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WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

PARAMEDIC KEVIN DARNOWSKI

Interview Date: November 9, 2001

Transcribed by Laurie A. Collins

MR. RADENBERG: Today is November 9th, 2001. I'm Paul Radenberg of the Fire Department, City of New York. The time is now 0934 hours. I am conducting an interview with --

PARAMEDIC DARNOWSKI: Paramedic Kevin Darnowski from Battalion 20, shield 3103.

MR. RADENBERG: This interview is being conducted at EMS Battalion 20 regarding the events of September 11th, 2001.

Q. Kevin?

A. Regarding the events of September 11th, 2001, my story is I was dropping my fiancée's son off at school in Brooklyn on Fourth Avenue. After dropping him off, I was heading northbound on Fourth Avenue, and I looked to my left and I see the north tower of the World Trade Center burning. My fiancée works in the north tower on the 98th floor.

At that time I proceeded to call Lieutenant Guzman here at Battalion 20 and question him as to whether or not he had a job in the system for the World Trade Center. He told me that he had reports of a fire on the upper

floors of the World Trade Center.

At that time he asked me if I wanted to continue to work or go down to the scene. I opted to go down to the scene, as I was on my way to work anyway. And in uniform, I opted to go down to the scene at that time.

As I headed down towards the scene, I was trying to call my fiancée in her office, and there was no answer on the phone. It just kept giving me a busy signal. I tried her cell phone, and there was no answer on her cell phone.

I was approaching the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel. Behind me was EMS Chief Goldfarb. In front of me was a couple of tower ladders and rescue companies and engine companies that were going through the tunnel.

Right before the tolls on the Brooklyn side heading towards Manhattan at the Battery Tunnel, we were sitting in traffic and we watched United Flight 175 hit tower two, which was the south tower of the World Trade Center.

At that time everybody was just in shock. The firefighters and I were just really trying to get through the traffic when the plane

hit, and we were just standing there in like awe of what was happening. Finally we ended up getting into the tunnel, and we ended up sitting in the tunnel for about another 10 minutes, 10 to 15 minutes, trying to get through the traffic.

When we finally got through the tunnel to the other side, I parked my car on the corner of Carlisle and West Side Highway, West Street, and I proceeded northbound on West Street towards the command center or what I believed to be the command center at that time.

I went along the center median, meanwhile looking up at the towers in disbelief and basically sheer awe at what was going on. None of us at the Battery Tunnel knew what was going on until the second plane hit. Right then we knew it was a terrorist attack.

So as I'm walking up to the scene, I see droves of firefighters running towards the buildings, but nobody's coming out on the West Street side. I questioned one Fire Department official -- I believe he was a captain; I don't remember his name -- as to why there was nobody coming out on this side. He told me the Port

Authority had locked the doors on that side of the building and was having everybody come out on the Trinity side by the church, like Trinity and Fulton area for easy evacuation.

At that point I met up with EMS Chief Goldfarb again and his aide Mary. We were over by Three Financial Center. At that point we were standing with numerous amounts of firefighters and fire supervisors and police officers, and we got a report of another incoming airplane. So we proceeded to go into a parking garage that was in Three Financial Center underneath.

Shortly after that we realized what was flying over was the armed forces F-14s flying over, and we got a confirmation from the FAA -- over the police radio we got a confirmation from FAA that all airports had been closed and there were no planes flying within the New York City area at that specific time.

So we all came out of the garage, and Chief Goldfarb started setting up triage on the corner of West and Vesey with the ambulances going towards North End Avenue, facing West Street along Vesey, along Three and four

Financial Center.

At that time we weren't getting that many -- we ended up putting -- I don't know what this building was over here.

Q. Vesey and North End.

A. Yeah, there was a building on the --

Q. Embassy Hotel?

A. It might have been The embassy Hotel.

Q. There's a movie theater also.

A. Right, right. There was a parking lot in the front on West Street. We ended up putting triage initially in Three and Four Financial Center.

At that time Chief Goldfarb and -- I had explained my situation, that my fiancée was up on the 98th floor of tower one and I would be as much help as I can. He told me regarding patient care-wise that don't bother with patient care, just with moving of patients and equipment.

So we went back over to the pedestrian bridge in front of Three Financial Center. We were standing under there with the Fire Department command center. We were attempting to set up a command center there, when one of the

firefighters starts screaming, "Look up!" Everybody looks up, and we were watching the people jump out of One World Tower Center and hitting the overhang in front of World Trade Center where the taxis would let people off originally.

At that time it was just -- the best word to describe it was pure chaos. Nobody really knew what was going on other than the firefighters going in to try to put out the fires.

Chief Goldfarb instructed me to go back to the MERV, which was sitting on West and Vesey. I went back over to the MERV, and I met up with one of my coworkers from Battalion 20, Chris Attanasio. He put me in the MERV, because he knew my situation, and he tried to calm me down and just told me to sit tight and relax and just hope for the best and just things like that. He was trying to calm me down and stuff. I just had to get out of the MERV. I had to be outside on the street watching what was going on.

At that point Chris Attanasio took me and he told me we were ordered by -- he didn't

specify any -- to go over to West Street just south of the north tower right at the base of the hotel over there, because we were getting patients from Two World Trade Center that they were bringing down the stairs from Two World Trade Center down to West Street. We were going to be getting patients over there.

So I proceeded with him and his partner over to that area, and we started loading patients, firefighters and civilians, in the back of the ambulance. At one point we had five patients in the back of the ambulance, and he was standing and he asked me if I wanted to go to the hospital with him. I told him no, I needed to stay in the area. I wanted to see if Chief Goldfarb needed me for anything. So he said okay, and he started to leave. He proceeded down towards like Albany Street, like Liberty and Albany, to go to one of the area hospitals; I don't remember which one.

At that time I started walking back up towards Vesey Street. I heard three explosions, and then we heard like groaning and grinding, and tower two started to come down. To the

firefighters and the cops that I was standing there with started running northbound on West Street and we made a left on Vesey and ran again towards North End Avenue where we were having EMS triage, and we stopped over there.

Down that specific street on West Street, there wasn't that much debris and smoke coming down because Two World Trade Center is more or less blocked by the hotel and a couple other buildings. It did come down like Liberty Street and towards Two World Financial Center and towards like the Winter Garden area.

We ended up just staying there for a while till the smoke more or less cleared up. We started putting our masks on and stuff like that at that time.

Shortly after that Chief Goldfarb told us to go back down towards where we had the ambulances staged on Vesey Street and start moving the ambulances back more and a little north in case tower one fell.

At that time I encountered Chief Larry Mittleman, Chief Fran Pascale, Chief Basile from Division 2, and ALS coordinator Louie Cook from

Division 2. I encountered them all at the EMS triage we had at North End and Vesey.

They were at that point -- Chief Goldfarb explained my situation to them with my fiancée being in tower one, and they were just trying to calm me down. I was helping move patients.

We went back to Vesey and West Street and started moving the ambulances back towards North End more, and then we started going northbound on North End towards Murray Street. We were moving the triage because we got a report of the parking lot in front of the building we were in, some of the cars were on fire, and we got reports of gas lines that were blown and the fire were starting to get to them. So we ended up moving the triage initially, and we just started heading northbound to Murray Street.

We got up to Murray Street, and that's when -- Murray Street and towards West Street we ended up putting the triage just for temporary purposes. Then shortly after that tower one started to come down. Captain Fenton, I believe, was on the scene. He said at that time to just

get in the ambulances and whatever vehicle you could get in and just head northbound on West Street until you get to Chelsea Piers.

That's how the triage ended up at Chelsea Piers. Everybody just started heading northbound. They started -- we were getting over the radio, EMS radio, that they started having the ambulances staging at the Chelsea Piers.

Captain Fenton told a lieutenant from the Bellevue station that was on the scene to take me back to the station, because I could be of no use patient care-wise given my situation. He told him to take me back to Bellevue station. They removed me to Bellevue station.

Just while I was at Bellevue station, I was acting as a liaison between the station itself and the emergency department with a couple of the other lieutenants there. I'd just seeing a couple of the injuries -- I saw the firefighter they brought in in cardiac arrest that was hit by a civilian that jumped out of one of the buildings.

At that point I still didn't know what was going on with my fiancée. I was calling her

sister, calling her mother. Nobody heard anything at that point.

That whole time I had no idea what time of day it was or anything like that. They removed me to Bellevue station at about 3:00. From 3 until 5:30, as I said, I was acting as a liaison between the emergency department and the station.

My twin brother is also a paramedic at Battalion 20. He brought in a patient to Bellevue, so I was talking to him for a while. I went back to the station. I called my house to see if there were any messages on the answering machine, and there was a message from a nurse at Brooklyn hospital saying my fiancée was at Brooklyn Hospital. She was okay. She was being kept for observation.

At that point I called her sister, and her sister was already on her way over to Brooklyn Hospital to see her. So then I approached the desk lieutenant at that time at Bellevue, and I told him the situation. He was going to try to get me a ride back to Brooklyn, but he said obviously it wouldn't be any time

soon since the events were still unfolding down at the World Trade Center.

I explained to my brother what had happened. He said fine. So they just told me to continue what I was doing and they would let me know about a ride over to Brooklyn. So I was continuing acting as a liaison.

At one point I brought the firefighter's equipment that had died back over to the emergency department from the station because his coworkers from the engine company were there requesting his equipment.

While I was standing outside in the emergency ambulance bay, I was talking to my brother and another EMT -- I don't recall his name at this time -- and I started experiencing some chest pain and chest tightness, and I was brought into the emergency room. I was treated for angina and anxiety. I was subsequently admitted to the cardiac care unit over night in Bellevue, and I was released at about 6 in the morning.

Just that's what happened to me on September 11th.

Q. When you got in to Manhattan and you parked down by Carlisle and West, do you recall seeing anyone outside from Chief Goldfarb? Do you recall seeing any other EMS personnel around there that you recognized, or fire personnel?

A. Offhand? Not offhand initially, not down at that time. There was a torso of a human that was down over by the hotel by the front of Liberty Street that they had blocked off, and I saw a couple of police crime scene units there. I saw a couple firefighters; I can't recall their names or what engine or ladder company or battalions they were from. I didn't start seeing EMS people until I got up to West and Vesey Street.

I saw NY Cornell ambulances in front. I saw Long Island College Hospital in front. I saw some Fire Department ambulances in front of the hotel and tower one on West Street. A whole bunch of fire apparatus and police vehicles. I saw what looked like a Fire Department command center. I don't exactly know who was there.

Everybody had their turnout gear on. So at that specific time, it was kind of hard to

differentiate who had white shirt, light blue shirts, you know, who was just wearing turnout coats.

Like I said, I ended up seeing EMS people from up here, Battalion 20, from New York Hospital that I recognized, some names being Craig Viscuti, Chris Attanasio and Roland Diaz from up here at Battalion 20, Joe Fortis and Mike Negrón from up here at Battalion 20. I saw an EMT by the name of Steven Hess. I believe he's from Battalion 57 or the old Woodhall station down in Brooklyn.

At that specific time, I don't remember seeing any EMS lieutenants or captains, just Chief Goldfarb at that time. Other than that, I really couldn't tell you any names.

Q. You've basically covered everything we were looking for. Any thoughts or comments you'd like to add, opinion?

A. No, not really. In that type of situation other than the word "chaos" describing it all, all in all everybody more or less did what they were supposed to do. The firefighters did what they were supposed to do. They were

supposed to go in the building and try to rescue the people from the fire floors, extinguish the fires as best they can. EMS people staging outside, some in the lobbies of tower one and tower two; I knew that.

I mean, other than the chaotic scene that was going on, I would have to say everybody more or less did what an emergency action plan recommends with regards to a mess. Obviously nobody thought the buildings would fall. That was unexpected.

What was expected was firefighters were going to go up to the floors, rescue civilians, as many as they can, extinguish the fires, then we would treat and transport. Basically that was the emergency action plan that was in effect, and was what everybody expected to happen. Nobody expected the towers to fall.

So other than that, basically everybody did what they were supposed to be doing. With the chaos, I'm actually surprised. I was the only one that was actually a little bonkers.

Q. How's your fiancée?

A. She's okay. She's doing good. She's

hanging in there. She hasn't gone back to work yet. Her work actually relocated, but she hasn't gone back to work yet. But that's okay.

MR. RADENBERG: Okay. The time is now 0954, and the interview is concluded.