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WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

LIEUTENANT RUDOLF WEINDLER

Interview Date: January 15, 2002

Transcribed by Nancy Francis

BATTALION CHIEF KEMLY: Today is January

15th, 2002. The time is 1755. This is Battalion Chief

Ronald Kemly of the Fire Department of the City of New

York. I am conducting an interview with Lieutenant

Rudy Weindler of Ladder Company 40 of the Fire

Department of the City of New York in the quarters of

Safety Battalion 1 regarding the events of September

11th, 2001.

- Q. Lieutenant, can you tell me what happened to you on September 11th?
- A. Yes. On September 11th, I was off duty. I was in Nassau County and within sight of the World Trade Center. When I saw the smoke coming from the Trade Center, I got in my car and drove from the Rockaways to Long Island City, where I left my car and got into a Fire Department van which was leaving the Long Island City shops and going to the scene of the fire.

I arrived at City Hall Park sometime between 10:30 and a quarter to 11:00, and I went to the quarters of Engine 6 and borrowed some fire gear, helmet, turnout coat, pants, boots, gloves, flashlight. There was nobody in the quarters at the time. The doors were open.

So I started to walk towards the Trade

Center, and apparently the towers had just collapsed or

one -- I'm not sure which ones collapsed. All I know

is the dust cloud was just coming east and people were

scrambling all over the place.

I started walking towards the Trade Center down I believe it was Vesey Street, and I ran into a Fireman Ron Kemly, who I believe also had borrowed some gear from somewhere and was unattached to anyone. So we hooked up something and we began moving down Vesey Street. At that time the dust cloud was still flying around. The smaller buildings of the Trade Center were on fire. All the cars in the street were on fire, and there was a Fire Department pumper in the block, I don't remember what the company number was, but it was also beginning to burn. The tires were burning.

Fireman Kemly had told me that he heard somebody calling for help. We looked around, didn't see anybody at all in the street. As I said, there was a lot of smoke and a lot of dust and things flying around. Then he heard another call and we found a woman, a middle-aged woman, inside the Fire Department pumper whose number I really don't know, and she was burned, I assume from the jet fuel. I don't know how.

She was really talking incoherent. So Ron and I carried her, took her out of the pumper and carried her back east towards City Hall where we saw an EMS ambulance and just basically gave the woman to the EMS workers.

We then proceeded back down Vesey Street towards the Trade Center, where we saw several other firemen who were in various stages of gear, no gear.

Some I recognized; some I didn't. At that point we were standing, I believe, on the corner of -- well, it was the southwest corner of the Church Street Post Office, and several of the firemen said they heard someone, again, screaming for help. They said they saw a police officer at a window in I believe it was 5 World Trade Center. I never saw the man. I heard the screams for help.

We went up an escalator to the plaza of, I believe, 5 World Trade Center. When we got up there, we heard some gunshots. It sounded like he was trying to alert us by shooting his gun. Again, I never saw him. But when we got to that plaza, the building was fully involved. There were no more screams and there were I-beams and stuff hanging all over the place, so we made a conscious decision to go back down to the

street level.

The next thing I did was we saw a fire starting to show at windows in 7 World Trade Center, decided to go in and try and see if there was anybody in the building and/or put out the fires, and we did a search from floor to floor of 7 World Trade Center passing fire on floors 3, 7, 9. The standpipes had no water. We tried to extinguish a few fires with cans. When we got to 11, there was just too much smoke and we decided that, without water, if we went any higher, we'd be on fool's mission.

So we left 7 World Trade Center, back down to the street, where I ran into Chief Coloe from the 1st Division, Captain Varriale, Engine 24, and Captain Varriale told Chief Coloe and myself that 7 World Trade Center was badly damaged on the south side and definitely in danger of collapse. Chief Coloe said we were going to evacuate the collapse zone around 7 World Trade Center, which we did.

At that point there were fires in, I guess, all of the smaller buildings in the Trade Center complex. The only place we had any water was in the Church Street Post Office, where we hooked up some house lines. They were just a bunch of firemen, some

of them I know, most of them I didn't, just trying to get water on fires in the smaller buildings of the Trade Center. Mostly it was futile.

At that point we -- I forget who it was. We needed water into a tower ladder, I believe it was 146's tower ladder, to put a curtain of water up between 5 World Trade Center and the Millenium Hotel. It took quite awhile. Somehow we got water. I don't know where it came from. The chauffeur from 146 or somebody else positioned it to put water up between the Millenium Hotel and 5 World Trade Center. From that point, we went into the Millenium Hotel, did a little search of a couple of floors. It was already evacuated, as far as we could tell.

 $\label{eq:After we left the Millenium Hotel, we went -- $$I'm not even sure what I did after I left the Millenium $$$Hotel.$

At some point, 7 World Trade Center collapsed. We were down the block. We heard it starting to go. We ran into a loading dock of some building on maybe Vesey Street or Dey Street. I'm really not sure where. We waited out for the dust to settle a little bit. I did have a Department radio. I heard a Mayday. I didn't know where it came from.

When I tried to contact whoever gave the Mayday, I got no response.

We moved back down the block into the dust cloud and realized that 7 World Trade Center had almost completely collapsed causing some fires now in the Church Street Post Office. We had entered the Church Street Post Office from a pile of rubble that used to be 7 World Trade Center. We knew we had water in that building prior to that collapse and hoped that there would still be water because there was fire on several floors. Again, we hooked house lines together and extinguished fires on several floors in the Church Street Post Office. I'm not sure what the address of that building is. That went on for a while.

Then we exited that Church Street Post Office and from that point went up on the pile and started searching voids, looking in holes and voids and trying to get into basements and into some basements below, I think, 5 World Trade Center, where we could actually walk down levels of a parking garage, I guess, just looking and listening. Never heard anything. We pretty much got to points where we thought it was just too dangerous to be and then backed out and looked for another place.

This went on, to the best of my recollection, until 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock the following morning, when I walked down to a little hospital by 6 Engine. I'm not sure what the name of it is. I had my eyes washed out and a doctor looked at me and several other guys, and then they wanted us to stay, but we just left. We laid down in 6 Engine for a couple hours, I guess, until the sun came up, went back to the site and started that process of either digging on the pile, searching voids. We formed up with teams of guys that I had worked with years ago in Brooklyn. At that point it was just either working on the pile, working with ironworkers cutting steel, not really knowing or not really having any game plan, just sort of going to where you thought you might be able to help somebody.

I really can't say where any Fire Department rigs were. It's all pretty much a blur to me. On a few hours rest, I ended up working on the pile until the sun went down again. At some point in the middle of the night, I walked uptown, got on a train, went to Harlem, laid down in my quarters, 40 Truck, for a couple hours, then back down to the pile, I don't know, some commandeered bus or van or something like that.

Q. You said at the beginning you went to the

shops and got a van. Did somebody drive the van with you?

- A. Yes. I had my personal car that I had driven and left on the sidewalk at the shops. The first person I saw when I pulled up on the sidewalk was Lieutenant Vasquez. I had worked on light duty there once. I said how do I get into the city? He said there's a van coming out. A van pulled out. I don't know who was driving it. He said he was going across the bridge -- he said he was going through the tunnel to the site, and I just jumped in the van, left my car on the sidewalk, jumped in the van.
 - Q. So it was just you and the guy driving?
- A. Me, the guy driving, and then there was another officer in there. There was a guy driving, a Lieutenant, whose name escapes me, and myself.
- Q. You said you were heading towards the Trade

 Center on Vesey Street when the building came down and

 there was a big dust cloud. Do you know Vesey and

 what, approximately?
- A. All I remember is, when I was in 6 Engine's quarters -- I jumped out of the van. The van came off the bridge right by City Hall. I don't know what their plan was. I don't know where they were going. My plan

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was to get some gear before I did anything. So I jumped out of the van right at City Hall and I ran down to 6 Engine to get some gear. Then that took me a few minutes. I don't know if that's when the towers collapsed. I really don't know. All I know is that, when I came out of 6's quarters, the dust was everywhere. So I don't know if that was the first, the second. I really don't know.

- Q. You said you saw a pumper. You don't know which one it was, but do you know what block it was on?
 - A. I believe it was on Vesey Street.
 - Q. Vesey and what?
 - A. Just west of Broadway.
 - Q. Okay.
 - A. It was definitely west of Broadway.
- Q. You said you saw it when you first got there after you hooked up with the other fireman and then later on you saw some guys that you recognized?
 - A. Yes.
 - Q. Do you know what companies they were from?
- A. Yes. Actually, I saw Jimmy Duffy, Captain of 23 Truck, and Abe Haiman, Captain of 30 Truck, and I believe Jimmy Hodges, who was a covering Battalion

 Chief from the 11th Battalion at the time. I hooked up

with them after Fireman Kemly and I had gotten the woman from the pumper and brought her back to EMS, then started back down I believe it's Vesey Street, and then, when I saw Jimmy Duffy and Abe Haiman, that's when somebody from across the street was yelling that there was a policeman in the window of the Trade Center.

So I think all of us that went up to that plaza, Jimmy Duffy, Abe Haiman, Jimmy Hodges, Ron Kemly and myself, I believe we all went up to that plaza, but there was just nothing to be done. It was just all fire.

- Q. Now, you said you came out of 7 and you saw Chief Coloe?
 - A. Yes.
- Q. And Captain Varriale. Do you know which side of 7 you came out of?
 - A. We came out of --
 - Q. Facing the towers?
- A. No. There's a street that runs between
 Church Street Post Office and 7 World Trade Center,
 which would be the east side of 7 World Trade Center.
 We came out of the door on that side. I met Chief
 Coloe and Captain Varriale on the northeast corner of 7

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World Trade Center.

- Q. Did they have radios, do you remember?
- A. Don't remember.
- Q. You said after that you ran into some more firemen that you knew from Brooklyn?
 - A. Yes.
- Q. Do you know whether they responded to the tower or came in off duty?
- A. Came in off duty. Some of them were from 290 and 103 and some of them were from 214 and 111.
- Q. But they were definitely off duty; they didn't come with their companies?
 - A. They didn't come with their companies.
 - Q. Okay.
- A. Actually, the guys from 111, it was maybe six or seven guys and no officer, and one of the guys said we'll just hang with you and we'll see what happens. I had the radio, so that was a big asset at the time.

BATTALION CHIEF KEMLY: If you don't have anything else, this will conclude the interview.

LIEUTENANT WEINDLER: Okay, Chief. Thank you.

 $\label{eq:BATTALION CHIEF KEMLY: Thanks for your time.} \\$