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WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

CAPTAIN RAY GOLDBACH

Interview Date: October 24, 2001

Transcribed by Elisabeth F. Nason

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MR. RADENBERG: Today's date is October 24, 2001. I'm Paul Radenberg, Fire Department City of New York. The time is now 1047 hours. Also present is Assistant Commissioner James Drury. We are conducting an interview with Captain Ray Goldbach, executive assistant to Commissioner Von Essen. This interview is being conducted at Fire Department headquarters in relation to the events of the morning of September 11, 2001.

Q. Captain, for the record, would you identify yourself?

A. Captain Ray Goldbach, executive assistant to the Fire Commissioner.

Q. Captain, directing your attention back to September 11, 2001, can you tell me what time you became aware of a problem in Manhattan and where you were when you became aware of it?

A. I believe it was sometime between 8:30 and 9 o'clock. And I was in my office. I received a phone call from Joe Higgins in communications, who told me that a plane just went into the World Trade Center. And they dumped the 1060, which is a radio signal for a major emergency. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] But I walked back into my office, looked out my window and I could see a plane had gone into the north tower of the building. With that I got Bill Feehan. He came into the office and took a look. We went and got Tom Fitzpatrick. Tom Fitzpatrick came over, came into my office, looked over and I had said to him I believe a small plane went into the Trade Center. He said it's not a small plane. It's a commercial airline, look at the size of the hole. I couldn't see that far so I didn't know.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The girls in our office were all starting to cry already. Tom McDonald, Assistant Commissioner Tom McDonald, who was I believe in a meeting with Tom Fitzpatrick, was there at the same time. I went down and got Peter Guidetti, the office manager out of his office. And the five of us went down to the garage. We all got into Bill's car. We went up out of the building, we went down Jay to Tillary, up Tillary and over the bridge. The police already had the bridge shut down. We got over the bridge pretty rapidly. We went down around City Hall. We got behind the police ESU truck that was on, I believe it was Broadway, going downtown. We followed

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that truck all the way down to, I don't know whether it was Broadway and Dey or Broadway and Cortlandt Street, where I remember telling Peter pull over, let us out. Thousands of people running up Broadway at that time. We got out of the car. Feehan went to the back and got his coat, his helmet. Fitzpatrick had his helmet. I didn't have any gear, nor did Tom McDonald.

The four of us got out of the car, we started to cross Broadway, and the second plane went into the other tower. I don't know what time it was, but Tom McDonald yelled something like holy shit, oh, fuck. He hit the ground out on the street. We all got up. We kept walking. I believe we went down - I don't know whether it was Dey or Cortlandt Street. We walked down that block. It was littered with airplane parts, pieces of the building.

We went down and I don't know whether it was 5 or 7 World Trade Center. We tried to go around to get up into a building. There was a federal cop there who wouldn't let us up the stairs. We went up the stairs any way. We told them who we were. He let us up. We tried to go across the plaza. There were a lot of people jumping at that time, on to the plaza.

We initially went back into the building,

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then we came back out again because we were trying to get into the command post, which was at 1 World Trade Center. We walked across the plaza back into whatever - I think it was, might have been 5 World Trade Center. I'm not sure.

Q. When you say the plaza, are you referring to the concourse?

A. The concourse, yes, where the big fountain was there. We saw a lot of people jumping at that plaza. Went back in, worked our way down around to the front of 1 World Trade Center and went into the lobby, where at that point the command post was established. The Fire Commissioner was there when we got there. It was chaos. A lot of units reporting in and trying to organize units and give them different assignments and send them up there, but there was hundreds of people running around inside of the lobby. The Port Authority was completely overwhelmed, I believe, in their ability to cope with this at that time.

A lot of their phones were out, some of their systems were down, I remember seeing them trying to get their vests on so they could identify themselves and get in their positions.

At that point, Commissioner Feehan and Tom

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were talking to Chief Hayden, and Chief Callan, about what we were doing, where we were setting up our units. I don't recall seeing Chief Ganci in 1 World Trade Center, nor Chief Nigro for that matter. But Tom told me, the Fire Commissioner told me to try to get some people from headquarters to get some radios and to come over to see to try to beef up our end of the command post once we got it set up.

I had a very tough time trying to make telephone calls to the office here from the phones there as well as using the cell phone. Eventually I got ahold of my wife, who was in her office on 55th Street and asked her to call the EOC down here and tell her to send some people over there if they could find them. That would help us man the command post.

At that time, somebody had come into 1 World Trade Center and told us that the Mayor was looking for the Fire Commissioner. I left with Tom, went out through one of the windows that had broken in 1 World Trade Center. We crossed all the way across West Street. We are now where Ganci and Nigro had set up the command post on West Street in front of the Winter Garden. I believe we were probably over there for at least 20 minutes at some point. Saw a lot of members

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of the Department over there that are dead. Lot of companies reporting in. We moved as many apparatus as we could. The Commissioner wanted the apparatus removed off of West Street to the sides of West Street so we could establish a path to start running ambulances from the south to the north to the victims.

So I remember talking with Tom McDonald and working with Tom McDonald and several other people, including company officers that came in, telling them to move the apparatus that was blocking West Street to the curb so that we could establish a lane. Like I said, what we were going to try to do is start - we were going to start bringing the ambulances in, turning them around down past the south tower, loading in the people, shooting them back out up north.

Then Manny Pepea from the Mayor's office came over to us again and told us that the Mayor was looking for the Commissioner and they were on Barclay Street. I walked with him and I believe it was a fire marshall, I think it was Mike Owey. We walked over towards Barclay Street. I didn't even know where Barclay Street was. We were walking towards that direction. We went over there, we couldn't find the Mayor or his group. I said to the Commissioner let's go back to the

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command post on West Street, I will find out exactly where we have to go, then we will make our way there.

Before we got back to the command post, somebody told us that the Mayor's group had now gone to 7 World Trade Center to the OEM command post. We went from where we were at that point, it was somewhere around Vesey or Vesey or something like that. We got into 7 World Trade Center, we took the escalator up to the second floor, then we were going to take the elevator. I think it was John Peruggia from operations, but I'm not sure, at that point told us we had to get out of that building. Everybody was evacuated in that building [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

We walked out of 7 World Trade Center, now following the whole group of people from City Hall who were somewhere ahead of us. I think we were on Washington Street near Greenwich Street, when the north tower started to collapse. I remember running and I think it was down Greenwich Street with John McLaughlin. We lost the Commissioner and the guy that he was with, the marshall. We got caught like in a



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white out, like a blizzard, and like dust, felt like insulation. Myself and John stayed together. We were trying to get down next to - we got down on the street and on our hands and knees crawled to the curb. I remember thinking to myself I thought we were going to get run over by a car. We didn't know whether - I thought I saw the building collapsing, but I didn't believe it. I saw it disappearing into a cloud, but I thought maybe a couple of floors had fallen off.

At that point we made our way about half a block up till we could eventually see. We got ourselves together. I said to him we got to make sure we find the boss. We went back into the cloud again, myself and John, and we walked around in this dust cloud. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Probably a couple of minutes, just calling the Commissioner. Eventually he and the marshall he was with called us. They had got across the street from where we were and into a doorway.

At that point I think we walked further up Greenwich Street and somebody brought us into another building where the Mayor's whole staff was. Everybody was tremendously in panic at that point. They decided that they were going to try to stabilize the situation

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in some way. They had to get away from this. We started working our way, I think it was up Broadway, I believe. Stopping at several places where the Mayor was looking for a place where we might be able to set up some type of - I don't know whether it was a command post or a place just to talk, and he was giving news reports as we were walking on the street. Every couple of minutes he would stop and give an update on whatever he had. Just what was going on as we were walking uptown.

We walked all the way up to 5 truck in a panic and haste situation. We just about forced our way into the fire house and we set up the - I guess the initial operations point from the Mayor's office at 5 truck. We were there for -- prior to getting to 5 truck, the other tower fell down. I remember telling Tom the other tower fell down. I saw it disappear into a cloud again and he didn't believe me, because he was continuing to walk, but I remember telling him that, at some point during the walk while we were going uptown.

Q. You were referring to Commissioner Von Essen?

A. Yes, Commissioner Von Essen. We were in 5 truck for what seemed like a long time.

Q. Where is 5 truck?

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A. I think it's in the village, so it was a long walk. I don't know exactly where it is, but it was quite a long walk. I bet it was a mile walk. We were probably there for what seemed like at least an hour while we were trying to coordinate resources from the state, from the federal government, Fire Departments. There was a lot going on at that point. John McLaughlin had left us before we started to walk uptown. I remember telling him to try to get the car, so after the first building collapsed and before the second building collapsed, I told him we were going to be -- I didn't know where we were going. Try to get the car, get around the battery on the other side and then call me and tell him where we were going so he could meet up with the Commissioner.

Q. Tell us for the record who John McLaughlin is.

A. John McLaughlin was the Commissioner's driver that day.

Q. He is a firefighter?

A. A lieutenant, he was driving the Fire Commissioner that day. We stayed up at 5 truck for, I don't know, an hour or couple of hours. At that point, I talked to John once or twice, getting tremendous

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amounts of phone calls and pages. Everybody wanted to know who was dead, who did you see, who we didn't see. Tom was alive. We left. John eventually got the car, got all the way back up to 5 truck, met us up there with Danny Lynch, who is a firefighter and another one of the Commissioner's drivers, who had secured another vehicle, and met us at the fire house there.

At that point, I guess the Mayor had made the decision to move the City Hall group, the operations command to the Police Academy. We left from there. We went to the Police Academy for again, I guess several hours, trying to set up some type of Fire Department command post at the Police Academy. We had the phones. We were looking for phones, we were looking for people, we fielded a whole bunch of phone calls up there. The police officers - we got set up - I believe it was in the library at police headquarters. We were there until sometime late in the afternoon.

At that point I had told Tom I was going to go back down to the site to try to see what was going on and I would call him back. I went down there with - I believe Danny Lynch drove me back down there. I went to the Fire Department operations post, which was at that time all the way up by Stuyvesant High School on

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West Street. I spoke to Chief Carruthers about what resources we needed. He gave me some instructions about trying to get us - I don't even remember what it was, whether it was more units, more ambulances or whatever it was, but I passed that information back on to our people at the Police Academy at that point.

[REDACTED] At that point, this was now late in the afternoon. I'm going to guess it was after 3:00.

Q. At that point in time had you heard anything about First Deputy Commissioner William Feehan or Chief of Department Peter Ganci?

A. No, we knew they were both missing because I had inquired six or seven times throughout the day as to their whereabouts. Everybody had said we couldn't find them, but at that point they had not been found. I was probably down at the operations post there by Stuyvesant High School for about 20 minutes when - it might have been Steve Mosiello, it might have been somebody else, came over to me and said we think we found Bill and Pete, Commissioner Feehan and Pete Ganci. I then walked down a couple of blocks back to the site. We were north of the Winter Garden at that point. It might have been - it was Vesey Street. We

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walked all the way back down to Vesey Street. There was a big discussion going on at that point about pulling all of our units out of 7 World Trade Center. Chief Nigro didn't feel it was worth taking the slightest chance of somebody else getting injured.

So at that point we made a decision to take all of our units out of 7 World Trade Center because there was a potential for collapse.

Q. It was on fire, correct, Captain?

A. Yes, it was on fire at that time. Then they said it suffered some form of structural damage. These things were going on at the same time. The fact that we thought we found Ganci and Feehan and his place at 7 World Trade Center. Made the decision to back everybody away, took all the units and moved them all the way back toward North End Avenue, which is as far I guess west as you could get on Vesey Street, to keep them out of the way.

At that point --

Q. Vesey or West?

A. It was as far west as we could go.

Q. I see. Okay. Near the water?

A. Near the water. At that point we are still hearing information that we found Ganci, we found Bill

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and we thought we had them and there was a lot of discussion going on. They thought they had Ray Downey. I remember talking to the Commissioner on the phone and him telling me make sure we know what we are talking about. I called him back a little while later after I had spoken to Chief Nick Visconti, who told me he went back. He did have Chief Ganci and Commissioner Feehan. Next half an hour or so, we were sitting down and sent him around, how we were going to bring their bodies out, where we were going to put them. I think the Commissioner had requested that the two of them go to the morgue in the same ambulance. We were trying to set that up.

Apparently they had taken Ganci's body out towards the north side of the World Financial Center and Feehan's body out through the south side of the World Financial Center. So I was with Henry McDonald at that point on Vesey Street and they had brought Ganci's body out and put him in the ambulance. Then we were waiting quite sometime for them to find out what was going on with Bill's body. Henry had taken a walk down to the other side of the World Financial Center, went through the World Financial Center, through the Winter Garden, out past Moran's Restaurant, around the

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back there to find out what the story was with Bill's body, if they were going to transport it by itself, they were going to bring him over to us. That was probably another 20 minutes.

At that point I had met Michael Regan, who is now our First Deputy, and a good friend of Bill Feehan's too. We decided we would take a walk over there, try to find out what was going on to try and get this straightened out. While we walked through the 1 World Financial Center, or 2, whichever one, I don't know which one. We went into the World Financial Center. We went through the Winter Garden, back outside again.

At that point somebody had passed by quickly there with a body. I remember saying something like I think that's Bill. He said no, Bill is in an ambulance. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] He says everything is screwed up over here. No one knows what's going on. That was Bill's body. They were bringing him back. 15 minutes, 10 minutes later, absolutely no conception of what time it was, 7 World Trade Center collapsed. I remember hearing the building collapse and seeing the dust go up into the air. Myself and Michael Regan walked back over to



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Vesey Street. At that point we had Ganci, Feehan in the same ambulance. Chief Nick Visconti had given me possession of Feehan's helmet. He had a front piece from Chief Ganci's helmet. He gave that to Steve Mosiello, and [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].

Q. For the record, describe what a front piece is.

A. The front piece is the identifying marker on the front of your helmet. Has your assignment on there, or in case of the staff, it has -- Ganci's helmet says Chief of the Department. Bill Feehan's helmet said First Deputy Fire Commissioner on it. Commissioner Feehan's helmet was pretty much completely intact. Once I got the two of them into the ambulance, Henry McDonald went to the morgue in the ambulance with Commissioner Feehan and Chief Ganci. I then went to the morgue with Michael Regan. We had gotten up there actually before the ambulance arrived there. Pretty much had a horrible scene up there too, it was - they didn't really have any people yet, but it was chaos already up there too. I guess they were trying to get set up, because they had a refrigerator truck set up

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outside. There were hundreds of people on the street and inside. I remember them asking everybody to leave, that they didn't want this to be a circus.

Q. Was it now nighttime or still the afternoon?

A. It's about dusk now.

Q. Do you know where they found Commissioner Feehan's and Chief Ganci's bodies in relation to West Street and the World Financial Center?

A. I believe anecdotally from people that pulled them out that they were found outside of the Winter Garden, which is where I know Commissioner Feehan was and Chief Ganci was. They were both on the driveway where they had set up the command post on West Street and Tom Fitzpatrick was with them when the second tower collapsed. I think he ran a different way than they did.

When we went back there, the next day, the day after, there were markings on some of the walls down there marked with orange paint and arrows that said body and body. I don't know if that was them or not, for like a week, that's where they found the two of them. After we stayed there until they brought in Chief Ganci and Commissioner Feehan and made sure that the marshalls were going to be there with them to make

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positive identifications on them and at that point, we got back into the car and came back to headquarters.

We spent the rest of the night trying to plan for the rest of this catastrophe.

Q. Okay. I just have a few follow up clarification questions. When you said you looked out your window, just to clarify, your office is on what floor?

A. My office is on the 8th floor.

Q. Of headquarters?

A. Of headquarters.

Q. You said you drove over the bridge in Commissioner Feehan's car?

A. Yes.

Q. As you were going over the Brooklyn Bridge could you see the towers?

A. Yes.

Q. At that point only one tower had been hit, correct?

A. That's correct.

Q. When you were in the lobby of the 1 World Trade Center tower, did you see any other Chiefs in that lobby, like Chief Burns or Chief Downey?

A. I didn't see Chief Burns. I didn't see Chief

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Downey. I saw Chief McGovern, who was the Battalion Chief down there, who is dead. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Q. Who was that, Chief McGovern?

A. No, Battalion Chief Pfeifer.

Q. Did you notice any damage to the lobby of the building?

A. Lot of broken glass in the lobby. There was a lot of stuff crashing down inside the lobby. Several of the windows, had to be 20 feet tall, were already broken out. There was stuff knocked over in the lobby at that point. Some of the trees. It was just - you could look up and see literally hundreds and hundreds of people running back and forth on the next level up from where we were. We were at street level. There was escalators. People were actually much more orderly than we expected at that time.

Q. But there weren't many civilians down there where you were in the lobby on West Street, near West Street?

A. There was some. The ones that were down there were not looking to hang around. They were

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coming down and trying to find a way to get out. We were trying to not let anybody out of the doors on to West Street because there was quite a few jumpers at that point. Jumping on to West Street. People jumping from tower one.

Q. Did you happen to see Father Judge there in that vicinity at that time?

A. I believe I saw Father Judge in the lobby of 1 World Trade Center at some point. I don't know when it was. I don't remember having a conversation with him. I just have a recollection of seeing him. There were several people there. I have a recollection of seeing him, but I did not have a conversation with him or recall that I was speaking to him.

Q. Just a couple more questions. Obviously you at some point had to cross West Street to get to the other side, correct?

A. Yes.

Q. You were obviously very wary of jumpers, cautious leaving 1 World Trade Center?

A. Tell you the truth, I stepped outside through the glass window, I looked up and I made it as hastily as I could away from the building without trying to fall on the glass. The street was just littered with

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glass at that point.

Q. There was a firefighter who was hit by a jumper in that vicinity named Suhr. Did you happen to see him when you were leaving the building?

A. No.

Q. 5 truck, when you arrived up there, were there any firefighters there or had they all left to go down to the site?

A. There was nobody in the fire house when we got there, because cops were panicking at that point to get into the fire house. They were trying to jimmy the lock with a knife. I just said give me a minute. I will get you a combination for the door. They tried to break the window with an oxygen bottle. I called EOC and I got the combination of the building at the fire house. Then after 15 minutes of being there, a guy showed up.

Q. EOC is what?

A. Fire emergency operations downstairs on the 7th floor of the headquarters. They have all the combinations there of the fire house.

Q. When you were walking from the vicinity of City Hall up to 5 truck, did anybody inform you of any updates regarding planes hitting any other facilities

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such as the Pentagon?

A. No, but I remember while we were on West Street, I remember hearing Chief Callan, I believe it was him, on the handy talky, saying to evacuate the building. That was 1 World Trade Center. Get everybody out of the building and then the piece after that was something to the extent that there was a third unidentified aircraft coming towards New York City. The plane did not identify themselves. That was when he called for that Mayday to evacuate the building, get everybody out of the building.

Q. How long after that Mayday did the tower collapse?

A. Approximately, I would say probably between 15 and 20 minutes. Because I remember hearing somebody on the radio saying they were on the 41st floor. They were working their way down.

Q. You mean a firefighter?

A. It was a company officer, yes.

Q. At some point did you lose radio communication, either before or after the first collapse?

A. There was a dead silence after the first building collapsed, for a period of time. Then the

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radio traffic even after that was somewhat subdued. I believe that's because most of the people on the radios were probably dead at that point.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER DRURY: I have nothing further Captain. Thank you very much. The time is now 11:17 and we will conclude this interview.