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WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

BATTALION CHIEF DOMINICK DeRUBBIO

Interview Date: October 12, 2001

Transcribed by Laurie A. Collins

MR. CUNDARI: The time is 10:15, and this is George Cundari with Murray Murad from the Fire Department of the City of New York. I'm conducting an interview with the following individual.

Q. Please state your name, rank, title and assigned command.

A. My name is Battalion Chief Dominick DeRubbio. I'm assigned to Division 8. I'm doing the 25R group in Battalion 21. That morning I was surplus, so I was assigned to the field comm. unit.

I was running late that morning. ■

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■ I got out late. I was driving in, and I was on the Gowanus and traffic was backed up. So I got off the Gowanus, and I tried to cut through Park Slope. Then I saw the smoke sort of to the west. I said, "Oh, it looks like we have a job somewhere."

Then I put on 1010 Wins, and then I heard that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. So I said, "Well, field comm. is going to be gone, so I'm going to have to get to

quarters." I parked the car, got my gear and started to get over there.

When I made the turn onto Flatbush Avenue, I could see the World Trade Center. I could see the smoke. I knew we had our hands full here.

Q. What quarters were you responding to?

A. I was going to field comm., which is Tillary Street. I was responding to their quarters. Traffic in downtown Brooklyn was a mess. I remember it was pretty jammed up down there. Then listening to 1010 Wins, I heard another plane crashed into the other tower. I said, "Wow."

I got to quarters, parked my car, grabbed my gear, and there was a group of some other firemen there. We walked over to the Brooklyn Bridge, which was closed. The cops had that closed. They got a Department of Sanitation car, and he drove us over the Brooklyn Bridge.

We got to like Chambers right in front of One Centre Street. It was just chaos. People were evacuating out of Manhattan. Everybody was coming towards us. So we walked through City

Hall Park over to Vesey Street.

I remember seeing Commissioner Von Essen. He was in front of Seven World Trade Center. They were looking at the fire in the tower. I noticed a lot of airplane parts in the street, a lot of gears and stuff like that.

Q. Excuse me. What was the location that you saw the airplane parts?

A. Going down Vesey, sort of in front of Seven World Trade Center. I knew they were airplane parts. You could see gears and pieces of airplane.

I got down to West Street and went south, and I saw field comm. They were in front of Two World Financial Center. They had their van set up there. I remember seeing Chief Cassano, and I remember seeing Chief Cross there.

So I reported in to field comm. I tried to get myself a radio. There were no radios left. All the radios were taken out of the van. I remember stowing my gear under the table, the field comm. table. I was talking to Chief Cassano. He needed a battery. I got him a battery, and I changed the battery in his radio

for him. He was standing there.

People were jumping out of towers. We were on West there. They were jumping out, and they were landing in the street in front of us. Just something you try not to pay too much attention to, you know.

There was a group of people there. There were people waiting for assignments. I remember someone saying they wanted to know if they could land helicopters on the roof. I think Chief Cassano said it can't be done.

After a while we were looking up at the tower, and all of a sudden someone said it's starting to come down.

Q. This would be the north tower coming down?

A. This would be the first one.

Q. Or the south tower?

A. This one here.

It was weird how it started to come down. It looked like it was a timed explosion, but I guess it was just the floors starting to pancake one on top of the other.

Luckily where the field comm. unit was,

there was a big open door behind us, a big roll-down door which was open, and that led to a ramp which went into the basement of Two World Financial Center. So pretty much everybody turned around and went down this ramp into the basement of the building.

A lot of debris came down where we were, and it also came down the ramp. All the dust and the smoke came down. Most of us who went down there -- I would say all of us -- were lucky we got out of the way.

After a while we sort of regrouped back to the top of the ramp. I was with a cop. He had a flashlight. It was so dark, you couldn't see anything, but we went back up and looked around to see if there was anybody up there. We didn't see anybody.

I tried to find my gear, and my gear was buried.

Q. Do you recall who went downstairs with you?

A. I'm pretty sure Chief Cassano was with me and Lieutenant Gates from field comm. There were some EMS people there. There was probably

some officers and some companies there also. It probably had to be about 30 people went down that ramp. Like I said, we were pretty lucky we had that, because if that door was closed I think we would have gotten hit with debris where we were standing.

Afterwards we went back down the ramp, and I was able to find a staircase. I walked into the lobby and went out the back of the building, which faced the Hudson River. People were starting to drift over to the west side. I think Marine Company 9 was there, and there were two New York City Waterway ferry boats there.

So I told the pilot in the marine company, "Tell the dispatcher any injured people, bring them to the Hudson River," because it was a clear area at the time and we had boats that were evacuating people to New Jersey. I know the marine company took quite a few people out of there and over to Jersey.

Q. Where was the marine company docked?

A. They had to be -- let's see.

Q. Here's North End Street.

A. They had to be over here. I think it

was south of this -- they were right here. People were coming west and coming over. They had quite a few people on their boat, and they took them, like I said, to Jersey. We were trying to help people evacuate and get over towards the Hudson River.

I didn't have a radio. I never got a radio, so I really didn't know what was going on. Eventually I was sort of behind the Winter Garden, and I had picked up a mask. I figured I might need it later. I didn't have a mask either. There was a mask laying there. I picked it up.

I was looking over the Winter Garden at the second tower, and then I saw that starting to come down. There were people standing next to me. We all just started running. I was able to get around the corner of another building, and I got into a doorway and put my mask on.

Q. So you ran north in the Winter Garden? This is the Winter Garden over here.

A. It had to be -- yeah, I ran -- it was probably around this building. I was able to hunker down in a doorway.

Q. You ran towards North End Street?

A. Yeah. I put my mask on. Like you say, you're sort of in shock that this thing even happened. It was really difficult.

After that it seemed like everybody started moving north. I met Lieutenant Gates, and we tried to set up the command board again, tried to get some kind of organization going, but it was kind of difficult.

Eventually we pretty much made our way north up to Chambers and West, and that's where the command post was set up. We had the staging, which was north of that by Stuyvesant High School.

That's pretty much it as far as I can remember.

Q. Murray, got any questions?

I just want to know, there was no assigned radio to you?

A. There was, but by the time I got there, all the radios had been taken.

Q. Okay. All right.

A. I guess people coming in, they stripped that whole field comm. van of radios.

That was it.

Q. Chief, I'd like to thank you for your
time and for doing this interview.

MR. CUNDARI: It's 10:25. This
concludes the interview.