

File No. 9110035

WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

PARAMEDIC DANIEL RIVERA

Interview Date: October 10, 2001

Transcribed by Laurie A. Collins

MS. BASTEDENBECK: Today is October 10th, 2001. The time is 1520 hours. My name is Chris Bastedenbeck. I work for the New York City Fire Department. I'm conducting an interview with the following individual.

Please state your name, your rank, your title, where you're assigned.

PARAMEDIC RIVERA: Daniel Rivera, paramedic. I'm assigned to Battalion 31, Station 36 in Brooklyn.

Q. I'd just like you to give me the events of September 11th, 2001.

A. Okay. I basically started my -- we were gassing up at Tillary and Gold Street, which is two blocks away from the Brooklyn Bridge, when we heard the commotion over the PD radio that a plane just hit one of the towers.

We got on the bridge, because we were, again, two blocks away from there, and called the dispatcher over the radio -- actually over the phone cause the radio was really bad, and let them know that we were on our way to that call. She said 10-4, and she assigned us the job. That

was two minutes after the first plane hit.

Q. The dispatcher that you spoke to was the Brooklyn dispatcher?

A. Yes, Brooklyn.

So it took us about four minutes to get to the scene, because we were really, really close. We parked in front of the south tower right in front of the building.

Q. When you say "Right in front of the building" --

A. Right here. Actually in front of Four World Trade Center and in back of the south tower building.

Q. Okay. So somewhere right in the complex?

A. Right in the front right here. Maybe about one yard away from the south tower building.

Q. So that was when you first arrived?

A. Right.

There was a lot of people running just every direction, and several people were hurt. At that time I was treating one patient who was on the ground with a laceration to his forehead,

and actually I think it was a total of three patients, one asthmatic and I don't remember the other patient.

As I was treating the patient with the laceration and the asthmatic patient, that's when the second plane hit. All I heard was just a thunderous noise. As I looked up, I saw a ball of flames coming down. So everyone ran, the patients and everyone.

I ran not too far, a couple steps behind me, next to this doughnut cart, and hid under there until everything was clear and we went right back. Basically that's when I realized it was a terrorist attack.

Basically there were too many patients at the time, and you really couldn't triage anyone. It was just too dangerous. The scene wasn't safe. So we were just basically helping – at that point I don't know what I'm talking about. Everyone pretty much split up.

Then I went and I started directing people from the building, from the south tower, to get out, because as they were coming out of the building, they were getting on their phones

and talking and blocking the entrance. So we just said, "Let's go. You've got to go."

Q. Did you go into the building actually?

A. Yes, I went into the south tower building, but came right out right by the doors. I was trying to figure out why there wasn't too many people coming out. Like I said, there was a lot of people on their cell phones. I guess when they got to the lobby they thought it was safe and they decided to just get on their cell phones and talk and block the entrances. I was making sure that the entrances were clear so everyone can pass.

Q. The south tower, do you know if you were out on Liberty Street?

A. I don't remember.

Q. You don't remember. Okay.

A. I don't remember. You know what, I could have been on this side. I don't remember that.

Basically once I did that, I got together with my partner, and he moved the vehicle two blocks behind, somewhere around here somewhere, behind Four World Trade Center, I

think.

Q. Like by Trinity?

A. Yeah, around here, somewhere around --
yeah, Liberty and around here somewhere, Trinity
and Liberty around here, I think.

Once we saw all that happening, we
needed to move the bus.

Q. Okay.

A. So what else happened?

Q. When you moved out the bus out to
there, did you see anybody? Any EMS supervisors
or firemen supervisors?

A. There was a supervisor, but he was
pretty much overwhelmed, but don't I remember his
name. He was pretty much overwhelmed. It wasn't
textbook. It was basically everyone for
themselves after the second explosion.

I saw Manny Delgado. I saw some other
people. Like I said, it was crazy, really crazy.

Everything pretty much calmed down.
Once the second plane hit, it wasn't too bad.
People still running out of the building. Body
parts, I think that was the worst. Every three
seconds I was counting -- I counted about 26

bodies when I was there. Every three seconds somebody was jumping.

At that point we were triage -- we were what they call front line medics. There was a captain there -- I don't know his name -- from EMS. He was setting everyone up, saying the medics were going to go in first, the EMTs were going in behind us.

They didn't let us go in because it was dangerous. We were right in front of the building still. We had no idea the buildings were going to collapse. That was dangerous where we were anyway.

I think it took about 30 minutes or 40 minutes after the second collapse. After the second plane hit the south tower building, and then the building collapsed.

Q. When the building collapsed where were you?

A. I was right in front of the building, right in front.

Q. You were still --

A. Right, because what happened was that --

Q. -- up near Trinity and Liberty?

A. No, we moved the bus to Trinity, but we went back to right in front of south tower, because triage -- I'm not too sure if it was over here. I think it was over here somewhere. Triage was still right in front of the south tower building.

Q. So you parked your vehicle?

A. My partner parked the vehicle, so I'm not too sure exactly where he parked it. I know he parked it two blocks up.

Q. And then you both went back into the complex?

A. I think it was around here somewhere. Around here somewhere we had triage. I know it was either this building or this building. I think it was over here we were triaging or over here. I'm not too sure. This is the south tower; right? This is the first one that collapsed. Yeah.

So we were pretty much -- most of the workers were inside this building. Like I said, I don't know if it's Five World Trade Center or Four World Trade Center. Most of them were in

the building because the chief or the captain said if you want you can stay inside that building. But I didn't feel safe, because I knew it was a terrorist attack, so I was scared. Every time you hear a plane, everyone would run. So I pretty much stood around here somewhere. I would see triage, but I was pretty much in between the two buildings.

Then that's when -- I kept on walking close to the south tower, and that's when that building collapsed.

Q. How did you know that it was coming down?

A. That noise. It was a noise.

Q. What did you hear? What did you see?

A. It was a frigging noise. At first I thought it was -- do you ever see professional demolition where they set the charges on certain floors and then you hear "Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop"? That's exactly what -- because I thought it was that. When I heard that frigging noise, that's when I saw the building coming down.

Q. What did you do?

A. Run. Most of the people ran into the

building, but I was just too far from the building to run into this triage building. I basically just ran up this way, right up here. I don't know if I was here or I was here. But I ran up -- I was really close. I thought I was dead because it was just too close to the building. It was just too close. I said, this is I don't know how many stories.

I ran as fast as I could maybe half a block and then hid between a building that had some kind of indentation like this, just hid like that. Actually I found a stretcher. I covered myself with a stretcher. That's when everything came down.

It was very dark for a few minutes. I think at that time my partner went under the fire truck, he was telling me. Everyone pretty much went on their own.

So once that cleared, I went right back and started pulling out people. Basically everyone was dead at that time with the first collapse.

Q. When that dust cleared and you went back, where did you go back to?

A. Right back to the triage, to triage.

Q. So in front of this building again?

A. Right, right here.

Q. In front of the World Trade Center, the northeast corner?

A. But there was nobody in there.

Apparently everyone ran and came out through here. So I ran in here. There was basically no one around just a few firefighters in shock. Then the next thing you know, the next building collapsed. I was right in front of that building.

Q. So you were still over there when the second building collapsed?

A. Right, because I ran back. Not too bright of me, of course. I ran right back in, and I was right -- I could actually touch the building when it collapsed, the second time when it collapsed.

But again, I was prepared because I heard that same noise. It was like a waterfall noise. That's when I ran. As I ran in here, I didn't run too far. Again, it was like a little indentation in the building where the same thing

again. That's when I jumped, because it was just too close. That one got me pretty good.

Q. So you were outside. You never ran inside a building when either one of the towers collapsed?

A. No. The first, south tower -- after the second plane hit, just to clear the doorway, and then I came running back out. I didn't stay there too long.

Q. As the collapses were going on, you never --

A. No, I was thinking about going into a building, because as I saw the first building collapse, I noticed that the first three or four floors, they were still pretty good. That was on my mind, wow, they were still pretty good. So when the second building collapsed, I was thinking of standing between the doors of the second collapse. Something told me no, just ran back.

Again, I ran up against one of the buildings there. Once everything settled again, it was dark again. Deja vu, you know. But I was really lucky because that building had damage on

top of me. Everything around me was destroyed.

The fire truck in front of me was destroyed.

Everything. I had to touch myself to see if I was alive.

Then I ran right back, because there wasn't much too run, and that's when you hear on the radio EMS people down, fire down. I ran there, and then I ran back over here, because I think they started another triage point around here somewhere, triage center. I ran back in there.

Then they said there was a lot of people trapped inside. That's when I right back in, after both buildings collapsed. There were several firefighters down there and battalion chiefs. I didn't know they were battalion chiefs, but they were when we pulled them out.

Q. So after the second building collapsed, you ended up over here by Trinity Street?

A. I was over here, right, and then I ran back over here somewhere. Because after the first collapse they pretty much set another triage center around here somewhere. I'm not too sure if it's over here. Then when the second

building collapsed, I couldn't run far because it was right there. Then once everything settled I ran right back to the triage area.

Q. And the triage was, you think --

A. Somewhere, right.

Q. -- somewhere by Trinity, about midway through the --

A. Right, I'm not too -- right.

Then that's when we found out -- basically I was looking for my partner. I couldn't find my partner. When I went back in there, he was there. He needed some oxygen because he had stuff all over his face. Then that's when the radio call came in that we had EMS and fire trapped. I ran back in here, somewhere over there.

There was just no one around. It was very, very bad. You couldn't breathe too good. That's when I saw several firefighters who were out. So we pulled out about three firefighters that were covered in rubble.

Q. What happened to them; do you know?

A. One guy -- I can't forget him because he was pretty heavy. I'll probably get in

trouble. He weighed 400 pounds. The worst part about this, when this building collapsed, it was very difficult to walk through all this.

Q. When the south tower came down?

A. The south tower, right. So when this building collapsed, pretty much everything here you couldn't recognize it anymore. So it took a while before you could actually walk from this point here all the way back here. This is where we had several trapped firefighters here.

Q. Over by --

A. Firefighters, right. There were lots of firefighters here. There was --

Q. By the customs building?

A. Right, but more -- right, right. Right around in between and Five World Trade Center. This tower here, you saw about 20 ESU guys on the second floor. Don't ask me how they got there. They were climbing down. So it looks like they were there when it collapsed. There was a ladder here. They were repelling down.

I was shocked because I tried to figure out how they made it, because they went from I think second or third floor and they were

repelling.

Q. This is where you ended up staying the rest of the day?

A. No, this is crazy. You couldn't stay here, because you had -- everything was destroyed pretty much around here. Again, don't ask me why I went back in. It was really bad. I pretty much went back to this original spot here at Church and Trinity, I think. Then they directed us somewhere else around here.

Q. Who directed you? A supervisor?

A. Right, some supervisor.

Q. Do you know where you ended up?

A. By the water somewhere around here.

Q. By Battery Park?

A. Right, somewhere around here somewhere.

Then they said that there was a gas leak and that was too dangerous, so we walked from -- we were here somewhere. Then they took us all the way to -- not Chambers. What's that place on the west side. Pier 94.

Q. That's where you ended up after all that stuff?

A. After all that.

Q. So you ended up at Pier 94.

A. Right.

Q. I forgot what I was going to ask you.

What happened to your vehicle?

A. We moved the vehicle. It had several holes. We had no idea it had several holes.

Q. So it ended up staying there and got damaged?

A. Staying there and then moving it, right. Basically every time it would collapse, my partner would go in the vehicle and move it. So that's why our vehicle was the only one pretty much that made it. There was another vehicle I think too.

One of the news channels -- I saw I think it was the south building somebody with a camera running out of the south tower building. You actually could see my vehicle right in front of the tower, right in front. But that's before the second collapse -- the second airplane hit. So we pretty much moved everything.

Q. You said at the end of the day you and your partner were together with your vehicle?

A. Yes. We picked up another ALS unit who

lost their vehicle. So we had two ALS unit in one vehicle. We went to triage at that point at Pier 95 I think.

Q. Anything else you want to add to this?

A. I'm looking at the times here. It felt more like five minutes, the whole thing.

Q. That's the kind of stuff I want you to say, how you perceived everything.

A. Like I say, once I saw the second plane, then I knew, that's it. It wasn't by accident. Then I started thinking about the World Trade Center, how everyone lined up, the ambulances and the fire trucks and I thought, the terrorists know exactly how we lined up last time, and we're doing it again. We pretty much did, line up exactly the same way as the last time. That was my wording.

At that point honestly there was no one to rescue at the two buildings. The worst part was when a surgeon came up to me as we were traveling and he's like, "Guys, listen, medics, we've got four surgeons, 18 doctors, and they were setting up a triage point." I told him that's nice but I don't think anyone's going to

come.

Because I was one of the few units that came out of there, and when we saw what happened -- that's why I left, because basically there was no one alive. We just pulled out several firefighters and that's it. We went back. There was nothing else to do. We were crazy to stay there, because you still had this thing about airplanes going to hit other buildings, and the other buildings around you weren't safe, because the building I was hiding next to, that one was leaning and I heard that one collapsed too.

It was bad. That's pretty much it.

Q. All right. You have nothing else you want to add; right?

A. No. I hope you can understand what I say because I talk kind of fast.

MS. BASTEDENBECK: This concludes the interview with paramedic --

PARAMEDIC RIVERA: Daniel Rivera.

MS. BASTEDENBECK: -- Daniel Rivera.

The time now is 1539 hours.