place — and telecommunication worked technically.

There were network overloads from the tremendous amount of telecommunication traffic. Telephone calls to New York City frequently encountered trunk-busy tones and messages, and calls out of New York City were slow. But all this was as expected, and calls ultimately went through after a little patience. The telecommunication network can be configured to give priority to outgoing calls during an emergency.

However, the real telecommunication story was not the technology but the human drama that unfolded as telecommunication kept people in contact with each other.

On the evening of the tragedy, I recall a televised segment of a firefighter walking — while bleeding from cuts on his face covered with soot and dust — and talking on a cell phone with a loved one, saying how important it was to hear the loved-one's voice and for them to hear his. Indeed, Alexander Graham Bell's vision from well over a hundred years ago of the importance of the human voice for communication was dramatically confirmed.

Wireless technology enabled cell-phone and air calls from the doomed aircraft to loved ones — calls that will forever be remembered and treasured for the concern and courage of those who lost their lives at the hands of an unseen, unidentifiable enemy.

The e-mail of the Internet became the way to keep contact with friends and colleagues around the world to assure them that one's personal situation was safe and under control. By making all pay-phones free in New York City, Verizon helped many people communicate their way through this disaster. AT&T donated prepaid calling cards.

The telephone with its ability to convey the emotions and closeness of human speech calmed both those distant from family and friends and also all those who have been traumatized by the enormity of this tragedy.

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