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WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

CHIEF OF THE DEPARTMENT DANIEL NIGRO

Interview Date: October 24, 2001

Transcribed by Elisabeth F. Nason

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ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DRURY: I'm Assistant Commissioner James Drury. I'm present in Chief of the Department Daniel Nigro's office on October 24, 2001. It is 3:54 p.m.

As I said, we are in the Chief of the Department's office on the 7th floor in headquarters. I'm here to conduct an interview as part of the World Trade Center task force.

Q. Just for the record, would you identify yourself?

A. Daniel Nigro, Chief of Department.

Q. Chief, at this time I'm going to direct your attention to September 11 of the year 2001, and direct your attention to the incident at the World Trade Center and ask you when you first became aware that there might be a problem at that location?

A. I was in my office at somewhere between 8:45 and 8:50 on Tuesday. I heard Pete Ganci yell from his office, which we are sitting in right now, look out your window, a plane just hit the World Trade Center, because the north tower is clearly visible from the Chief of Operations office. That's how it began for me.

At that point, Chief Ganci and I, along with

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his executive officer Steve Mosiello, took the elevator down to the C-1 level. My aide for the day, Adam Vilagos, took my car with two officers from Engine 91 to assist at the command post.

Q. Is he a fire fighter?

A. Fire fighter. We responded there. Our car was right behind a car in which Donald Burns was traveling. He was the off going city wide tour commander, and the Trade Center was clearly visible for the whole ride, especially from the Brooklyn Bridge. We took the Brooklyn Bridge. At some point as we approached Manhattan, Chief Ganci got on the radio as we discussed what we were going to do when we got there and transmitted a fifth alarm.

Q. For the record Chief, what does a fifth alarm mean?

A. It was already a third alarm assignment, which would be approximately 14 engines and maybe 8 ladder companies. The fifth alarm would give us a couple of additional chiefs, 8 additional engines and 6 additional truck companies. We continued over the Brooklyn Bridge, past City Hall, across Barclay Street. We could clearly see that people were actually running forth from the scene and both Church and West

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streets as we continued west and we parked our car somewhere on approximately West and Vesey. I believe field com was in the process of setting up a command post in the middle of West Street, where there was an island that runs up the street, which we felt to be too close to the building because of debris that was already falling and had fallen in the street and we moved the exterior command post across West Street to the garage entrance in front of, I believe the address would be 2 World Financial Center.

At that point, also, on the scene, to my knowledge, were Assistant Chief Burns, Assistant Chief Barbara, Assistant Chief Cassano and Assistant Chief Callan. Chief Callan was placed in command of the lobby command post of the north tower where the plane had hit, and he left the exterior command post to go into the lobby to join the first division that was already there.

At some point after our arrival and after we had moved to the west side of West Street, I heard a loud roar of a jet, looked up and saw the second plane impact the south tower. At that point it was clear to me it was a terrorist attack. Earlier I didn't know what it was. I assumed it was an accident. I turned

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around and saw the Mayor, with his large group, including the Commissioner and I went back to speak with him for a moment, regarding the fact that I believe this to be a terrorist attack. When I got back to business at the command post, I noticed the Mayor had left that area and that was the last I saw of him until that night I suppose.

Chief Ganci and myself directed Chief Burns and Chief Barbara to the south tower, along with Chief Ray Downey. Ray took, I think all of the companies that were assembled behind us at the command post to the south tower to assist in the evacuation of that building. At that point, I told Chief Ganci I was going to quickly walk around the perimeter of the Trade Center to assess the degree of damage to the two towers, because our vantage point on West Street only allowed us a view of the west side of the building. I took my aide with me. We walked east on Vesey Street, stopped in front of 7 World Trade Center to speak to EMS Chief Peruggia, who gave me a quick update about victims on that side of the building.

Q. What was that update if you recall?

A. He told me how many jumpers he felt had hit the plaza, which we knew we couldn't help and that the

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people that were already injured were being removed to where the ambulances were staging, which was north of the Trade Center on West Street. I don't recall him giving me any number of people injured.

We stepped over small airplane aviation parts, on Vesey, continued west, continued looking at the building. I looked up at the south tower and could see that it was more heavily damaged than we could tell from our west vantage point. That the second plane had - although it hit from the south, it also did a great deal of damage to the north part of the building. As I got on to Church Street, I walked south on Church towards Liberty, where I was going to turn right. I looked up at the east side of the south tower and found that to be also very heavily damaged, which we couldn't see. I was going to report that information back to Chief Ganci.

I was stopped briefly by a person who used to work here in headquarters, whose name escapes me, Gabe Delapena, who used to work here until a few months ago, who was very very - I wouldn't have stopped, but he was very very concerned that his wife worked on the 92 floor of the south tower. I just recall telling him that hopefully she came down when the first plane hit

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and that maybe she was in the area. That's the last I saw of him. He survived and she didn't. After I spoke to him we proceeded south, heard a loud noise, knew it to be the building coming down, looked up, saw the building coming down on us. I grabbed my aide as he was going to go south and I took him east on Dey Street, and we got as far as we could until materials started crashing down and took refuge in a doorway of a building just east of the Millennium Hotel and survived in the doorway.

When all the noise stopped and all the dust stopped, and we were able to get out of our position, we started walking east. We couldn't see if anything was left standing because of the dusk and the darkness that was created. You couldn't see at all from that vantage point anything maybe above the second story level, or more than 50 or 100 feet ahead of you.

So I decided to go east and then south and come back around on to West Street to get to the command post that way, which proved to be a good decision because at some point, east and south of - I don't know what street we were on, we heard the noise again and knew that it was now the north tower coming down. Same huge dust cloud enveloped everybody. We

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waited out the dust cloud for a few minutes. We had handy talkies turned to a few different channels and we heard a few messages, but very little, especially after the second collapse. More people calling in car 3, which is Chief Ganci, or other people that would be at the command post and not getting an answer.

At that point we didn't know -- I knew a very very large number of people were killed, but I didn't know about the command post. I was worried but there was no way of telling yet. As we continued around to get back to West Street, we got over just south of - I guess it would be south of Rector on West and found the large communications tractor trailer vehicle with two dispatchers that were set up there and they had Dr. Prezant and Dr. Kelly with them and two members of engine or ladder 10 and that was it.

I asked them, we wanted to get back to the command post, where was the command post now set up, because they were communicating with both a dispatcher and whoever was at the scene and I was told that the command center was now at Barclay and Broadway at the tip of City Hall Park and Chief Haring was in charge, Deputy Chief Haring, division 6, which was the first mention of his name, that message. I felt that

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everyone else was killed, everyone else that was a ranking member of the Department, if that was the case.

We walked up to that location. Dr. Kelly, Prezant and two members of engine 10 and my aide and myself walked up amidst the dust and the paper, got there and found out that -- the first semi-good news, that another command post was indeed operating at West and Chambers and that Assistant Chief Carruthers was in charge up there. I left Chief Haring in charge of his operation. They were putting out fires in the Trinity Church area and in the area around 5 World Trade Center, Fulton Street. I went up to the other command center, found Chief Carruthers, Deputy Assistant Chief Michael Butler, and started to find out who was missing and who had survived. So Chief Callan was there and alive. I was told Chief Cassano was taken to the hospital. Chief Burns and Barbara were missing, as was Chief Ganci, Commissioner Feehan and numerous other people.

At some point after I was briefed, I took command of the operation from the Chambers Street post and was told that Chief Fellini was at the forward operations post at West and Vesey, from which the

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search, rescue and extinguishment was being directed of what was left of the complex.

Steve Mosiello and Chief Turi told me they had been looking for Chief Ganci. They thought they knew where he was, unsuccessfully, and they were going back to - I walked back down to the area where he was and sometime after that they found Chief Ganci. He was like the first person that I knew of that they found in the rubble. He was somewhere across West Street from the Trade Center. The most important operational decision to be made that afternoon was the collapse had damaged 7 World Trade Center, which is about a 50 story building, at Vesey between West Broadway and Washington Street. It had very heavy fire on many floors and I ordered the evacuation of an area sufficient around to protect our members, so we had to give up some rescue operations that were going on at the time and back the people away far enough so that if 7 World Trade did collapse, we wouldn't lose any more people.

We continued to operate on what we could from that distance and approximately an hour and a half after that order was given, at 5:30 in the afternoon, 7 World Trade Center collapsed completely. I continued to operate at the scene until probably somewhere around

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8 o'clock, at which time I borrowed Chief Meyers' car, because mine was destroyed and went home to say hello, shower, change my clothes and came back to work at approximately between 11 and midnight with Chief Turi.

That does it for September 11.

Q. Just a few questions, Chief. Were you actually on Liberty when the south tower started to come down?

A. I was on Church.

Q. Near Liberty?

A. Probably between Dey and Cortlandt and I went back a few paces and then ran east on Dey and that's where we ended up. I think if I look at this map, the building we took refuge was the Dey Street side of 195 Broadway.

Q. As you were doing the tour, did you have any further communication with Chief Ganci over the radio as you observed the --

A. No.

Q. Did you notice civilians evacuating through the concourse on Church Street which I guess had an exit from the north tower?

A. They were exiting everywhere, but I don't recall if I could see where they were coming out of.

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Q. Did you happen to see any triage centers set up by EMS on Church or Vesey?

A. I thought Chief Peruggia told me they were triaging at 7 World Trade Center, where he was. I didn't see any other that I can recall.

Q. So there was no radio communications between you and any of the command posts as you were coming around doing the tour?

A. I don't believe so.

Q. After the first tower collapsed, I think you mentioned you might have heard some calls over the handy talkies?

A. Yes. I heard someone trying to contact car 3 with no answer. Maybe I thought someone was trying to contact car 2 or one of the 4s, and again no answer. Not much else.

Q. Did you ever make it into the FDNY command center that was inside the lobby of the north tower?

A. No.

Q. What about the command center that I believe you said Burns and Barbara left to set up?

A. No, Chief Burns and Chief Barbara were going to 2 World Trade and I didn't make it into any of the buildings.

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Q. Can you tell us if, as you started your tour, if you noticed rigs and ambulances down West Street or on Vesey or anything like that?

A. We were set up on every street. I know before I started, before I started, I directed a couple of officers, I think one of them, was it, was the Captain of 290 engine, Sudnik, he is a Chief now, to insure that the rigs didn't block West Street so that ambulances could get in and out. Because we have a tendency to, when we have that many rigs coming in for a fifth alarm, close the streets. If we needed to take away many injured people, which we were hoping we would be doing that day, we would need a clear path up and down West Street. So I know I directed him and possibly another officer to make sure the rigs on West Street parked to the curbs so that ambulances could get between them. I took off east on Vesey.

Q. Stepping back for a moment to when you were coming over the Brooklyn Bridge, could you make a determination based on a visual from that distance how involved or fully involved the fire was and how many floors?

A. It looked to me like it was involving about 10 floors of the building, and the way it was burning,

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I stated to Chief Ganci on the way there that I didn't believe we could extinguish the fire.

Q. That was based on what?

A. The number of floors I think. The volume of fire on the number of floors. To my recollection, we had never put out a fire that involved that many floors in a high rise building in this city before. I think more or less the direction of - in both towers ended up, evacuation was the main, the initial concern. Get as many people out of the building as we could.

Q. Did you ever hear any communications over the radio before the first collapse that OEM thought the buildings could collapse and to get out of the area?

A. No, I heard later from an individual that somebody came over from OEM to the command post after I left and told Chief Ganci the building was unstable and that was moments before it came down. The only thing I do remember and I didn't hear it over the radio, I don't think, was that a third plane was heading in the direction, I assumed was heading in the direction of the Trade Center, that there was a third plane, then a little later on somebody told me about the plane that hit the Pentagon. I don't know who told me that. The third plane was -- I don't think it came over the handy

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talky. I think somebody walked up to me and told me, somebody of some credibility, that it wasn't just a person on the sidewalk, but someone either with us or the police or EMS that I knew, because I recall taking it as a serious issue.

Q. The last point where you saw Chief Downey was at the command center on West Street?

A. Yes, after the second plane hit, he told me I want to take all these units and start evacuating the stairwells in the south tower. I said okay, good. Take them. And Ray gathered all those units up, however many there were, and marched them across the street. I don't know exactly how he got there, because we were concerned with the jumpers that were coming down out of the north tower at the time.

My assumption was he was going to take them south and go across through to the hotel to get into the tower.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DRURY: We are going to end this now Chief. The time is 4:20. I thank you very much.