

On the morning of September 11th I was at LaGuardia Airport involved in everyday activity a commanding officer is involved in, in this case sitting at my office with my office administrator and interior designer discussing the need to recover chairs with new fabric in my office at a small meeting table. I joked with them that because police officers wearing their gun belts had gotten bigger and bigger they wore the fabric out to the point it needed to be replaced. During this discussion somebody outside my office said: "A plane hit the World Trade Center." The Port Authority Police had mobilization plans, so I knew a mobilization would be initiated by Police Headquarters. I met with my staff lieutenant, Ed Dowling. Ed had been the long time staff lieutenant at the airport; nobody understood its operation better. I told him: "You stay here and take care of the airport and I'll take the mobilized personnel down to the Trade Center." We mobilized with eight vehicles and I believe 17 or 18 uniformed personnel and detectives. Our caravan of police vehicles drove southward on Brooklyn Queens Expressway, while en route I saw the second tower struck by an airplane. At that moment I knew this was not just an aircraft accident or high-rise building fire but an act of terrorism. My mind went back to 1993, I had been part of the rescue and recovery back then as a lieutenant, working that February day with Chief James Nachstein, the department's Chief of Operations.

On crossing the Williamsburg Bridge and seeing the inferno engulfing the World Trade Center towers I realized this was completely different from the 1993 bombing. I radioed instructions to the responding personnel from LaGuardia Airport not to respond to the planned West Street location for World Trade Center mobilizations but to a point one block north of the towers on Barclay Street. This location provided cover by the buildings between the north boundary of the World Trade Center Complex on Vesey Street and Barclay Street. During our response drive I attempted via the 800 police radio system to contact the World Trade Center Police Desk and also the responding Headquarters units but was unable to make radio contact. I later learned the radio base station located at 5 World Trade Center Building had been damaged due to falling debris from the burning towers knocking out radio communication capabilities. I discovered the ability to utilize a little used outdated police channel, "Channel A", to get in touch with the Port Authority Police Central Police Desk to inform them of our response and resources at the WTC Site.

My vehicle was parked at Barclay Street and West Broadway on a sidewalk right under a construction protective canopy. The other LaGuardia vehicles were also parked at this location that was across the street from the Barclay Street WTC vehicle entrance ramp. I gathered and instructed all my LaGuardia personnel to remain with me and we walked westward along Barclay Street till we came to West Street and turned southward, where we found the Port Authority Police Command Bus vehicle parked at the northeast corner of Vesey and West streets. Approaching the Command Bus I saw then met with a long time Port Authority Senior Executive, Robert Van Etten, and New York City Police Department 1st Deputy Commissioner, Joseph Dunne. Mr. Dunne inquired if the Port Authority had closed off the tunnels and bridges into New York City. I told him I believed they were, based on the radio transmissions on Channel A, but would check in the Command Bus. I was able to get a phone line to the Central Police Desk and they told me the George Washington Bridge and the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels were closed to incoming Manhattan bound traffic and that only outbound traffic to New Jersey could use the crossings. I left the Command Bus and informed Joe Dunne of the river crossings' operations. I was unable to make contact with any ranking command officers taking part in the rescue operations in the two towers. I was informed by Joe Poland, a Headquarters Sergeant, that the police Superintendent and two working police chiefs had entered the North Tower to lead the rescue operations.

At that point I decided to respond to the North Tower lobby, knowing that was the designated incident command area in the procedures developed after the 1993 bombing. At the Command Bus location were the maybe 17 or 18 LaGuardia police personnel as well as I guess 50 to 60 police officers from other Port Authority Police offices taking part in the World Trade Center Complex mobilization. I instructed the lieutenants and sergeants at this location to break up in groups of 3 or 4 officers and to remain there until I came back with a plan. I informed them I was going to respond into the North Tower and meet up with the New York City Fire Department and any Port Authority Police supervisory personnel at the incident command post located in the North Tower lobby.

I had Lieutenant Emilio Sepleveda, who had during his career worked years at the World Trade Center Command including the 1993 bombing, accompany me

PAPD INSPECTOR
JOSEPH MORRIS
9/11 RECOLLECTIONS
FROM 01/11/2016
BLOG

"UNDICISETTEMBRE"
by LEONARDO SALVAGGIO

to the lobby command post. While walking southbound on West Street toward the VIP Drive North Tower entrance I started looking upward and suddenly observed objects exiting the South Tower higher floors and the tower started to collapse straight down. The first few seconds I was amazed at what I was seeing, not believing my own eyes that the South Tower was collapsing. I then realized the danger and yelled "Fuck! Run!", I turned and started to run north on West Street with other people around me. As I ran back north I realized that there was a powerful force of collapsing debris above and behind me. At about 80 yards I saw and dove into the Command Bus for cover. The police personnel in the bus then closed the doors to provide protection from the driven airborne debris. While the collapse debris was still all about people knocked on the vehicle door seeking safety from the debris storm. One person was Chief of NYPD Detective, Chief Olly, who was being carried by other NYPD personnel and who was covered with white dust covering his entire person including every opening in his face: his nostrils and mouth were covered with dust. We cleaned him with water that allowed his breathing distress to be alleviated.



I can only describe the blowing dust and debris as a warm blizzard white out. I remember the only thing that really survived was pieces of paper. At that point I did not see any other police commanders from the Port Authority Police so I took command responsibility, anticipating things that might be happening. During the time after the South Tower collapse other Port Authority Police personnel who escaped the collapse and its aftermath gathered at the Command Bus. One of those was Captain Tony Whitaker, the World Trade Center Commanding Officer; we were attempting to organize the personnel and available resources. We were located outside the Verizon Building that was located yards away from the North Tower. Captain Whitaker expressed the need to quickly move saying "We have to get out of here", I asked "Why?", and Tony said "The first tower came down and this is going to come down too." Based on that a decision was made to move our Command Bus further north on West Street for safety.

Due to the depth of the airborne debris that collected all about the Command Bus its engine choked and stopped running. Police Officers Arcardi and Kennedy took the initiative, removing the clogged filter, then went to the closest fire hydrant and washed it off, returning it to the engine, then were able to restart the bus. The Command Bus was then moved three blocks north on West Street just south of Chambers Street intersection.

One thing I experienced that most of other commanders did not that morning was a panoramic view of the World Trade Center while responding down the Brooklyn Queens Expressway. That view provided me a better understanding of the devastation caused by the terrorist acts. Port Authority personnel gathered about the Command Bus. We were just accounting for who had survived, we believed 300 to 400 Port Authority Police personnel were in and about the World Trade Center Complex when the South Tower collapsed. During this same period of time more employees of the agency gathered about the Command Bus. Two senior executives, Christopher Ward, a Project Director, as well as Jeff Green, the Chief Legal Counsel, arrived at the location. Both had fled their North Tower offices after the aircraft striking the tower and taken refuge in the WTC Complex's Marriott Hotel only to escape the South Tower collapse upon the hotel and took shelter in the Command Bus. I was in discussions with them concerning their knowledge and understanding of the situation when the North Tower collapsed. Again the warm blizzard white out overtook the entire area, with people seeking cover for refuge from the warm blizzard of debris until it ended.

I remembered words of Chief Nachstein during the 1993 bombing response and rescue operations to the effect that it was our job to avoid drowning in the tidal wave and to bring order to chaos. Those words dictated my actions for the rest of that day. I, with other supervisory personnel, did bring order to chaos as we met and took actions as the day went on. Meeting with other agency personnel in an enclosed courtyard at Manhattan Community College I directed the fellow employees to group by the department they worked for and organize in that manner.

In the early afternoon I was informed by Chief Thomas Farrell, who was on medical leave and responded to the Port Authority Agencies Command Post in Jersey City, that I had been designated the WTC Site Commander. I had moved up to the Manhattan Community College that was located on West Street, north of Chambers Street. The college's gymnasium is where Port Authority rescue and recovery operations were established. I was introduced and began a relationship with Ed Sullivan, a great man, who was Senior Vice President for the facility. Ed told me *"I have no power at the building facility"*. I told him *"No problem, we will get you power with portable generators. We just need to use the gymnasium."* That is simply how things were done, no bureaucracy just people trusting each other to get things done that day and in the months that followed. I remained at the site as the Port Authority Police WTC Site Commander till I was promoted to Chief of the Department and Acting Superintendent of Police on September 24, 2001. I kept an almost daily physical presence at the site till its closing ceremony in May of 2002.



Undicisettembre: Do you know anything about the collapse of World Trade Center 7?

Joe Morris: We knew it was on fire, I spoke with some United States Secret Service agents whose offices were in the building and escaped from it and told me of the scale of damage and spreading fires in the structure. The building also was the location of the New York City Office of Emergency Management Offices and Emergency Command Post located on the 25th floor. The building contained large storage tanks of diesel fuel that provided power to emergency generators used to provide emergency electrical power. World Trade Center 7 was completely ablaze by late afternoon on 9/11, there was no firefighting capability. There existed no water supply due to lack of any water pressure caused by the damage to street infrastructure by the collapse of the Towers, the water lines were broken. The only recourse was to keep personnel away. We knew the situation was bad and the structure collapsed after 5 in the afternoon, adding itself to the physical carnage on the WTC Site.

One thing you learn as a police commander is that cops and firemen want to get back into action, holding them back and organizing is the toughest part of the supervising. That, though, is our function in bringing order to chaos. I was determined, like many other bosses, not to lose one more person to that pile of carnage.

Undicisettembre: What happened in the evening?

Joe Morris: I remember sending some people to go look at and explore the site, I utilized only department certified emergency service personnel; I had the ranking department Emergency Service Supervisor, Police Sergeant John Flynn, go down with these specially trained officers to make observations of what the site was like, what we could do as well as what we could not do. The sergeant came back and reported how bad the existing conditions were at the site. At 8:30 that evening I met with the city officials and people from the medical examiner's office; they estimated at that time that there was a possibility of losing 10,000 people because of the attacks during rush hour. The medical examiner also expressed to us that few bodies are going to be found. Most were pulverized, at best body parts will be found.

Looking back that evening I remembered while approaching the North Tower to go to the command post I had seen Port Authority Police Officer George Howard, he was standing yards off to my right near One World Financial Center in the West Street southbound traffic lanes. George was one of the first officers killed that were discovered that afternoon. His death occurred during the collapse of the South Tower with debris striking him in the head. I surmise it occurred at the time I was running northward away from the collapse. I look back and realize it was just a matter of where you were standing that day. What protected me I think was the North Bridge structure that crossed over West Street connecting World Trade Center's Custom House to the World Financial Center. That structure provided me enough cover as I ran up West Street before diving into the Command Bus.

It was a matter of continuing to utilize your existing resources. Resource use included the assignment of department detectives to the temporary morgue and hospitals to perform investigate responsibilities at those locations or assignment of lieutenants for accounting those who we knew survived, those killed and those that were still missing. Personnel were assigned to account for vehicles and equipment sent to the WTC site and what vehicles and equipment were still in a useable state. It was very tough because communications were for the most part wiped out. The Port Authority had very little radio communications, we had no workable cellphones. I utilized motorcycle officers, as in World War I, to deliver verbal and written messages. The only phones that were actually working in the WTC site area were BlackBerry instruments, but because of their costs neither the police nor the fire department personnel had been issued.

The police agencies and the Fire Department were trying to get themselves together and organized to address the fire and police responsibilities at the WTC site. The best way to explain responsibilities jurisdiction-wise during a catastrophe or a fire at the World Trade Center Complex is that the Port Authority Police would respond to the smoke alarm or fire alarm area with police officers. The fire department would respond to the tower lobby command desk waiting for confirmation. If a fire or smoke event was confirmed the fire department personnel would then respond to the area via elevators. Port Authority Police officers assigned to the World Trade Center Complex were fire trained, every year attending and certified as to fight structural fires. The New York City Police had jurisdiction responsibilities for the adjacent streets and sidewalks abutting the World Trade Center Complex. These jurisdictional responsibilities were the basis for all the operational directives for all interagency responses between the Port Authority and City of New York. As you look at the World Trade Center attacks on September 11th, the casualties sustained by the three agencies reflect their operational responsibilities. Fire department personnel were casualties in and about the World Trade Center Complex, Port Authority Police officers assigned to the World Trade Center or responded in the mobilization were casualties and only NYPD personnel specifically assigned to their Emergency Service Unit that were directed into the Complex were casualties. The only exception was a NYPD officer who was retiring that day, he ran from NYPD Police Headquarters into the World Trade Center complex and lost his life.

Undicisettembre: Having witnessed the attacks in '93, were you guys expecting another attack to the Trade Center?

Joe Morris: In 1993 I was a lieutenant, I was in the Headquarters' administrative assignment. I know from talking to people there was a threat, a very general

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threat. The Port Authority Police, based on that general threat, did increase World Trade Center perimeter security vehicle and foot patrols.

Based on the 1993 bombing experiences the emergency response plans were reviewed and adjusted by the responding agencies. These plans were the basis for the response to the September 11, 2001 attacks upon the World Trade Center Complex. In July 2001 there was a meeting called by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) that I attended as the LaGuardia Airport Commanding Officer. The FAA informed those attending of a general threat that was not specific serving as only informational purposes. The Port Authority as an agency had determined in 1996 after the TWA 800 incident to bring its police personnel to its next to highest threat level for security purposes at its three major airports.
