

File No. 9110017

WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

LIEUTENANT GREGG HANSSON

Interview Date: October 9, 2001

Transcribed by Laurie A. Collins

MR. CASTORINA: This is Ron Castorina, working with Thomas McCourt. We are at Engine 24. The time now is 11:10. The date is October 9th, 2001.

Your name, sir?

LIEUTENANT HANSSON: Lieutenant Gregg Hansson.

MR. CASTORINA: Where are you assigned?

LIEUTENANT HANSSON: Engine 24.

Q. Can you tell us what happened on September 11th?

A. Sure. I believe the call came in somewhere around 8:47, when the tower was first hit. I hopped on the rig. We had an extra man with us. It was myself, Firefighter Ottrando. John Ottrando was the chauffeur. We had a probationary trainee Firefighter Byrne, probationary Firefighter Sterling, Firefighter Claes, and Firefighter Billy.

I believe we were responding on second alarm, which was the initial second alarm. I'm not sure what due we were. We responded down Varick Street, which turns into West Broadway. We came down into Vesey, made a right onto Vesey

and made a left onto West Street. We parked at the corner of West and Vesey, where my chauffeur was going to hook up to a standpipe.

Obviously we noticed smoke coming up from the north tower. Me and my four men proceeded with our rollups, the standpipe kit, up the stairs into the lobby of the One World Trade Center, which was the north tower building.

Q. Is that standard procedure or were you given direction by anybody there?

A. No, there were no directions at that time to do that. That seemed like standard procedure to me in a high-rise building.

At the time I did not know what had transpired, whether that was a plane or some type of explosion.

Upon entering the Trade Center, we went through the revolving doors but noticed that all the glass was out. So we could have gone right through the building.

At the northwest corner I believe is the Port Authority command post. Deputy Chief Hayden was there already with his aide. There were several other units on the scene. It was

understood that all the elevators were out at that time.

We waited for direction, at which time a battalion chief did come over. I don't know which battalion chief it was. He was speaking with Lieutenant Fischer Ladder 20. I was standing next to Lieutenant Fischer, and he asked what staircase he was going to use. I'm not sure what Lieutenant Fischer said, but I was then assigned to go up with Ladder 20 as a team.

I believe we followed a Port Authority police officer. We went past the elevator banks. You could see that they were all blown out. We went over to stairway A, which was the southeast corner area. There were many civilians self-evacuating at the time. We got the evacuees into a single file to come down, and we single-filed our way up.

We made our way up somewhere between the 15th and 20th floor, at which time we saw one woman, a black woman, with burns along her arms. In the same vicinity we were met with a woman who was having severe respiratory distress, which was likely caused by an asthma condition. She was

with a civilian who stated he was from the 90th floor, and he had a large gash to his forehead.

We took her off the stairway and into the hall. I tried to call for an urgent, but at that time I realized that quite a number of maydays and urgents had already been given for many civilians and also for firefighters who were having trouble breathing already or having chest pains.

Q. What floor are you on at this time when you pulled her off?

A. I believe we were around 20.

Q. 20?

A. Somewhere in the vicinity of 20.

At that time we had her lying down. She was breathing but having some trouble. We didn't have any oxygen with us, and there wasn't much we could do. I realized we weren't going to get any help, so we just monitored the situation.

I questioned the guy from the 90th floor, who said it was a plane. That's when I first realized that we had a plane up there. He said there was a fireball on the 90th floor and a lot of smoke on the 90th floor.

He got to a room where there was about eight people, and he said the eight people did eventually get out. He stated to me that he believed everyone from the 90th floor had gotten out.

She started to feel better, and she said she was ready to descend again.

Q. What were the conditions in the stairway?

A. The conditions in the stairway were absolutely clear. There was no smoke whatsoever. Occasionally on the hallways you could see a light haze, but that wasn't on every -- some were totally clear. Some had a very light haze. But the stairways were totally clear. All the civilians looked fine except for the ones I just indicated.

So we left that civilian from the 90th floor, that gentleman, he assisted the woman down. We continued our way up. I believe Ladder 20 had gotten off with us on that floor and were taking a rest.

We continued up until I believe the 27th floor. My men started to become pretty

exhausted at that point. Again we took another rest at the 27th floor with Ladder 20. There was a couple civilians with a woman in a wheelchair.

At that time I ordered Firefighter Billy to stay with her and if he got any assistance from any units on the way up that he could descend with her. But at that point I said for him to just stand fast.

I don't know how long we were there for, maybe five minutes. Then we continued our way up again, eventually reaching the 35th floor. Again, we were still with Ladder 20. On the 35th floor I spotted Engine 33, and I spotted Ladder 5. There was also a battalion chief, which I'm not positive but one of my members has indicated he believed he was the battalion chief from Battalion 11.

We also had a couple EMS workers up there. I did see one firefighter lying in the hallway in the elevator area, lying on his back. He was being administered oxygen. Everybody else that I did speak to indicated that they were doing okay.

Basically we were taking water, ice tea

or whatever, and the battalion was setting up a staging area at that point. So again we were taking another break.

I then spoke with the Engine 33 officer, which was Lieutenant Pfeifer. We were trying to formulate a plan with the battalion chief as to how we were going to get up somewhere around the 90th floor, being that we were already exhausted at this point.

I don't know if that's important or not, but our idea was to take only four rollups out of the eight men we had instead of the eight rollups. My estimate is that we might have been on that floor between five and ten minutes. I would say at least five minutes.

I was in the vicinity of the battalion chief, who was on the command channel, when I heard a mayday given over the command channel to evacuate the building. He started to tell everyone to evacuate, as I did also. I saw all the units get up. Everybody got their gear. Everybody started for the staircases to evacuate.

Ladder 5 I know for a fact had been going down stairway B, which was in the elevator

bank in the middle of the building. Engine 33 -- I'm not positive but I believe they went to stairway C, which I believe was the southwest corner. I went back to my men with Ladder 20 to stairway A.

Still in the hallway, we heard a big shake in the building. It's my belief that was the tower two coming down. I'm not positive, but you could definitely feel an incredible shake.

Q. Did you hear any explosion or anything from the first?

A. I didn't. Some people stated to me that there was at that time, but I can't recall actually hearing.

Q. You were at the 35th floor --

A. We were at the 35th floor.

Q. -- when you decided to evacuate and got the mayday.

A. Right.

Some people have indicated that that was the 37th floor, but I believe it was the 35th.

Q. Do you know what time?

A. I have no idea what time frame that

was. But if in fact that was the tower coming down, it was 10:06.

At this point I do not know that the second tower was hit by a plane, nor do I know that that's the second tower being hit. I did hear on my way up transmissions from Ladder 3, which was Captain Brown. I did hear him communicating with somebody. I assume it was with the command post or some chief. I have no idea.

Q. Where was Captain Brown?

A. I'm not sure where Captain Brown was. I had assumed he was in the first building, because they were from Ladder 3, and I assume they would have been coming down on the initial alarm to the first. I'm sure you will find out in your interviews. I've heard and I thought he might have been as high as in the 60s, but I don't think that's correct. I did hear after that that he might have been in the 40s of tower one.

I thought he gave a mayday, and I thought he stated that there was an interior collapse. But again I'm not positive of that.

On the way down I could hear them calling for Ladder 3. Then they would call specifically for Pat Brown. There was no response from Ladder 3 whatsoever from that point.

The chief had directed us, after this big loud shaking, to get in the stairways. At that time I was with Lieutenant Fischer and my men. I believe two of his men had gone up, before this shake, had gone up. He was obviously upset at them for going up. He was screaming at them for them to get back down. Then he went up to go get them. At that time I ordered my men, "Let's get out." So we started to get out.

I lost contact with Firefighter Claes at that time. I thought he was ahead of me. I found out later that he had gotten out of the building much sooner than we did.

We got down to 27, where I went to pick up Firefighter Billy that I had left off there.

Q. He was still there?

A. He was still there with the woman in the wheelchair.

At that time Firefighter Byrne had

indicated to me that he left his mask up on the 35th floor. So I ordered him to leave the building, to stop for no one, being that he had no mask.

So now I was with Firefighter Sterling and Firefighter Billy. A couple people, civilians, indicated to me that there was an elevator that was working at this time. But I had already gotten transmissions over the air that some elevators had already crashed down to the first floor. I told them no one is getting in an elevator.

There was another officer there. Firefighter Billy indicated to me that he might have been the captain of Engine 21. We discussed how to remove the woman, and I believe he said to me that he's going to take her down with his company. They went to stairway B. I said, "Okay, Rich, come with me and let's continue on down stairway A." We went down stairway A.

We got down to the third floor, and the third floor was partially blocked by some sheetrock. We started to move that when a firefighter from Squad 18 -- I believe his name

is Kelly. He is alive. I've seen him since. He said to me that you can't get down that staircase, there's no exit that way, and he needed help with a civilian.

There was on that floor now -- on this particular floor all the lights were out. We had a rather large gentleman, I would say maybe 300 pounds or so, a civilian, who was for some reason incapable of walking. He was on the ground. We assisted him in trying to remove this guy. We made our way to stairway C, I believe.

We were having quite a difficult time trying to remove this guy. There were a couple Port Authority police officers. They might have been ESU. I have no idea. We finally managed with great difficulty to get this guy down to the first floor, and we were directed by Port Authority police officers to the lobby area of the north side of the Trade Center, which was a couple of doors right in the middle.

We had two officers there who said, "Hold up. There's people jumping out of the building and there's a lot of debris coming down." They were actually looking up outside the

building when we were still in the lobby. They said it was okay to go, and we started to bring this guy across.

At that time we were with I believe the officer of Engine 15, which was Lieutenant Foder. I believe he had at least two men with him. It was myself, my two men, the Squad 18 guy, and I believe I saw a guy from Rescue 5. I think his name was Firefighter Spade, who made it also. There were at least four police officers.

We started to go across. There was a little overhang there for the Customs building. We made it across to that, under that overhang. The civilian just kept on tripping over debris. There was debris everywhere.

Q. What was the condition? It was still heavy smoke?

A. You had a visibility of about 10 to 15 feet, I figure. To me it looked like a whiteout. There was a lot of debris on the ground. It seems to me it might have been the sheeting of the Trade Center. A lot of that you saw. This guy kept on tripping over it.

I went ahead of I believe Lieutenant

Foder and Firefighter Kelly from Squad 18. At that point we're assisting the civilian, trying to hold him up. At that point I got rid of my mask. We were outside the building. We were all pretty exhausted by that point too. I went ahead of them to remove debris. We were at this point right here. I don't know if you can see that.

Q. Okay.

A. That's basically where we were. Then a large explosion took place. In my estimation that was the tower coming down, but at that time I did not know what that was. I thought some type of bomb had gone off.

I was, I believe, ahead of the rest of the firefighters and officers there. I made it to the corner, and I took about four running steps this way when you could feel the rush of the wind coming at you. I believed that that was a huge fireball coming at the time.

I then hit the deck into the side of the building and basically waited it out. We were all hit with debris. At that point it was a total blackout. You couldn't see anything. All this glass already had been taken out.

I found out that those guys there that were behind me had jumped into World Trade Center six when this came down. I was in the courtyard over here. I got hit by a lot of debris at that point, but I guess within seconds or a minute it was over.

I was still okay. I got myself up. I had no mask at the time. All I had was my flashlight. There was dead silence. You couldn't hear anybody. No transmissions over the radio. There were craters all over the place. You were in the middle of this cloud that was fairly suffocating, so I had no idea how much longer I was going to be able to stay in there.

I wound up crawling for a ways, and I finally saw a flashlight. I don't know if there's a staircase in here, but I saw a flashlight and I saw someone calling, "This is the way out. This is the way out." I made my way to that staircase, got myself out, and I don't know where I came out. I think I might have come out this way and over to Church Street.

At that point I saw Firefighter Byrne when I got out into the street. There was nobody

else around for blocks. I could hear Firefighter Billy calling a mayday at that point. I tried to respond to him over the radio and tried to direct him out. He didn't respond again to me.

I then looked for help to get a mask, to get a search rope of some sort to try to go back in there. There was nobody around. We went several blocks, I don't know how far, when I finally found Ladder 164's rig.

All my maydays went unanswered. I got on Ladder 164's rig. I called the dispatcher, gave the dispatcher the mayday, told them that both myself and Byrne were out of the building and I was missing the rest of my company. I said I don't know where the command post is, but there is nobody around.

Q. Byrne was with you the whole time?

A. From that point. On the 27th floor I had told Byrne to leave.

Q. Right. You hooked up with --

A. I hooked up with him again at this point.

Q. Who was the one with the flashlight that you saw think you saw leading you out?

A. That was a police officer. It could have been the Port Authority or it could have been ESU.

Q. When you were outside you were by yourself?

A. On the initial collapse?

Q. When you were outside. When you came around.

A. I was by myself at that point.

Q. And then you picked up Byrne?

A. On the street somewhere.

We walked several blocks, but then we found an ambulance and we saw Safety Chief King in the ambulance. I started to ask him what happened. That's when he told me both towers are down. I didn't even know that had happened, but that's what it was.

Eventually we made our over to Engine 7, Ladder 1's quarters. A triage area had just started to be set up. There was a doctor there, and she took a look at me. She said, "Your throat's extremely red. We have to get you to a hospital."

I called the dispatcher again from the

department phone there, indicated again where I was. They provided no other information to me.

Soon after that then an ambulance came, they picked me up and they transported me to Forest Hills, where I stayed until about 4:00, when I finally got a ride back to the city.

I made my way back to quarters here. Sometime around midnight I went back down.

Byrne stayed at Engine 7. We all eventually --

Q. Byrne didn't go to the hospital?

A. What?

Q. Byrne didn't go to the hospital?

A. Byrne didn't go to the hospital at that time.

Q. You decided respiratory difficulties, no injuries?

A. Yeah, as it turned out. I mean, other than minor scrapes and stuff, I was all right.

That's pretty much the most I can remember.

Q. The rest of the company, what --

A. The rest of my company turned out to be okay. You can speak to Marcel in a few minutes.

From what he told me, he had gotten out all the way to the rig, Engine 24's rig again, and he operated all day from there. He did receive burns to his back area when he had taken off his coat. Then all this stuff started to happen.

Ottrando was the chauffeur. All he stated to me was that when they started coming down, the big cloud, he just started running north, and I believe he operated most of the day.

Firefighter Billy and Sterling got themselves out also from the area that I also had been in, and Billy was eventually taken to Downtown Hospital. Somewhere around 4 p.m. I started to find out that they were okay, but that was -- I'm sure you guys know there wasn't much information. There was nobody around.

Q. Yeah, right.

A. The only other thing I can remember that I might have left out is on the 35th floor there were a couple civilians. I believe there was a civilian in a wheelchair on the 35th floor at that staging area. When we started to evacuate, I believe she was going down the B staircase where Ladder 5 was. It's speculation

at this point, but I believe they were assisting her.

We did find most of those members from Ladder 5 two days later in a staircase with two civilians.

I did leave another thing out. After the 27th floor, we were coming down. I got stopped again around 17. At the 17th floor, a firefighter came into the staircase and said, "I need some help with a room full of civilians."

As it turned out, I came out of the A staircase, I went down to that room. I left my men there. I went down there. There was it looked to me, about 15 firefighters and about maybe 10 civilians in this room on the --

Q. 17th floor.

A. Southwest side. I kind of stated generally that we have to evacuate the building, "Let's go." I was approached by someone -- and I saw Pfeifer there from 33 Engine. I also saw someone from Rescue 3. I'm not sure if he was the officer or not. I thought he was the officer, but he might not have been.

He took me aside. He took out a window

on that floor, showed me West Street, and that's when I saw the damage done on West Street. I could still see several rigs, but you could see all the debris also.

I again said, "I think we've got to get ourselves out." He said, "I'm not sure we can get out." I said, "We've got to try." I again generally said, "Let's go, everyone, let's get out." I did see some people go to the C staircase. I went back and got my men at the A staircase and descended down. Then eventually I hit the third floor, where I teamed up with that guy from Squad 18.

I think that was it.

MR. CASTORINA: The time now is 11:37.

This concludes the interview of Lieutenant Hansson at Engine 24.