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WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

FIREFIGHTER WILLIAM REYNOLDS

Interview Date: December 11, 2001

Transcribed by Elizabeth F. Santamaria

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BATTALION CHIEF KENAHAN: Today's date is December 11, 2001. The time is 1:59 p.m. This is Battalion Chief Dennis Kenahan from the Safety Battalion of the Fire Department of the City of New York. I'm conducting an interview with William Reynolds, Firefighter First Grade, from Engine 76, in the quarters of Engine 76.

Q. William, just tell us the events as you recall them on September 11th.

A. We arrived down through the West Side Highway, I honestly don't remember what street we had gotten off the rig, 76 Engine. Probably somewhere in the area of Murray and West or maybe something south of that like Vesey. At that time, the engine went off to places unknown and the company ended up down at 2 World Financial Center by the command post, waiting for an assignment.

More companies arrived and so probably there was approximately 45 people there. I don't know the other companies that were there. I wasn't really paying attention. I did notice at the time I saw standing next to me Mayor Guiliani and the Police Commissioner, Chief Ganci and Chief Ray Downey. It

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seemed like a decent amount of time that we were there and we as a group had become pretty distracted with the amount of people jumping down out of the north tower. It got to the point that we were talking about not looking at the people. So as a group we all turned our backs to them so we wouldn't have to look. Then the noise from the people hitting, it became so much that we ended up having to turn around and look again. This went on for a while and I remember the people that were hitting the awning over the doorway, they were blown to pieces. I remember saying, "I hope they don't hit that awning, because this way I don't have to see them blown to pieces."

After a while, and I don't know how long it was, I was distracted by a large explosion from the south tower and it seemed like fire was shooting out a couple of hundred feet in each direction, then all of a sudden the top of the tower started coming down in a pancake. I remember my jaw dropping and just staring at it and Richard Banaciski, one of the firemen that was there, yelled "Run" and I turned and I started running into the parking garage of the Financial Center.

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Q. Bill, just one question. The fire that you saw, where was the fire? Like up at the upper levels where it started collapsing?

A. It appeared somewhere below that. Maybe twenty floors below the impact area of the plane. I saw it as fire and when I looked at it on television afterwards, it doesn't appear to show the fire. It shows a rush of smoke coming out below the area of the plane impact.

The reason why I think the cameras didn't get that image is because they were a far distance away and maybe I saw the bottom side where the plane was and the smoke was up above it.

So we ran into this parking garage, the parking garage was empty of cars and it was lit and I remember thinking, "I hope that this building doesn't fall down and crush the building that I'm in." And I remember saying, "I can't die today. My wife wouldn't accept this."

So anyway, we made it to the back of the building and I remember looking over my shoulder as this wall of darkness came in. Luckily it was only just smoke. I was standing next to my Lieutenant in the engine, Lieutenant Farrington, and I had set my

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mask down by the ramp at the entrance and I didn't have a mask. I said to him, "Frank, if the smoke gets bad, you're gonna have to share your mask with me." Then we continued back further. Frank found an exit and a security guard, we asked the security guard if that exits the building and he said, "Yes." I remember saying to him, "Are you absolutely sure?" He said, "Yes." So I said, "All right. Then get out of here. Go."

So all of a sudden Frank came out with a life saving rope, which I wasn't aware he had at the time, and he hooked it to the doorknob and we started walking back into the area where we just ran from and I heard people with masks on, the guys had masks on, I could hear them in all directions. So I followed behind Frank and I started talking out loud saying, "If anybody can't find the way out, we have a rope over here. He'll take you to the door." Some voices said, "Where?" I said, "I'll keep talking. Just come to my voice and there is a way out over here."

Then I remember hearing somebody saying, "Oh, I have a door here." I said, "Well, if you have a door, then go out the door. But if anybody is lost,

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just come over to my voice and there is a rope and you can follow it out." So then guys started showing up towards me. They put their hands on the rope and that's the last I saw of them.

So after we were confident that there was no one left in the parking garage, Frank and I followed the rope back and we worked our way to the back door. When we got out, we were by the North Cove Yacht Harbor and we went out to the Hudson River. What I had forgotten to state previous to this, before the towers had fallen, two emergency service cops had come up to us in wired gear, carrying uzis and asked if we had seen any civilians. They said, "If you see any, come get us. Don't go near the civilians." At the time there were no civilians around, in my eye shot.

I also remember, at that time, which I had also forgotten to state, that in the north tower there was a woman who may have been a security guard for the complex and she was just walking back and forth seeming to be oblivious of the people falling down, jumping down right on the other side of the glass. In hindsight, I would say she probably was in shock.

There was also a Police Officer in there. He

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just seemed to be just standing there not paying attention to what this woman was doing. Anyway, back to getting out to the water.

We started regrouping as a company, verified we were present. We did not know at the time where George Rodriguez, our chauffeur, was. There was a lot of radio traffic. The Lieutenant was trying to find out where George was. After a short time we heard communication that George was fine.

I remember then seeing a civilian, the first civilian that I saw, he was carrying a bag and I thought, you have to watch out for the civilians and I was thinking, maybe I should take his bag and throw it in the water, because I didn't know what it was. Then I thought maybe of throwing him in the water. Then I said, "No. He's walking south. I'll work north and get away from him."

I remember discussing with other guys that maybe there is people around that would shoot us. Then we went over closer to the water and there was a barge there. I remember thinking, this might be an oil barge and there might be a bomb on it. So we started walking back towards West Street. Then I was thinking, we can't go close to the buildings

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because if more planes come. So we kind of just all were walking around dazed and I ran into a Battalion Chief. I don't know who he was. I said to him, I said, "Chief, they're evacuating the other building; right?" He said, "No."

Q. You're talking about the north tower now; right?

A. Before the north tower fell. He said, "No." I said, "Why not? They blew up the other one." I thought they blew it up with a bomb.

I said, "If they blew up the one, you know they're gonna blow up the other one." He said, "No, they're not." I said, "Well, you gotta tell them to evacuate it, because it's gonna fall down and you gotta get the guys out." Because I had felt there were hundreds of firemen who died in the first tower and thousands of people. He said, "I'm just the Battalion Chief. I can't order that." I remember looking at the radio on him and I said, "You got a fucking radio and you got a fucking mouth. Use the fucking things. Empty this fucking building." Again he said, "I'm just a Battalion Chief. I can't do that."

So I walked back by the water. We were all

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basically just somewhat in visual site of each other, us and 22 Truck, some of the guys from 22 Truck. I had known, at that time, that all of the guys of the 22 truck had gotten out. We were walking around very numb. I knew I was in shock, but there was nothing I could do about it.

So eventually this other chief came back and said, "They are evacuating this tower." I said, "Oh, that's great." And sometime after that I watched from the, I guess, by the Winter Garden area, I watched the north tower fall. It was expected so it wasn't as traumatic as the first one to me. Then that Battalion Chief came back again with his clip board and he said, "We need volunteers to go back in and check the perimeter for survivors." He emphasized that we didn't have to go in, but if we would he would appreciate it.

So he took the names of us in 76 Engine and we went back in. I believe it was at Vesey Street we got up to about Washington and a Deputy Chief met us there and said that he wanted us to go back up West Street and regroup and we'd take it from there. Basically while we were in that area, Washington and Vesey, it was just everything burning on the ground

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and around us and the dust, and it was no apparent people laying around that was visible. So we walked up West and I think we got to the area of Stuyvesant High School and basically that's where I spent a good amount of time. I don't think anything much after that should be relevant, because I didn't come back down to that area again of the World Trade Center for many hours.

BATTALION CHIEF KENAHAN: Okay. Thank you, Bill. I appreciate your cooperation.