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WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

FIREFIGHTER BRIAN FITZPATRICK

Interview Date: December 6, 2001

Transcribed by Nancy Francis

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BATTALION CHIEF KENAHAN: The time is 4:00 o'clock p.m. and this is Battalion Chief Kenahan of the New York City Fire Department from the Safety Battalion. I'm conducting an interview with Brian Fitzpatrick, Firefighter Sixth Grade from Ladder 22.

Q. Hi, Brian. Just tell us in your own words what happened.

A. I'd say that morning, on September 11th, it was 8:48 a.m., one gentleman at house watch, one of the firefighters, saw on the news flash that Tower 1 was hit, the north tower was hit by a plane. Everybody started getting their gear ready because we knew we were going. I was actually kind of excited because I thought it was going to be a big job. We didn't know the size of the plane that hit it. We just saw a lot of smoke. Our tones went off and it was a voice alarm and they were basically just calling companies off. It basically ran up the west side. I remember it going from 35, 40, 74, 25, straight up the west side they were calling us, and we responded. I'm almost 100 percent sure that we were en route pretty much when the second plane hit. I don't remember seeing it on the news when the second plane hit. So I'm almost 100 percent sure we were en route.

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When we got down to the scene, it was pretty hectic. We pulled up close to the north tower and then saw that it was pretty ugly, a lot of debris falling, a lot of people running. We moved the rig and went to the west side command post. Ladder 22 and Ladder 25 I remember seeing go to the north tower. I mean, I apologize, the south tower. We were basically standing fast just watching what was going on.

I remember hearing people shouting about a third plane being in the air. I don't know if that's what held us back from going right away. But we waited basically until I saw our Lieutenant Farrington coming back and we thought he had our orders where we were going. So we were grabbing our gear and we were walking out to meet him and we were in front of the parking garage in front of 2 World Financial Center, the Merrill Lynch building, which is basically on the southwest corner of the north tower and right across the street from the Vista International Hotel, and that's when we heard a tremendous noise and it was coming from the south tower, and we looked up and it was coming down.

I basically froze and Rich Banaciski shoved me and told me to run, and I remember there being a

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large number of people behind us as we turned to run. I remember making it into the tunnel and it was this incredible amount of wind, debris, heat. I remember falling down, getting back up, and the guys were just falling all over each other. It wasn't like we were trying to kill each other, but it was all bets were off, just run.

I made a right in the tunnel. I was with some other guys. I can't remember the engine company. They're from the east side. They were trying to force a door in the right of the tunnel and it turned out to be a storage shed. I remember when I fell down, I picked up a mask and I put the mask on and I was buddy breathing with a few of the guys because the air was so thick and pulling out like baseball clumps of debris out of your mouth. We knew that we couldn't force that door.

My Lieutenant, Farrington, from Engine 76, we heard him screaming and banging his tool against something metal and I distinctly remember hearing his voice. He had found the exit to the back of 2 World Financial Center, and it was a maze of stairways, but we got out. He found the exit, set up a search rope, brought it back, and he got out about I'd probably say

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40 guys out of the tunnel.

Then we exited out by the marina, the North Cove Yacht Harbor, where we all basically just took a knee and we waited a couple of minutes. Everybody was in shock. We didn't know what happened. We just thought it was debris or an explosion or a secondary explosion or another bomb inside the building or another plane.

We got up and we made our way around through what turned out to be the North End Avenue and we hit Vesey. I'd say probably 25 minutes had elapsed by now. We were walking up Vesey and we got to Vesey and the West Side Highway and we were making the turn. I remember seeing the bridge as we turned and somebody came running by us saying the north tower was leaning. I didn't even know the south tower fell yet. I looked up and I actually saw the antenna coming down.

I just took off running again. I headed straight down Vesey. I wound up breaking up with the rest of my company, and I wound up by the railing by the water. I remember there was a bunch of senior men there and they were getting out of their bunker gear and they were getting ready to jump in the water because you could see ferries out in the distance

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waving us on. They said, "Get out of your gear. We're going in the water."

When I was younger, I used to work out in the Hamptons on people's boats and I remember currents. I knew the currents down there would just kill us, you know, they'd find us in South Jersey. So I just buried myself in the fence and hoped for the best.

The debris cloud pretty much caught us, but it seemed like right by the time it hit North End it stopped. I think the wind was blowing a different direction. It was pulling it all east. That's what it turned out to be because I remember the command post, everything that was set up later was set up on the west side because the wind was taking all the smoke and debris east.

I wandered around looking for the rest of my company, which was Rich Banaciski, Richie Batista, Billy Reynolds, George Rodriguez, and George was with the rig and we were sure that he was under it, and Lieutenant Farrington. It took me, if I had to guess, I'd probably say about 45 minutes before I found the rest of my company and that was on the West Side Highway and everybody was just lying on the West Side Highway. By that time there was just hordes of firemen

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coming down the West Side Highway whatever way they could get there. I guess it was the recall. I don't know if that was hours later, but I remember seeing guys that weren't working that day that came down, and we were all just waiting to get back in.

When they let us back in, it was early afternoon. I'd say it was probably 1:30, 2:00 o'clock. We searched 140 West, the New York Telephone Company building, for 15, 16 floors. It was myself, George Rodriguez, Doug Robinson, a battalion aide, and Captain Pellegrinelli. We forced numerous amounts of doors, but we were basically searching in the wreckage of, if you were on West Side Highway, it would be the exposure four side of the telephone company building. It had gaping, massive holes that you could fit a house in, you know, what it looked like from the inside. So we basically crawled in the rubble there and looked for victims on each floor because the holes took up several floors.

We heard a Mayday for everybody to get out of the building -- no, I'm sorry, an urgent, three urgents, and we came out of the building. I'd say that was like an hour and a half, two hours later. We were then positioned on Vesey Street between North End and

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the West Side Highway because there was an imminent collapse on 7 World Trade, and it did collapse.

As far as other companies, I don't know. I knew from sticking my head out the window going down that we were by 35 and 40. I think they were ahead of us when we pulled in. I'm sorry. 35 Truck and I can't remember the engine down there, 25, 74, I think 47 was there.

Q. These are all the rigs that were on West street?

A. Yes. We were headed down together. From what I saw, we all pretty much met up on the West Side Highway at the same time because the alarms went off and we're all fairly the same distance from the on ramps.

That's about it. That's my story. I wish I could be more helpful.

BATTALION CHIEF KENAHAN: No, that's been fine. You've been very helpful. Thank you for your cooperation.

THE WITNESS: No problem.

BATTALION CHIEF KENAHAN: The time now is 4:10 and this interview is completed.