# WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

ROSARIO TERRANOVA

Interview Date: October 26, 2001

Transcribed by Maureen McCormick

MR. TAMBASCO: We are at Battalion 4 in the lounge, and the subject of the interview is Lieutenant Rosario Terranova, assigned to EMS Battalion 4.

The time is now 1330 hours.

## BY MR. TAMBASCO:

- $\ensuremath{\mathtt{Q}}.$  If you would be good enough to just tell us what happened.
- A. Okay. Well, on the day of the events, I was actually still assigned to the Chief of Department's office, so my response to the incident actually was from headquarters, and I had been at work already. We were sitting -- I was sitting in my cubicle, and I heard Chief Ganci make a statement. You know, it was kind of like a screaming thing from his office. Said, "Come on, Danny. We gotta go right away. There's a plane that hit the Trade Center," and that, of course, was referring to Chief Nigro.

So at first, to be honest with you, in the office it was kind of -- people thought maybe he was full of shit, you know, he was kidding around, because he's like -- he was a jokster kind of guy, you know, but you could tell right away from the way he was moving around and people were starting to scurry that

something was happening.

So I ran to the window. From headquarters you actually can see lower Manhattan, and, sure enough, you could see in the one tower there was this huge, you know, black void and smoke coming up, so we realized there was a serious issue, but, you know, at the time to be honest with you, nobody thought what was going on. We thought it was just some kind of fluke accident and a plane had hit. People started scurrying for stuff, but I ran right away to get Chief Gombo, because even though I was assigned to the chief of the department's office, something like this I wanted to get him involved right away, so I informed him of what was going on, and I suggested that we go together to the incident.

So we gathered up our stuff, and everybody was rushing down the elevator banks. We got into our cars in the garage. Then we kind of went over in this, like, convoy, maybe four or five of us that followed.

We were following Steve Mosiello, who was Chief Ganci's executive assistant, and Chief Ganci was in the car with him, Chief Nigro, Commissioner Feehan was in line with Commissioner Fitzpatrick, a couple of the other chiefs were there from upstairs. We all proceeded over

the Brooklyn Bridge. On the way over, we could see a lot of debris and stuff falling from the buildings.

When we got down into lower Manhattan, we swung around
City Hall Park, around Park Row, and then headed across to Church Street. From there we broke off a little bit.

Most of the convoy began to head down Vesey Street. Chief Gombo and I swung south on Church Street, and we wound up parking on Fulton Street, heading east about a hundred feet east of Church Street. The reason we chose to stop there is because there was a significant ambulance presence there.

We noted several voluntary hospitals there, and we saw some treatment going on the sidewalk. We decided that we would initially stop there and see what we could assess. We really didn't have any information. It was very early on in the incident.

We came to find out afterwards, in looking at the unit histories, that we actually were on scene within six minutes of the initial call to 911. There was no reporting place or command post that had been established yet, so we opted to stop there and at least get some kind of idea of what we were looking at.

After we parked the car, we initially ran into a crew

from New York Downtown Hospital. I don't know who they were, but they were beginning to treat patients on the sidewalk.

There was a couple of patients who were walking wounded, a few patients that couldn't ambulate. I remember clearly the sea of people coming out of this lobby, you know, and all we could do was encourage them to just to keep going, keep moving away from the incident site. You know, people were asking us, "What's happening? What's going on?" We really just didn't have any time. Just respectfully as we could, told them keep moving, keep moving north, just get away from the incident site.

We remember saying over the radio make sure everybody was their helmets on, this is a hard hat op, because we were starting to get hit with stuff. We didn't know what it was. It was mostly just soot and paper, but, you know, it wasn't really clear what was happening. About this time we heard like a little bit of an explosion. I guess it was secondary to the crash that had occurred, and we immediately told everybody let's retreat. We tried to take patients with us, but those who couldn't ambulate, we had no choice but to leave them there. We actually retreated across the

street back by the cemetery, which is right on the corner of Church and Fulton. It's part of St. Paul's Church there. We had some debris falling from the building, some larger objects and some objects with mass. Those patients that were unable to ambulate, they, unfortunately, became further victimized by the event. After that initially stopped, we made the decision to bring that treatment area back over to this side of the street, the east side of the street, and to have people as best they can use real extreme caution.

I remember running into two people from headquarters there, which was Lieutenant Medjuck and Captain Olszewski, who are both assigned to the EMS command, and Chief Gombo gave them direction to assume the responsibilities for that area, and he was going to assume command of the EMS operation. At my suggestion to him, we began to head west of the incident down Vesey Street.

We had gotten information that the fire command post was being established in the lobby of the No. 1 tower, so I expressed to him, and I thought because of the magnitude of the incident that's where he needed to be. That's where all the fire super people would be, the super chiefs would be, so that

would be the best position.

Anyway, we left Captain Olszewski at that location. We left our vehicle where we had initially parked it, and we began on foot to move forward, and we started accepting radio transmissions as command for the event.

We had established a staging area on the west side of West Street at Vesey Street being the cross.

We instructed additional ambulances responding in that they should take that location as their staging location. We also ran into Captain Stone from Battalion 8 at that location, and Captain Stone was going to begin to coordinate those efforts. He wasn't necessarily assigned the role of staging, but it was his job to assume that an officer was placed in charge of that, and that began to come to fruition.

Chief Gombo and I began to proceed into the lobby of No. 1 tower, which is where fire had established a command position by the side command center. It was clear on the west side of the building that the damage, physical damage, to the building wasn't as extensive as it was on the east, but still we had a lot of debris, visible flames. We -- our path was, you know, was obstructed by some bodies that were

on the scene. I remember saying to Chief Gombo how horrific a scene this really was. You know, there was a couple of spots where we recognized by clothing that there were body parts, but we couldn't even recognize male or female. You know, it was just horrific.

So anyway, we decided to proceed into the lobby, which is where they had established the command post, and it was a very hazardous location to begin with. I mean, there was a lot of glass on the floor. A lot of the window panes from the lobby had been already broken. I can't tell you if they were broken intentionally by fire personnel for venting or if they were broken as a result of the incident, but we began to establish command there.

We saw many people there. We saw Father

Judge there. We saw Commissioner Feehan there. We saw

Chief Turi there. We saw -- who else? I'm trying to

think who else was there. Anyway, if I come back to

the names, I'll try to remember, but there was a

significant number of people there. It was clear that

that's where the initial command post was being

established. We began to -- we began to speak and

discuss about the long term, how we're going to attack

this operation. I could see the mezzanine level -- I

don't know if you are familiar with where that lobby was, but there was a mezzanine level above you, and then there was like a vestibule in there that you could go up a set of escalators to the plaza or into 6 World Trade Center. We could see at the mezzanine level there was a significant number of people being evacuated out into the plaza area from the mezzanine. I commented to Chief Gombo I thought it was so amazing how people were really moving, you know, very organized, very coordinated effort.

We remained at that location for a little while. Chief Basile came in, and he was there. They began to discuss strategies and what was going to occur. A couple of times really we were frightened by what we thought were additional explosions. We kept hearing these large boom, boom, and actually what it turned out to be -- what it said in the Times, it actually was people jumping and hitting on the glass awning that was outside the lobby there. We then decided that -- Chief Ganci had left, and he was actually establishing a fire command post across the street on West Street, south of Vesey Street. I would say the best landmark would be in front of the Winter Garden or, actually if you look at the Winter Garden

dome, it would just be almost just north of that spot.

There was -- the best way to explain it is there was a driveway to a loading dock to that building, and it was established there at that location.

- $\ensuremath{\mathtt{Q}}.$  Which I guess probably was the American Express Building.
- A. That's what it is, right. There was a loading dock off of West Street for 3 World Financial Center, which is the American Express Building, and that is just north of the Winter Garden, and that's exactly where it was. This pedestrian bridge that existed on the map, if you look at it as reference, just north of that is where this driveway was. We could -- so that's where we decided to proceed, we would move to that location, and we did so.

We did so, I would say, probably about ten minutes after Chief Ganci had left to go there, and still at this point the second building, the second building had yet to be affected, and there was some question about this. There was a video that I was privy to see, which is being kept confidential in nature, held by the chief of safety, and it was taken by an amateur photographer who was doing some training with the first battalion. I don't know if you are

aware of the tape, but anyway it's really helped me -seeing that helped me get this frame of reference. I'm
very sure of my times on this, you know.

So anyway, Chief Gombo and I decided to proceed out of the building. We left Chief Basile at the building to coordinate resources there. Now, we moved out of the building back across West Street. We kept on staging again to see what was occurring. We had a few people that were standing south of Vesey Street. We corrected that situation, moved everybody north again on Vesey Street where we wanted to stage, and, you know, our mentality about staging is always -- especially now, since we're working with the Fire Department, to get further away, because we know that they're coming with additional resources, and we don't want to lose any assets behind them.

So again we moved them, and then we proceeded to the command post. Now, at the command post, I remember seeing Chief Ganci there, Steve Mosiello, Chief Burns. I remember speaking with Commissioner Feehan. Commissioner Fitzpatrick was there, and it's funny, because Commission Feehan asked me, you know, what about the patient count, how many patients we got? I said to him, "Listen, Commissioner, with all

due respect, it's a lot." You know, and we kind of giggled. He said, "I know, I know, but I have to ask the question." It's kind of sad to me because it was almost in a jovial way. I mean, that was his personality. Anyway, we began to establish our situation now, and we heard a little -- all of a sudden we hear a huge explosion, you know, and in looking up, you could see the second tower being hit by this second plane, you know, and it was at that -- it was at that very moment that everybody there realized that we were -- you know, that this was clearly a planned act that this is --

- Q. No accident?
- A. This was no accident, you know, and it was a terrible feeling to say, oh, my God, you know, this is something that's really bad that's happening. You know, just on a personal note you started to think, I wish I could call somebody or do something, but there was no time for that kind of stuff. We had to put that away.

So we initially began discussing the need for resources, retreat of resources, where we could move people to, if we had to. What are going to be some of our evacuation plans? We started to discuss what

further acts we could anticipate. Is there something else that's going on in other places of the city?

Should we anticipate additional problems down here in the financial center?

It seems like it happened very fast. I mean, the time went actually longer than that, when you're involved in it, I'm sure you understand that, you know, it seems like these things are happening, and there's no real time frame.

While we were discussing this, I remember hearing Chief Ganci say, "Oh, shit," you know, so we all looked up, and you could hear this rumble coming. We looked up at the south tower, which is the No. 2 tower, and all of a sudden we began to see like a pancake. I mean, it's as simple as that. If you could imagine you had two cards in your hand, and you just clapped your hands, and they just closed on each other. That's what it looked like, like a toy, and we began to see the pancake, boom, one floor after another, as quick as you can imagine it.

At the time I was standing looking at the building in front of the fire command board. To my left was Chief Gombo and to my right was -- to my right

## ROSARIO TERRANOVA

front was Chief Ganci with his aide, Steve, and right directly to my left was Roger Moore, Lieutenant Roger Moore. Directly behind him to my right was

Commissioner Feehan, so I remember Chief Ganci saying,

"Go, go, go, go, go."

Everybody decided which way they were going to go. Some people went to the left. Some people went to the right. I decided -- I looked behind me, and I saw a few people were heading into this loading dock. The loading dock bay was actually open. I thought to myself, I don't think I could -- I don't think I can out run this, you know, and maybe I got a better chance getting into safety, so I said to Gombo, "Come on let's go."

I went about three steps, maybe three or four steps running, and I turned to see and he wasn't -- Gombo wasn't there. He was still kind of standing, looking at the building, so I ran back to him. I kind of grabbed him by the neck like a -- you know, the best way I can describe it is like a kitty cat. I grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, and I pulled him with me into this building.

When we got inside the bay, we could hear it getting louder. You know, it's getting loud, and it

was getting dark, so I had to him -- you know, I said to myself, maybe we should -- you know, it's an odd thing, because even though you certainly were running for your safety, there is an odd curiosity, and you want to see it. You want to see what's happening, so everybody was run to go what they thought was safe, but still not getting as far away from the door as they probably should have. I said to myself, you know what, this is not how I want to check out, so I said let's go , and I grabbed Gombo. I was going to run down further into the bay, and then -- I don't know. It's very strange, but in the loading dock, right against the wall very close to the door was a white van, and it was just parked there, and I said, "All right. We are going to grab refuge behind this van."

We went to the back of the van, and we got down on the ground, and we heard this huge, thunderous, loud sound, and then it was completely dark and completely silent. It was like the sound of death. It was so strange, because there was all this commotion, and people screaming, run, run, run, go, go, go, and then I guess at the point -- at that point the debris hit the bay, and it was just complete silence, an eerie silence. I'd be amazed that people who were in that

garage don't describe it the same exact way, that eerie silence. I took a second and realized -- I mean it was dark. We had a few lights down at the end of the garage, the end of the loading bay, but it was very dark.

I took a second to realize, okay, I'm not trapped. I can move everything. I had Gombo. I wouldn't let him go. I could feel his shirt. Then I went to take a breath, and all I got was dirt. It was at that point I said to myself, did you make a bad decision not running? Because now, you know, maybe you didn't get buried in this crap, but are you going to be able to breathe? Are you going to suffocate here?

But anyway, the long and the short of it is we took a second, and within a minute or so the dust started to settle a little bit. You could breathe through your clothes. People began to scream. I remember Jerry saying, "Ross," and I said, "Jerry." We had each other. He had a little flashlight. He had the flash on, and we were trying to see did we see anybody else. Then I thought to myself -- I thought of the thing about the '93 incident when they had this Ryder truck full of explosive, and now I realized how strange it was that this white van was parked in this

loading dock. I started to think to myself, God, did we step into the wrong place here? So I said to Gombo, "Look, we gotta get out of here, because we don't know --" I didn't know the integrity of the building we were in, what fell on us, how much we're under, so we tried to go back and look, but it was too dusty. I couldn't see anything.

There was a couple of firefighters in the building, so we proceeded to the back. Everybody proceeded first to the back of the garage. We saw Terry Wynter there, who was from OEM. He was in the garage with us. I saw a couple of cops and, you know, Jerry started asking me "Where's Feehan? Where is Ganci?" We didn't see them, so we believed, him and I believed, that they were buried as a result of that. Then he said, "Where's Roger?" He thought Roger was behind us, and we couldn't find Roger either. So we just assumed that these guys had been buried.

Now, it was strange, because -- I'll get right back to where I am, but we didn't realize -- we didn't find out until Friday of that week that that's not where Ganci and Feehan perished. That was mostly because we spent so much time working at the scene the next three days, we didn't have any time to talk to

anybody else and find out what really occurred.

Anyway, they were able to evacuate by running. Then we also found out that -- we also found out from Roger that, in fact, he had injured his leg, actually both his legs, but he actually was in that garage. He actually made it in that garage. We felt -- or I can speak for myself -- Chief Gombo may say otherwise -- but I felt profoundly upset because, you know, it was afterwards that I found this out.

I thought, man, I abandoned him, you know. I should have gone back to him and looked for him, but, like we said, we didn't have SCBAs. It was very -- breathing was very poor in there, and we asked some firefighters to go back and see if anybody had survived that had been buried or trapped. It turned out that those firefighters are the guys who helped carry him out of that garage.

- Q. Right.
- A. Yes, so Roger, that's correct, so in a sense,
  I guess -- while I may feel personally bad for not
  doing it myself, I guess in a sense we sent somebody to
  help him, so there is some resolve there.

 $\label{eq:control_control_control} I'm \mbox{ sorry.} \mbox{ I know I'm a little long winded,}$  but I hope it will help you.

- Q. Not at all.
- A. We -- so we were in this little garage office, which I guess was intended for the attendant. There was a telephone there we were trying to get out on. We couldn't get an outside line. As a matter of fact, somebody called in looking for somebody, and Chief Gombo said to them, "Look, you know, he's not here, but if you can call somebody, tell them that there are people in this place, and we don't know if we have a way out."

Anyway, one of the firefighters that was in there decided that they would take the stairway to see if there was an access point above us. While he did that, we waited. We sealed the doors and put some towels down to try to lessen the smoke situation and the dust situation in the room we were in.

I would say maybe about five, ten minutes went by, and the firefighter came back to us and said, "Look, I found an access." We have to take a stairway about maybe two floors up, and then we needed to walk towards the back of the building, and then there was a door that emptied into the courtyard of the back of the building, 3 Financial on the west side of the building or directly against -- directly north of Battery Park

by the water line.

- Q. Right.
- A. We were able to evacuate the building in that fashion. We got out of the building. There was debris and dust everywhere. If you need an explanation, the best way to try to describe it is take a vacuum bag that you should have changed two weeks ago.
  - Q. Right.
- A. Then open it and just throw it up in the air. That's what it looked like, the dust and shit flying everywhere. So we said okay -- now that we're out, let's try to get on the radio and make some communication. We were able to get on the radio, let them know that we were all right, and try to get a status for the operation.

It was difficult to -- it was a difficult situation to try to get back in charge of, because we were out of commission for probably about 30 minutes.

- Q. Right.
- A. In our absence, things had already been going in place, so it seemed senseless to take that role back over. What we opted to do is we opted to try to move back towards the incident site and see who we could get ahold of.

- Q. Right.
- A. So we began to -- let me find my bearings here. We began to move -- yes, we began here on North End Avenue.
  - Q. Right.
- A. We began to head up North End Avenue and then to Vesey.
  - Q. And then east across Vesey?
- A. Then we tried to go east across Vesey. Now, what wound up happening was we encountered a lot of ambulance crews that were operating between 3 and 4 Financial Center, on Vesey Street, which is between West and North End Avenue.

On North End Avenue, north of Vesey Street, there's a hotel there. What we started to do is we established a treatment area in the lobby of this hotel. I'm sorry. The name escapes me, but we began to establish a treatment area in the lobby of this hotel off of North End Avenue. Like I said, there were crews operating here on Vesey Street, and there was some crews operating south of Vesey on North End Avenue, as well.

We actually met up with Chief Basile there. We met up with Chief Pascal there. Chief Gombo

actually called a meeting with the chief officers there because we were unable to make any contact with Chief McCracken. We were -- we knew he was there, but we were unable to contact him. We weren't sure if he had perished in the incident. There was, of course, rumors flying all over the place, this one is dead, that one is dead, so we did our best to figure things out.

Chief Goldfarb was there with us. Chief Villani was there. What we decided to do is we decided that we would continue to maintain this treatment area. I suggested to Chief Gombo that there's going to have to be a spot where the agencies are going to start to get together, and the only logical place we could think of, given the proximity at the time of OEM to the incident, we didn't think that they would be at their offices in 7 World Trade Center. We decided that we needed to make our way to One Police Plaza, which is all the way on the east side of Manhattan. We thought that -- Chief Gombo and I said we're going to proceed over to that location. That was our initial plan, and right around this time again we had some commotion. We stopped our meeting, and we went out again where we were treating patients, and we were out on the street when we heard the rumble of the second tower

## ROSARIO TERRANOVA

collapsing. I remember specifically myself going up

Vesey Street again towards --

- Q. Eastbound?
- A. Yes, heading eastbound up Vesey Street to try to wave people down. Come on, come on, let's go, let's go. There was one guy, he didn't want to leave his patient. I said, "Come on, you have to leave her. You gotta evacuate that location."

I remember seeing the rubble, seeing the rubble fall and actually start to chase down the street, and, you know, it's strange because you wouldn't expect -- you wouldn't expect debris to do that, but it literally traveled, like, you would see these movies with like a tidal wave that flows through the streets and hits down any path it can. It literally traveled that way. I began to retreat myself, begging people to come with me back onto North End Avenue. Then I took a position against the building on North End Avenue just north of Vesey Street.

- Q. With the building between you and the --
- A. Right, like, I put myself up against the building. I was -- I stayed as close to the edge as I possibly could, because I wanted to try to be able to

## ROSARIO TERRANOVA

grab people or just pull them off to the side, because

I was afraid people would keep running straight and put
themselves still in the middle of the road.

There was some people on the south of Vesey

Street that refused to come over. They were fine where
they were. Then, just like I described, there is this
huge puff of dust to my left through Vesey Street, and
then to my right through Murray Street. The percussion
of it was so much it actually pulled me off the
building, you know, so I can't -- there were a couple
of people who I remember seeing on Vesey Street who I
couldn't find again.

- Q. Right.
- A. Oh, I want to mention this. I forgot to mention this. Going back to the command post.
  - Q. Right, the original command post?
- A. Original command post in front -- on West

  Street. One of the people who I had lost sight of was

  Sam Harris. He's an EMT. He's Chief Digg's aide. He

  happened to have been there with Captain Pincus that

  day. He was working with us to start some

  communication, and he broke off from us to head up into

  the Winter Garden building to try to make some

  communications. It was at that point when that

building collapsed.

Now, I bring it up only because I met up again with Sam Harris and accounted for him back at the hotel at North End Avenue.

- Q. Right.
- A. So we -- he at least was accounted for.

One of the people we couldn't account for at that time was Chief Basile's aide. His name escapes me, but I know we were looking for him. We couldn't account for him. He was later accounted for, thank goodness.

Anyway, after the second building collapsed, here we were again consumed with this debris shield, this dust shield, you know. There was some people who had taken refuge underneath ambulances. But anyway, we started to recoup things a little bit, and I said, okay, now we really have to think about what we're doing. So we were back in the lobby, and actually stepped away from the windows. Everybody started to get very paranoid of what was going to happen next. We were establishing our plans for the operation, who was going to be responsible for what sectors, and all of a sudden I noted -- I saw a lot of cops running north past the building. Even some firefighters, and I was

too curious, saying, "What are these guys running from?" So I went outside I said, "What's the story?"

They told us that as a result of the collapse, the building that we were in had had a gas leak breach on the opposite side of the building. So I went back in, and I said to Chief Gombo, "Look, I think we need to --have to just abandon our operation here and move everybody north as far north as we can and get a handle on this," because we need to make sure all our people are safe. Of course he was very frustrated at the time, too, and he said to me, "How far north do you think we should go?" I remember specifically telling him I think we should walk north until you don't see any stuff any more. Just keep going north.

So anyway we decided -- we started proceeding north on North End Avenue with a convoy of personnel. It was about Murray Street that we actually encountered Chief Callan, fire Chief Callan. He was --- I don't mean any disrespect to him, but he was completely dazed and out of it. He was just in total shock from the event, just walking in circles, you know. I grabbed him, I said, "Chief Callan, are you all right? Are you okay." He just said to me, "Hi, how you doing?" I said "Chief, come on. Why don't you walk with us. We

have to start walking forward. Why don't you get all your people to come with us. We have to move north."

That kind of snapped him a little bit out of it, and he started to give the order to his people, let's move north, let's move north, so we did. We moved, I would say, a couple of blocks. I can't tell you exactly where we stopped. Probably somewhere around Warren Street. We began to -- there was a police officer from the Police Department chief of department's office, who actually had a gator out. They must have had them at headquarters and used them to transport people over. We explained to them what we were doing, and he said, "Come on, chief, I'll take you over," so we went, Chief Gombo and I, Chief Goldfarb and his aide. We went to One Police Plaza.

When we got there, we went upstairs to the command center. The command center had already been completely activated. I mean, there was a flurry of activity going on, and it was there for the first time that we began to see some images on the television of what had occurred. I remember saying to Chief Gombo what a good decision it was to come there, because it was -- we now had the landline capability. We were able to call headquarters. We were able to establish

some interagency communications. We still didn't have a fire rep with us, but anyway we decided this would be a good spot. We made contact with headquarters. We made contact with fire operations to say that this is where we are, and we think it would be an excellent idea to have a fire rep there.

The choice to bring Chief Goldfarb with us was a superb choice, because he had a vast knowledge of mutual aid and interagency communications. He was able to start establishing contact with FEMA and with state EMS and begin to put plans in place immediately for mutual aid.

He also had a very intricate knowledge of the Oklahoma City bombing. So he was very influential on telling us this is what we should anticipate in 24 hours. This is what we can anticipate in 48 hours. I tell you, I got to give him a lot of credit. He was a hundred percent on the money, because, sure enough, he was right. I mean, the amount of supplies that came in. Just for example, as an insight, one of the first things he said to us that we had to consider doing is find warehouse space.

At least, we both looked at him, like, how could you think about that now, and he said, "Trust

me. You are going to want to think about that because in two days you are not going to be able to move." He was a hundred percent correct. I mean, this battalion here, Battalion 4, simply by nature of its proximity and the logistics of the station became an absolute warehouse. It wasn't till last week that we just got rid of almost 200 cases of food and clothing that we sent to shelters because we had no need for it. We were completely overwhelmed by generosity.

So anyway, we spent a large portion of the rest of the day, I would say realistically we were there. We got there around one o'clock, and we spent the day there until about ten o'clock. About ten o'clock we decided that we would --we wanted to head back over and see what was happening. Captain Connelly, who was on duty, he just came on duty. He was sent to the trade center, to the command post at One Police Plaza to take over for EMS liaison. We decided we would rotate. We built a schedule for continuous manpower there for staffing. Chief Gombo and I, along with Chief Goldfarb and his aide, decided to head over. We decided we'd walk over on foot, and we were able to do that.

First thing we did was we wanted to go and

see what kind of condition, if at all, Chief Gombo's car was in. Because that was our mode of transportation. As it turned out, amazingly, because of the way the building fell, his car was not hit by debris, although the driver's window had been broken. Of course, the car was filthy and dusty inside, but other than the driver's window, we started the car, and it was fine. Interestingly enough, there were a lot of other cars with the windows broken like that. We thought it odd that just one window would have been broken, and we surmised later on from speaking to people that actually it was not broken as a result of the incidents. It was broken by people after the buildings fell to try to get in and get some fresh air, which I suppose it's a small price to pay for a window.

Anyway, once we realized the car was all right, we left it there. We were able to get it out. We had to come over some hose lines and stuff, but there was a path to get through. It was filthy in the streets. There was inches and inches of dust and muck. By the time we had gotten there, of course both the buildings had fallen. This one building -- I'm trying to describe exactly which one it was. I guess

it was 5 World Trade Center had kind of been gutted out just like a picture out of a movie. You wouldn't even believe it.

So we started to proceed north on Church because, of course, you know, the command center -- by the time we were done with this, the EMS command post had been established at Chambers Street and West Street. That's actually across from Stuyvesant High School. Ironically, that's where we remained for several weeks after the incident, as far as the command post was concerned. We began to walk up Church Street in an attempt to make our way over to West Street. We were going to go down Vesey Street, but it was completely blocked by debris.

Then we decided we'd stay north of Chambers

Street. We ran into a couple of different people we

knew. I ran into this guy, we call him Yack. His name
is Jimmy Yakamovich. He's a fire captain. He was a
good friend of Chief Ganci's. Everybody knows Yack.

Most people know him by now.

Anyway, we ran into him, and he was there.

He was there in some somebody else's bunker gear and helmet, and he was telling me -- we were talking about -- he goes, you know -- you know, Ganci is dead

and Feehan is dead. They can't find Burns or Barbara, or -- you know, the list just went on and on, Fanning. It was hard to believe. I mean, Fanning, and Downey. I mean, these guys who had all but made the department in the last 40 years, all of them gone in one shot. I mean, people began to think about how we going to move on from here, you know. We were glad to hear at the time we knew Nigro was okay, Cassano was okay. I knew Callan was okay, because I saw him myself, although physically okay at least. So we -- you know, we wished him well. We made our way over to Chambers and West Street. That's where we ran into -- Chief McCracken actually was there. He looked beat up, but he was in good shape. He was in complete command, as always, of what was going on with EMS. He had established a very good plan about how we were going to do things. He began to say to Chief Gombo, at least for the next few days we need to -- him and I need to -- him and I meaning Chief Gombo and Chief McCracken need to be on this rotating schedule. One of them always needs to be there. So we decided that we would -- Chief Gombo and I would head home.

It took us about midnight by this decision. We would head home and then come back in the morning to

## ROSARIO TERRANOVA

relieve him. Chief McCracken would stay own, and then we would go on, like, this twelve-hour thing for the next few days. So we did. We made our way back to the car, and we headed home. That particular night I stayed by Chief Gombo. We went home for a couple of hours, and we headed back in on the 12th.

So that's my recollection of September 11. I mean, I have some other stuff that we did subsequent to that, but, I mean, it doesn't --

- Q. No, that's pretty much -- other than anything else you may just want to add. I mean, you know, feeling wise or anything like that, that you'd like to have added into this, that's -- I can't ask for much more detail than you have given me.
- A. Well, I tried my best to lay it out, because, I mean, it's helpful for me to talk about it. I mean, it was difficult -- it was a difficult week, you know,. I mean, a lot of stuff went on to establish things there. You know, in the subsequent days, we worked with Jersey City Medical Center, who had lent us a command post to use.
  - Q. Right.
- A. Something that should be on the record, should be that EMS needs to have a command post so we

can operate the long-term operation. I mean, we used to have the field com, however inappropriate that vehicle might have been, but we still had it. The truth be known, fire communications has vehicles, but they are fine for fire communications. When we need to set up something like this, we need to go outside and say could you help us, because we don't have -- and that's a kind of silly situation. But that's a personal feeling, not a professional one. We took the time to go to the ME's office and see their operation there. I have to tell you, it's horrific.

They were doing -- I mean literally doing autopsies right on the street underneath tents. I give a lot of credit to the guys who worked sectors in the next coming days. One of the hardest sectors to establish was the morgue sector. It was hard because there were a lot of -- tensions were running high, let's just put it that way.

I mean, we had some run-ins -- when I say we,
I mean Chief Gombo and I. We basically were married at
the hip for the remainder of the week, you know. We
had some run-ins with Chief Butler and Chief Cruthers,
which were later ironed out. Of course, they were just
nothing more than people being so profoundly saddened

by what had occurred. It was important to us, and, of course, it was important to fire suppression, as well. We needed to establish a very clear, well-maintained morgue sector. So that one, of course, we could account for all our lost, both PD, fire and EMS, but mostly so that we could ensure that the remains of the Fire Department personnel would be returned as quickly as possible to their families. That was something that was difficult to do, but I'm proud the way that worked out.

And, you know, we went on. I mean, things have somewhat come down to normal at this point, or at least started to establish a long-term basis, you know. We -- right after the event, we established 24-hour coverage of headquarters and a staffing person at OEM a staffing person at police headquarters, and, you know, staffing people at the command center. For the first week or so everybody -- you couldn't pull people away if you tried. Everybody wanted to be there. They couldn't do enough, but it had to come to a point where you had a decision to make that this is going to be a long-term operation. This stuff is not going to go away tomorrow. The debris is just not going to clear. We are going to have to be into this

for six months or a year and still you need to establish a long-term plan because you can't run out of people in six weeks, and that's where we were headed.

So to our credit -- I mean, I think that things are proceeding okay now. I mean, I think it's good that people are volunteering to do overtime down there, and that the 911 system is back in place the way it was, although, in my opinion, of course, I don't know how much -- how long you could ask people to do overtime in that kind of scenario. I think it's a very difficult thing to do.

I mean, I have my ideas about how we could do it also, but we will leave it at that. I'm glad to -- in a sense, I'm glad to have survived it and be able to contribute to this collection of information. I think it's important to document historically what's happened in the department.

You know, from my perspective, I've encouraged everybody I know to speak to you about this, to speak to investigators about this. You know, there's an unfortunate stigmatism that comes with your office and your organization and, you know, what are they looking for? Are they looking to fire people because they put in for comp. packages and they

weren't there.

I mean, of course, you know, to be honest with you, if people are performing inappropriately, they need to be discussed with it, but I -- so they don't expect that that's the meat and potatoes of this investigation. I don't -- I didn't approach it that way. I hope my information has been informative to you.

- Q. It certainly has been, and just keep in mind that -- actually think about it 30 or 50 years from now when somebody wants to look back and this and get more of the personal stories.
- A. You know, I tell you why I think it's a good idea, I'm offering these things up, because maybe it will come up for further discussion.

One of the things we used to at EMS prior to the merger, we used to do post incident summary reports. This was something that Chief Cross was a stickler for when he was the chief of operations for EMS. Any time we had a big incident -- I mean a big -- certainly not relative to this, a big, you know, a plane crash, a building clamps, along those lines, we always take the time to do a post incident critique. What we would do is we would print the CAD and gather

all the ACRs and create a time line and a table of organization and speak to those in charge and have narratives written, and this information would be put in chronological order and stored on paper so that we can learn from the lessons we had. I think back on the World Trade Center event, which is an event that we did not do a post-incident summary about, largely because of the magnitude.

- Q. Right.
- A. But I think back on that event, working in operations as I did, and working with the chief of department's office as the correspondence liaison, I received on many occasions inquiries from people who wanted to learn from our department. It was a standard joke when anybody would call about the '93 bombing they would be switched immediately to Chief Seretta, because Chief Seretta was one of the command officers. Then when Chief Seretta retired, they switched this person immediately to Chief Burns because Chief Burns was also one of the ranking fire chiefs -- but unfortunately there are no more rank and file chiefs that were in '93. All their information, and history and expertise has been lost. That's a real shame, so I hope that -- I hope that this will pave the way for other future

## ROSARIO TERRANOVA

considerations for reports like that when we have these types of -- it's important history, and you're doing an important thing here.

That's all I have.

- Q. That's about it, Ross. I thank for you the info. It certainly was quite detailed.
- A. I hope it's been helpful to you. Thanks a lot, Michael.
  - MR. TAMBASCO: We conclude as 1415 hours on October 26.