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WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

CAPTAIN KARIN DESHORE

Interview Date: November 7, 2001

Transcribed by Elisabeth F. Nason

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INVESTIGATOR TAMBASCO: Today is November 7. I'm Mike Tambasco with the World Trade Center Task Force. We are doing an interview with Captain Karin Deshore of Battalion 46 into the events of September 11 at the World Trade Center. Interview time is beginning at 0549 a.m.

Q. Captain, would you be good enough to tell us your story?

A. Okay, on 9-11-01 I reported for duty as usual, at 0500 hours. Lieutenant Spiro Yioras was sent from Battalion 49 to be Conditions 46. He arrived here roughly around 0615 hours. Mr. Keller, who became part of the persons responding with me, arrived for duty at 0630 hours. I don't know the exact time, but I was sitting behind my desk when Mr. Keller came into my office and told me that an airplane had just hit the World Trade Center.

Because Mr. Keller is a prankster, I told him to leave me alone, and get out of my office. Then he said to me it was really true. I looked at his face. I got up and sure enough there was smoke coming out of the World Trade Center building. We had the television in our lunchroom.

Thinking it was a possibly accident of a

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Cessna or something hitting the World Trade Center, I did become concerned, but at that time I didn't have a command car. I didn't respond. When it became apparent that a commercial airliner had hit the World Trade Center, the first hit, I called Lieutenant Yioras in from patrol. He came here and another one of my employees, Mr. Prue, also called and asked did I want him to come in, since he lived right around the corner and I advised him, come on in. When Lieutenant Yioras arrived, Lieutenant Yioras, myself and Mister EMT Keller, who is here on restricted duty, but I still felt he could respond with me, if it was just as a matter of being my aide or carrier or assist and Mr. Prue responded in command car 825.

It is my recollection that we drove Northern Boulevard to the 59 Street bridge. At the beginning of the 59 Street bridge, the second airliner hit and we witnessed it. Mr. Keller later on told me that we were still at the office here, but I remember it hitting when we just hit the 59 Street bridge on the Queens side. People were just standing on the 59 Street bridge in total disbelief. No traffic was moving. Traffic agents were trying to clear the way to get us over the bridge. We could see the smoke coming out of

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the buildings, explosions, you know, dark smoke coming out of both buildings.

We made it over the 59 Street bridge, made a left on Second Avenue and we took the rear end of a caravan of police vehicles, Fire Department vehicles, black cars with sirens and we just followed them, because there was just no other openings. People were standing everywhere on Second Avenue and just looking, because you couldn't see the twin towers, but you could see the smoke coming, you know, above the area.

I was not driving, Lieutenant Yioras was driving and somewhere we made a right turn. In the meantime, I notified communication, was told to switch to Citywide, which we did, and I told him who was all responding and I was advised that I was cleared to respond even prior to that, because we also heard EMS employees on the air advising that they were on the scene of the locations and there were no supervisors and they didn't know what to do, where to go or who to await.

So they were told by communications to go to various staging areas. We were told to go to West and Vesey. I have no idea where West and Vesey is and we just kept following the caravan of emergency vehicles.

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We arrived on the west side and I believe it was West and Vesey. We couldn't go any further. It was in front of -- just prior to one of the twin towers, and I believe it is number 1 twin tower. All right.

Just as we got there, Chief Charlie Wells was there trying to set up an area with all of the ambulance crews that were just standing there and really didn't have anybody to give them any directions. He saw Lieutenant Yioras and myself and he basically asked us to keep in touch with him and be part of his contingency.

Most of the individuals that were there were Hatzolah volunteers, maybe 3 and 4 to a bus. I had one Flushing paramedic unit and I remember it was Al Touro on the paramedic unit. We also had a student that was his first day riding as a paramedic student. He, of course, had no helmet. I had another BLS unit from Flushing. I don't know their radio designation, but the two ladies' names are Jen and Bonnie and I really didn't know that they were ladies either.

Later on I found out a react unit and one of the gentlemen was Orlando Rivera I believe. They were told basically to respond with myself and Chief Wells to the further part of the World Trade Center

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buildings, the southwest corner of building number 2.

I left Lieutenant Yioras in charge of all the ambulances. He was to collect the keys and as the units would get patients, they would come back to him, get the keys and then respond to a hospital and then come back to him or whatever they were told to do. I was with Mr. Keller and Mr. Prue. This is funny, but Mr. Keller told me that I looked like an ass and I told him it was really unprofessional for him to say that. I said to him why would you say that. He said to me I had my helmet on backwards. So I put my helmet on the right way. Apparently I was a little excited at that time, because I was trying to get everybody as close to the west side as I could because of the falling debris and the bodies kept coming down.

I spoke with paramedic Charl from Flushing and I said to him did you see that, he said what. I said just look up to your left. Here the bodies kept coming out of both buildings. Some of them were on fire. Some of them were moving, others were not moving and the worst part was as they hit the ground, they would go like a splash sound. You could just see the whole body would just disintegrate into pieces and splatter all over and the sound and I saw a couple of

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them do that, was just enough to just make me tune out to that.

I became more concerned with everybody in my contingency not getting hit by falling debris. I had the rear. Chief Wells had the front and all the volunteers were in the back. I was trying to keep them moving and trying to move left, because once I got them out from underneath the buildings, they weren't getting hit by bodies, but the debris just kept coming out, and the billowing smoke and as people kept pouring out of the buildings, there was total chaos. They were coming in our direction and before we could do anything for them, they would turn and they would go back in.

There was no organization, anybody saying hey, just keep going in this direction. People just would not listen to any kind of advice, suggestion or demand you made of them to keep them safe. My concern at that time was basically all of the volunteers that I had who had no helmets. So as we got over to the furthest end of the World Trade Center building, which was now building number 2, the southwest corner, Chief Wells said to me Karin, give me one unit to go in with me. Go on the command frequency and when I need another unit, I will call you. Then you know that the

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other unit has a patient and gone back to their bus, which at that time I felt saved a lot of lives instead of us just all go into the building. His decision was an extremely wise choice.

I didn't know that the two people I chose were two ladies, they were Jen and Bonnie, because they were the only ones with helmet. In the meantime I am yelling to get everybody else underneath a pedestrian overpass over the street, because again they had no helmets and the debris, there was no longer danger of them getting hit by bodies, but the debris was just coming down. It was unbelievable.

Charlie Wells, my last recollection of him was going towards the building and Bonnie and Jen. I told them to follow Chief Wells with their helmet on, but they didn't have a long board so I said to -- later on I found out they were ladies. Don't you think you should take a long board with you and they didn't have one. Somebody went and grabbed a long board from someplace and they had their stretcher up, they laid it on the side of the stretcher.

As they are walking now they are tripping on the straps, so I told them -- again, I told them this is not right. You are going to fall and hurt



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yourself. You won't be able to help anybody and they took the long board and put it on top. My last recollection was of them going towards the building.

I asked at that time -- everybody else was with me still and I kept pushing them back and back and back, because I said what is this, a subway at the end of the overpass, because there is fire coming out of the ground. I didn't realize that that was a car already on fire over there.

All the ambulances were parked right there in front of me also, underneath the overpass, just neatly parked towards the buildings, all of them. There must have been at least two rows of ambulances, maybe 10 of them. Of course cars parked everywhere else.

Apparently, my last recollection like I said, was Chief Wells and the two ladies going towards the building. I didn't know that Chief Wells made it out of the building and apparently my delaying their entering the building, Jen and Bonnie, might have saved them all, because they also survived. My back was towards the building, trying to push everybody up. Grassy hill was there and up underneath that overpass, when somebody just simply shouted and I have no idea who it was, it's blowing.

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I had no clue what was going on. I never turned around because a sound came from somewhere that I never heard before. Some people compared it with an airplane. It was the worst sound of a rolling sound, not a thunder. I can't explain it, what it was. All I know is -- and a force started to come hit me in my back. I can't explain it. You had to be there. All I know is I had to run because I thought there was an explosion.

I ran about 10, 12 feet up this little grassy hill and by then this force and this sound caught up with me already. I threw myself behind the last support column of the pedestrian overpass. It became pitch dark. The sound got worse, the force just kept passing me. At times I thought it was like an orange light maybe, coming past me.

I was unaware what was happening. I thought it was just a major explosion. I didn't know the building was collapsing. I was sitting with my left side towards the support beam, total darkness, total noise. I felt beyond alone. I felt desolated. I felt like, all I could say was people think about their families and whatever. All I kept saying to myself within me I don't want to die, I don't want to die, I

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don't want to die.

I can't tell you how long it was before it died down. I just felt like the darkness the loneliness and being alone was the worst thing I ever experienced in my life and not being able to breathe. There was no air. Whatever this explosion was simply sucked all the oxygen out of the air. You couldn't breathe and the feeling of suffocation, I can't explain no further on that.

I don't know how long it took. All of a sudden it was all over and the silence set in. Nobody cried, nobody talked, nobody made a sound. There was nothing. Absolutely nothing. You could open your eyes, it was pitch black. Breathing became a little bit easier but I just sat there. I didn't know what was happening and I just sat there. Again, I can't give you time periods, 5 minutes, 5 seconds or however long it might have been.

Somehow over my right shoulder I hear this male voice, "is there anybody out there." I didn't know at first should I answer, should I not answer. Then I just said I'm over here, please don't leave me. The man said I'm over here, I can't see. That's when I opened my eyes. I said I can't see either. He said

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okay I'm going to talk. I said I'm going to talk and we will find each other. That's exactly what we did. We found each other. We kept talking to each other. We found each other. Nobody else answered, nobody else said a word. I was unaware that there were people from my unit laying all around me. They described it later on where they were.

I had a police van in front of me, about 6 feet that I remember being there. I saw a picture later on, it was totally destroyed. Two feet to my right there was an overturned car, which I saw later on the pictures also. I had steel beams all around me.

Like I said I found this gentleman and we held onto each other like little kids. By then we were coughing, vomiting, spitting. It was just -- we were trying to breathe. It was total darkness. We couldn't see anything behind us at all. We found about 5 or 6 more people and we held onto each other. Like little kids, we walked, as I found out later on, towards the water. Since I didn't know any of the location I didn't know there was a marina. We just walked in a direction where we could walk. We held onto each other. We were all coughing, vomiting. Some of us fell down. We would pick each other up. There might

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have been 6, 7, 8 of us by now. There were dead bodies laying everywhere, obvious signs of death.

I had no ambulances. I had no medical equipment. We had nothing, just the way we were, that's what we had. Towards our -- as we kept walking down a street, I have no idea what street it was, halfway down that street, two ladies came out of a building. They brought us some water. We started to rinse our mouths out and we started to -- I at least, I know I irrigated my eyes because I had whatever it was in my eyes and that made it even worse. Now I apparently created mud in my eyes. As I was told later on, we had granulated cement and jet fuel mixture all over our uniforms and our bodies.

It just got worse. We now picked up a fireman that was severely severely injured. I had some female police officers that had severe cuts and lacerations and people were just bleeding, by now maybe 10 of us. We were just -- I didn't have any obvious signs of injuries that I could see on myself, but other people were bleeding.

We went into this location of business where the ladies came out and found out it was a distribution place for napkins and table cloths for restaurants. We

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used their napkins to bandage people up. Somebody found a long board and we put the injured fireman on. He was severely injured, bleeding from the rear of his neck or occipital area in the back of his head.

Police officers now came in. Again, maybe by now we were 12, thinking I was Fire Department and had the Fire Department helmet on, I was chosen to run the outfit there, because I kept telling them bring all the wounded in here that you can find. We started bandaging them up and so on. The officer said do you have any ambulances. I said I have nothing. We had no equipment whatsoever.

Somebody apparently found some face masks and we attempted to put them on, but they hindered us from breathing even more and we just couldn't breathe. It became a little lighter out. By now it was grayish. The officer saw that there was a little marina. They went across there to try to get the boats that were docked there started and they couldn't.

After I bandaged everybody up and everybody was sort of calm in the location. Like I said, maybe 10, 12 people now. Now I also had two elderly females that were a part of that business there. So we had maybe 12 individuals. I went outside to see what I

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could do, when I saw the second building of the World Trade Center, still unbeknown to me the first one had collapsed.

Somewhere around the middle of the World Trade Center, there was this orange and red flash coming out. Initially it was just one flash. Then this flash just kept popping all the way around the building and that building had started to explode. The popping sound, and with each popping sound it was initially an orange and then a red flash came out of the building and then it would just go all around the building on both sides as far as I could see. These popping sounds and the explosions were getting bigger, going both up and down and then all around the building.

I went inside and I told everybody that the other building or there was an explosion occurring up there and I said I think we have another major explosion. I don't know if we are all going to be safe here. I told them I can't force you, but I don't know if we are going to be safe here. I'm going to try to get as far away from this building as possible.

Unbeknown to me, a half a block down was the water.

Now we are picking up this injured fireman.

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It took 4 to carry him. We are picking up all the injured. We took the two elderly ladies from the building with us and now 10, 12, of us, 14 of us, are going out of the building and further down, only to get down to the water.

Down at the water was one EMS person. I saw his Fire Department uniform, with his hands over his ears, yelling I can't find my partner, has anybody seen my partner and he is just running back and forth. He wouldn't stand still long enough for me to even speak with him. I had another EMS person, later on I found out he is from Battalion 20, his name is Kemp, the last name is Kemp. There were two ladies there that apparently had been jogging up and down this East River or west river, whatever you want to call it, and they were in little jogging shorts, jogging in circles. You couldn't stop them. I tried to stop them. I tried to find out if they were injured or anything. I couldn't stop them.

So here these explosions are getting bigger and louder and bigger and louder and I told everybody if this building totally explodes, still unaware that the other building had collapsed, I'm going in the water. I said I can swim. I'm taking somebody with me



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and hold them, because it was maybe a 6 foot drop.

Just then, a small Jersey boat, it was Jersey police officers as I thought, entered this little marina. By then the darkness had turned to gray and there was light on the other side, but you couldn't make out that light. Maybe because my eyes were that bad I couldn't see that good, but there was light and the boat came in. I don't recall that I had to go down some stairs to get to that boat. I saw that later on when I went to visit the site about a month later.

We went down, we carried everybody down. The elderly ladies got on. The fireman was put on board and the police officers and the EMS person, maybe 10, 12, 14 people got on the boat. I had not got on the boat yet. There were 3 officers, two officers and one sergeant, what I thought was a sergeant. As I'm standing at the door to the boat, the sergeant yells at me and pardon me for my language, what the fuck are you going to do now. Are you going to come or not. I'm still standing there trying to figure out what my next move should be, when the same sergeant says fucking shit, it's coming at us, and that's a quote.

Again, I didn't see what was happening behind me, but knowing of all the explosions I thought here

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was another explosion coming and this sound again and this wave of this force again. I just jumped on the boat, closed the door with my left hand and just sank down to my knees. Here whatever it was just came right at us again. The sergeant is yelling at the one officer. The second officer was in the back with some of the people that had been in the back of the boat. I had no clue what was going on back there. The sergeant is yelling at the second officer, get the fuck out of here, get the fuck out of here. I'm sorry for using that word repeatedly. The poor guy behind the steering wheel is saying I can't go any place, we are tied on.

That is about what saved our lives, because this force came at us and hit us with everything. The boat was attempting to overturn and it kept hitting in the back against the pier. Again, I was just -- by then I was resigned to die. I didn't mind dying because I was with other people, you know, and the guy behind the steering wheel just sank to his knee and the sergeant just stood at the other door. I have no clue how long that lasted. I was -- my back was towards it and as I'm sitting in this corner there I was just resigned, this is it, it can't happen to me a second time. We were -- this time was a difference. We were

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capable of breathing and I was with somebody.

When again, I don't know how the window didn't get broken or how the boat wasn't overturned, nothing happened really, but when all of it quieted down again, the sergeant opened the door and he got out and he untied the boat and by the time this starched individual with the starched uniform came in, he was covered with everything. He told us this guy who -- officer who finally got off the floor, just get the fuck out of here now. He said I can't see where I'm going. He said just turn the boat to the left and every time you hit something turn it to the left and turn it to the left and turn it to the left till you get out in the open water and when you get out, just keep going. That's exactly what this officer did.

As we finally got out of this small opening of that marina, you could see the light in New Jersey, because he apparently was by then was going in that direction. I got up from there because I appeared to be in the way. I got up from there and I went down into that small cabin that was down there and he was -- they apparently had taken, thrown the fireman and long board down into that cabin. The fireman had come off the long board and was just laying there. He was

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still bleeding profusely.

I went down there and I straightened out his leg. The long board was laying half way going up the stairs and people were just sitting and hanging there and by then they had gotten back on to the top of the boat and the back. I straightened out his leg and -- sorry -- he had all the stuff coming out of his pockets and I said to him I'm going to empty out your pockets because you got -- they looked like hose connections, metal and everything in his pockets and his turnout coat and I took everything out and I threw it to my right. There was like a bench or an area there. I just threw it. He still had his helmet on. He was laying in his own blood and he says to me just I'm all right. My name is Bob. So I said to him my name is Karin and we just held hands. So we just held hands till we got over to Jersey.

When we got over to Jersey they told me to get the hell out of the area and I said I can't get up right now. I just couldn't get up. I didn't have the strength to get up. They came and got Bob and they put him on the long board. I saw them turn him over to my side. They put the long board and the 4 of them got Bob up and I still couldn't get up. They came and they

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physically stood me up. I couldn't get up. I did walk up those about 3 stairs up and I got to the top of the boat and they weren't ready for us in Jersey.

We were the first boat to get over there. There was nobody there. The cops kept yelling, there were cops there. The cops kept yelling, just give him your hand, give him your hand, put your foot up. I can hear all of this. I couldn't react. I know I didn't do it, but I could hear them. Somebody finally took my right hand and gave it to somebody and they took one of my legs and they put it up there and gave it to somebody. I mean they put it up and they pulled me up and they pushed me up. Then somebody came and just assisted me and they put some sheets over on the pier and they put me right there. I don't know what happened to anybody else. They started coming in, medical teams, and I don't know what happened to Bob.

So we were just laying there and again they gave us water and they irrigated our eyes and it just made it worse. By then, we were vomiting. Some of us were vomiting blood and so on, but I appeared to be one of the better ones off, because they had triage tags and I started making out triage tags and putting it on everybody, just their names and Ladder company or

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Engine and EMS and civilians and I made triage tags up for everybody.

Maybe 45 minutes to an hour later they got not ambulances, but some vans to take us to Jersey City medical center, 4 of us. When we got there they had just set up some kind of an auditorium or whatever. They took us into the auditorium and they proceeded to treat us with -- I got albuterol treatments and I got an injection. They got an ophthalmologist and they cleaned out my eyes and my ears were just, I don't know. I couldn't even hear any more, probably from all the noise.

My problem was I refused to give up my helmet. I would not surrender my helmet because I didn't know when the next thing was going to come. Somebody dropped an oxygen tank and 4 of us hit the deck. I mean I just got out of that wheelchair and I threw my self on the ground looking for someplace to hide. I can remember that.

But the most unbelievable thing is that when I looked down, my right foot had no sock on. I found my sock in my pocket. To the best of my recollection, as I child I was always told by my grandmother, if you ever have to jump in the water take your shoes and

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socks off because it will pull you down. I think in anticipation of jumping in the water I started taking my shoes and socks off and then saw the boat come and put my shoe back on. That's the best I can remember.

After treatment, we were taken up to a conference room where they had gathered all fire, PD and EMS people. I saw some really traumatized individuals. By then, I had this only survivor syndrome. I hadn't heard, seen or anybody from my unit. My feeling of sending Charlie Wells and those two ladies into that building, because by then people said that both buildings had collapsed and I had figured that everybody was in there. It just took a total mental toll on me until maybe sometime in the afternoon, around 4, 5 o'clock Al Touro was brought in, the paramedic from Flushing.

We saw each other and we just stood there and we hugged and we cried. We just cried. I had been unable to get any kind of message to my family because the phones were out. My husband works over at Battalion 47 in the Rockaways. The last transmission from me was that I had lost all of my people, that I was with individuals and I was trying to evacuate them. After that there was no more transmission. Even

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that apparently didn't get through to people.

Lieutenant Gleeson here went to the command center here. He initially had me declared missing, then missing and possibly dead and then definitely confirmed passed away. That of course, reached my family and they had a very hard time trying to figure out what had happened.

My husband left work that evening at 5 o'clock after doing 12 hours tours. He immediately caused an accident and totalled the car. He had to be picked up by one of my children Danielle, and she brought him here and that was about 8:30, 9 o'clock that evening when I reached them for the first time and told them I was alive.

By 10 o'clock that night a minister from Jersey got a bus from somewhere and because the city was closed down, we got an escort from the Jersey City police and we were all brought back to somewhere in New York where we wanted to go. I reached here at 10:30 that night. That was for the first time my family really knew that I was all right.

We were allowed to take showers at the medical center because by 1, 2:00 in the afternoon all that soot that was covering us had created a total rash



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situation. I think I stood under that shower for, I don't even know how long, but I couldn't get it off. I found debris inside my clothes that was just unbelievable how it got there. It just can't be explained. My uniform was totally gray. It was covered with a soot that I can't explain what it even was. My visor on my helmet was cracked, but I think I was one of the better ones that got away as far as injury was concerned.

I'm alive. Anything else I can tell you?

Q. Quite a story. Quite an experience.

A. Well, it hasn't left me. Yes, people came here to give us counseling. After a while, while I felt they had the best of intentions, after a while I just simply had to tell them please don't come here no more, because if you come here and you sit like you are sitting across from me at the desk and ask me one more time how do you feel. Do you want to talk about it, I will go off the deep end.

The only people I want to talk to is the people that were there with me. What has really helped me was to know that nobody in my unit got killed or seriously injured. The most they had were fractures. Rabbi Birnhack confirmed that all the Hatzolah

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volunteers survived. I spoke to all of the other people that were with me and they all survived. I was so grateful that Charlie Wells survived. He was the first one from my unit into that building.

I have a problem with the whole situation still. I wish the Fire Department would come around with professionals and not people that are from a local counseling service or whatever -- excuse me for a moment. My concern really was that no one from the Fire Department made any kind of effort to even find out how we were doing. I didn't get a phone call. I didn't see my Chief until Saturday a week after that, which is 10 days later.

I even received a phone call from Mr. Velez, the executive director of Elmhurst Hospital at my home, but no one from EMS contacted me to find out how I was doing. There was great concern here about some other people, which after I had gone through all the problems I had to handle, because again nobody was available to handle anything at the facility here concerning the other individuals that had gone through this trauma.

To this day I have not been asked do I need any counselings from some certified people or do I wish to participate in counselings with a group. Elmhurst

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Hospital has offered me counseling services, which I will accept, but I feel more of an effort should have been made by the Fire Department or the EMS command to assist us that went through this.

Anything else I can help you with?

Q. No, ma'am, unless you have anything else that you would like to add.

A. I'm retiring.

Q. May I say congratulations on that.

A. Thank you.

INVESTIGATOR TAMBASCO: Thank you for your interview Captain. This interview concludes at 0633 a.m.