

Family had 2 at Pentagon

Thomasville couple can breathe easier

By Sandi Snyder Olson

sandi.olson@gafnews.com

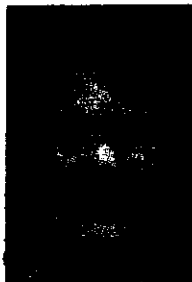
THOMASVILLE — As news of the terrorist attacks were spreading throughout Thomasville, Gary and Susan Cooper were saying prayers, not only for those in the devastated areas, but for their four children who serve in the military.

"I was filling my car with gas and saw the first burning building on TV. I stood there watching for five minutes and saw the second plane fly into the tower. The second one made me think terrorism," Gary Cooper said. "Bottom line is that we have two kids in the Pentagon. My wife was in tears. I was trying to hang tough. I told her with confidence that all of our children were all right."

Cooper was not just trying to comfort his spouse. He confirmed he was confident that all of his children, Melissa and Fred Cunningham, Amy Cooper, Scott Davidson, and Kristine Cooper were safe.

"The night before all this happened I woke up at 2 (a.m.) and, although I didn't know why at the time, I started praying for Melissa, Fred, Scott, Amy, Kristine, all the people in the military and all of our friends," Cooper said.

"I had faith that they all were all right. In the event something had happened to one of them, I felt peace in knowing that I know where they are going."



**AMY
COOPER**



**FRED
CUNNINGHAM**



**MELISSA
CUNNINGHAM**

Daughter Melissa Cunningham and her husband Fred Cunningham, both captains and graduates of the Air Force Academy, are participants in the Air Force Intern Program.

They are the first couple to be accepted into the program simultaneously. To participate in the intensive 13-month training session, the Cunningham's reported to the Pentagon on June 15.

The parents were unable to make contact with their daughter and son-in-law for nearly six hours after the attacks began.

"Melissa was only 50 feet from the end of the blast area when the plane hit. It happened right beside her," her father said. "The big point was that they had just received information in her sector 10 seconds before the blast went off. Imagine hearing that you are under bomb alert and then 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 boom! And then dissection."

Melissa Cunningham told her father that everyone calmly got up and walked to a lower section and started making rescue plans. Fred Cunningham was on the other side of the Pentagon and was unharmed.

"I was afraid, but as Christians I knew that we had to trust God. When I did find out they were all OK I was relieved, happy, and grateful," Susan Cooper said.

While the Cooper's were waiting to hear from their family members at the Pentagon, they did receive phone calls from their other three children.

Amy Cooper, who is a cadet at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., called and reported that the academy



Scott Davidson, shown with his bride Lynette at their wedding, is one of four military members of the Thomasville family.

was under full alert with several planes flying in the area keeping guard.

Son Scott Davidson, who serves in the transport division of the Army, called from Mannheim, Germany to check on the status of his sisters.

Daughter Kristine Cooper is an interior decorator who

lives in St. Simons Island. In an upset state, she also contacted her parents. One of her best friends was working at the World Trade Center and she had not been able to contact him. Later in the evening she did receive news that he had escaped the building seconds before it had collapsed.

"I am very proud to have four children serving this country. Our freedom has been obtained by sacrifice. Freedom is not free, there is a tremendous price behind it," Gary Cooper said. "As I was watching the coverage I thought 'How can I help? How can my children help? We are finding out what what freedom means, the cost of freedom and God bless America!'"

To contact reporter Sandi Snyder Olson, call (229) 226-2400, ext. 226
