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WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW
FIREFIGHTER TIMOTHY BURKE

Interview Date: January 22, 2,002

Transcribed by Elisabeth F. Nason

BATTALION CHIEF McGRATH: Today is Tuesday,
January 22, 2,002. The time is 1611 hours. This
is Battalion Chief James McGrath of the Fire
Department of the City of New York. I'm
conducting an interview with Timothy Burke of
Engine 202. This interview is regarding the
events of September 11, 2001 and is taking place
in the quarters of Engine 202 in Brooklyn.

- Q. Timmy, please state your name and just recount what happened on September 11 to the best of your recollection.
- A. My name is Timothy James Burke from Engine

  202. I was working September 11. I got in at 8

  o'clock in the morning. The first plane had hit a

  little later. We watched it from the roof of the

  building. Then they called us to a staging area around

  quarter to nine, I think, which would be the Brooklyn

  Battery Tunnel. From the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel

  staging area, we watched the second plane come in.

As soon as the second plane came in, they sent us into the tunnel. We spent a few minutes in the tunnel. Seemed like a lot of traffic in the tunnel. It was rumored that they were blowing up the tunnel then. We got through, we drove over what felt like

gravel, because there was so much glass and debris around. I saw a plane tire in an alley, body parts and people all over the place. We pulled up, as soon as we got up in front of the building, I think we were right in front of the Vista Hotel, they made a statement that we should keep moving forward, so our rigs -- we got back on the rigs, then we moved to position right in front of, looks like the Merrill Lynch building, which is 2 World Financial Center.

From there we proceeded to, that would be the staging area, which is the two garage tunnels. Their staging area was right at the throat of the garage tunnels. Our officer stayed with the command post and the engine and truck went into one of the garages where all the firefighters were starting to meet up.

As soon as that happened, the Chief ran over, started screaming that the engine should be on one side, the truck should be on another. That's the last I saw of 101. That's the last we saw from 101. Then they were split from us. There was just all engines on that side. A guy from 211 had a cell phone and we were all trying to call our families. At this point, this was a few minutes into the box, few minutes into us being there, I would say about 5, 10 minutes.

It seemed pretty bad that everybody was willing to get on the phone and try to call their wives to say good-bye or say whatever. Just the faces of people, you kind of knew that some of us were going to get hurt, because it was just too too too much going on. I had a radio and I was the nozzle man. I had a radio. There was a calling for water, they had no water, they had no water, I thought it was coming from Engine 10. I'm not sure. Then there was a call out that one engine was on the 19 floor, and that if they expect them to get to 34, it's going to be at least an hour. I forget the number of that engine.

There was a lot of chatter. There was chatter that a fireman was hit by a jumper, to keep your heads up, to keep an eye out on what was going on. We learned that was Danny Suhr. At one point, at the beginning of us getting there, at one point, we got off the rig. We got all our gear and we needed something else off the rig, so Bobby Norris and I ran to the rig and I looked at him and I wasn't going to go unless he went and he wasn't going to go unless I went, because it looked a little hairy, not that we wouldn't go. It was just we wanted to stay with each other, make sure everything was okay with each other because

there was a lot of stuff coming down.

That's when I saw the guy from Rescue 1,

Anginelli, the older guy, and I wasn't sure what he
wanted. He looked a little old and I was wondering
what he was doing. He wanted an extra Scott pack if we
had one on our rig. We searched the rig for a Scott
pack. Then I found out that he is not with us
anymore. I remembered just speaking to him.

Then we faded back to the garage and they started sending companies in. It was like they weren't grabbing officers at this point and saying get your company together. They were just grabbing full sets of men. We weren't a full set of men, we were just me and Bobby standing at the line. Our chauffeur was sitting with our detail from 20, Pete. His wife was in the building.

When the plane hit, he called his wife to say, when the plane hit tower one, he called his wife to say get out of tower two. When we got to the box, he was sitting on the side just worrying about his wife. He was ready to go but he wasn't sitting with us. So when they started taking companies without officers, they started grabbing full groups of guys. They were just grabbing guys on either side of us.

Then there were still a bunch of guys there. Still guys in the streets, still everything going on. Another Chief came over and said you are going to be there for a while, start loosening up, because there was already radio contact that guys were falling in the stairs with heart attacks and stuff. Things like that. Guys were going down, guys weren't making the stairs.

- Q. Do you know any specifics, any companies?
- A. No, it was just -- I don't know if it was radio or rumor, but when the Chief came over, he said everybody, you are going to be here a while. Loosen up, loosen up.
  - Q. Do you know who the Chief was?
- A. No, I don't remember. I remember one guy
  there was Metcalf. He was -- I remember him from proby
  school. He was a Lieutenant in proby school,

The other Chief ran over and he seemed like a Chief for a little while, he seemed liked a little older. He says everybody calm down, you are going to be here a while. Take your gear off, stay cool, you don't want to heat up now. Some of the guys started taking their masks off, the jackets off. I remember we made a nice pile of stuff. I remember where our pile was. Then we were sitting there and waiting to get called in, then the radios are going, calling for water, calling for this, calling for that, you know, different things going on on the radio that right now it's hard for me to remember exactly all the chatter. But it was very — seemed chaotic but not out of control, you know.

When we were standing there and like I said, people -- you just saw people moving, all people moving and if you looked at tower one you saw jumpers. You could hear the sound of jumpers. When you looked at tower two, you saw more flames. So I'm standing in the street, you could look for jumpers to your left and flames to your right, because tower two was more involved.

At that point I was going, where the hell are

the choppers? That's my mentality, going where the hell are the jets, where the hell are the choppers. I am thinking there was going to be another plane and every time we heard noise people thought it was another plane coming in and so everyone would like flinch.

Then the building popped, lower than the fire, which I learned was I guess, the aviation fuel fell into the pit, and whatever floor it fell on heated up really bad and that's why it popped at that floor. That's the rumor I heard. But it seemed like I was going oh, my god, there is a secondary device because the way the building popped I thought it was an explosion.

When that happened, they all started fading into the garage, masses of people. I'm thinking this building is coming down. We are going to be covered by two buildings. I didn't know if it was a good idea to run for the garage at that time. I was really saying I'm going to be killed by two buildings, they are not going to find me until they uncover one building. So with the amount of people rushing me, we ran through the garage. We kept running through. The only thing we could think about was trying to get as far into the building as possible, which was weird. I just wanted

to get deeper and deeper, further and further away, which was my mentality.

The guys were following us, me and Joe. We all ran up till we got to like a -- what looked like a workman's shanty, because it was plywood locked up door. Just a temporary door. Usually construction workers keep their tools in there. It's something I know because I used to work in the construction field. It would be like a tool lock or something, just something temporary made. I remember trying to break into there, just to get that much further in.

All of a sudden the noises stopped, the sound of the building falling stopped. We all turned around and it was dark now. We really couldn't see. We got back to where -- we went back to the garage as far in it as we were, we were all full of the cloud. The cloud was in there. All eating the cloud, whatever it was like, very thick. I keep saying it was like a 3 dimensional object. It wasn't smoke. It was like everything. It was like a sand storm. We only had bunker pants on at this time.

I was with Bobby. I don't know what happened to anybody else, but it was very silent after the building fell. Then all the Maydays started happening,

the guys were screaming. You only tune into certain numbers. Like I heard 131 looking for their irons man. I just kept hearing that back and forth. Bobby Norris and I stayed together the whole time. We were like — if I was going anywhere, it was with him and he was doing the same thing. I kept on saying to myself, where is 101, because that's my company. So where's 101?

I kept not hearing them and I knew it was a different group of guys that kept on saying they screwed up, something happened, they screwed up.

Either they are all together or they are all screwed up. I kept hearing 131 looking for the irons man, the irons man answering back.

I think I heard Sean Albert from 279 call for his guys. I know I heard Sean call for his company. I think it was 279. I don't know. I don't remember exactly. I just remember 131, because 131 (inaudible), come on, speak. We didn't hear anything. I made a choice with Bobby to go get our gear. We felt that if we were going to be here for a long while, I want my helmet, my jacket, if I can get my cylinder. I actually had a size up of the garage because when we first got there we looked around the garage. So I knew

exactly how far it was from this one stairwell and when we found the stairwell I knew our gear was 15, 20 feet up and that would be 10 feet from the entry of the garage.

So I went for it. I went for my gear, Bobby came with me. We grabbed our gear, we grabbed each cylinder -- Scott packs and I grabbed an extra Scott pack. We both, we both started falling back. Somebody had ran a search group to a back stairwell, which was a pretty good idea. From the stairwell I knew, it would have put us right into the atrium. So we didn't know if that was a good idea to go in there, the atrium being that cafeteria in between the buildings. It's not really a cafeteria. It's like a table area where you can sit down and have coffee, whatever. Part of a mall you would say, because the bottom level was a mall.

The stairwell I knew would lead us right into that area. So we didn't think that was a good idea to take, plus we didn't have our officer, the chauffeur or the back up man and it was just me and the control man together. Then Lieutenant Calkins was looking for us.

We were calling back to him. I think he was already outside on the -- outside where the Moran's bar side

12

## T. BURKE

is. I was right there, which is the Pier. Everything is whatchamacallit, landmarks, Moran's bar was the landmark. He was already out there, but Bobby and I were still inside. We actually thought of going back out the way we came in, but there was no visibility and when we got up for our gear, the aluminum facade was laying across the stuff. I thought it was duct work, because we had no visibility, and it felt like duct work. I'm going holy geez, the building came apart that much. There is pieces of duct work all over the place.

If there was visibility, we probably would have went out, knowing that we had an exit out the front, but there wasn't visibility, so we faded back again. That's when we got in touch with Calkins, and Calkins was calling back and forth to us. We finally hooked up. We went outside.

- Q. Where did you meet the Lieutenant, in the garage?
- A. In the garage, by the search rope. What Bobby and I did was one of us stayed by the search rope. The other guy would go out 10 feet and come back and we would work our way down, looking for things, looking if we could go any further from where we were.

This way we had an idea what was going on. We worked the search rope down to where I knew of a stairwell, because at least if we had to bail out I knew of one. We stayed at that point. That's where Calkins followed us, followed the search rope. We kept on saying we were on the rope, we were on the rope. He followed the rope down and found us. We proceeded outside.

When we had gotten out we were on the Pier side and that's another reason why it saved us, because we were isolated from the other building. We were here. We came out back here and we were here. The Winter Garden would be the atrium. So somewhere around here I had found a stairwell, but we didn't take that one. We took a stairwell that was over here. We popped out over here. There were just guys falling. I remember running. When the building first started coming down, I remember running and following guys from 204, because Ziegler had a cut on his hand, and I kept on telling him I was following his blood trail. So we made a little joke out of it, because he was doing pretty good.

That's before we lost all visibility. Then I don't know what happened to them. I knew 204 was in there with us, but I didn't know where 224 was. I

14

## T. BURKE

didn't know where anybody else was. I just remember Ziegler from 204 before we lost all visibility. We popped out over here, we all got together. There was 5 of us, the whole Engine Company, and 3 complete sets of bunker gear, because we had no tools, we had no anything. Just 3 cylinders and three complete sets of bunker gear, because everybody went -- like I said the Chief told us break down and take your stuff off, and then the buildings came down and nobody had really a chance to recover their gear.

Then one guy was screaming, let's all get together, let's all get together. The Lieutenant says the first building fell, the second building will.

Let's keep moving. We left. We started walking on the Pier. When we got around Moran's bar over to where the floating hospital is --

- Q. Stop for one second, okay.
- A. Back on?
- Q. Yes.
- A. We got out of the building and --
- Q. You were heading north?
- A. We were heading north under the Lieutenant's instructions that the first building came down, the second one will. Let's keep moving. So we moved

around and we got to -- they had that ferry, that floating barge. We got there. The other building started coming down. We ran and at this point there was a good hundred firemen running, guys were tripping, we were worried about getting covered with debris. We actually got covered with the cloud again over on the Pier side up there.

We ended up getting separated a little bit again, but it wasn't bad because we were outside. When we got up to there, and I guess it's called River Terrace by this map. We were going up there, like I said the second building had fallen. Now we were cut off from the first building by being on the Pier side. So we had to walk around to get to around there, we had -- I think at this point is when we knew everything was all haywire.

- Q. Did you hear any radio transmissions at that point that you recall?
- A. Not that I recall. It was just hectic.

  Really was. We went up to the corner -- somewhere over here and there was two ferries. There was a couple of hurt firemen, we helped them on the ferry. I remember that. We were standing there and it was like I don't know exactly what time it was, but I knew it was the

morning and then we looked at the officer and we asked if we can go try and get some water or something for us and for whoever needed it.

We went into Stuyvesant High School, Bobby and I, and we commandeered a dolly. We filled it with sandwiches and juices and we started handing them out to whoever needed it. We just started helping people on the Pier side. We started helping firemen and civilians, on to the ferry boats. They kept going back and then all of a sudden when we got that dolly filled with all the stuff, we got back to the Pier side and the ferry came in with water. We threw water on the dolly, we wheeled that dolly for about a half an hour around the Pier and wherever we were going. We ended up at West Street, I would say probably around Murray. That's the corner where Stuyvesant High School is, if that's the street. I'm not really sure if it was -- I think we were further down than Vesey. I think we were at Murray.

We ended up over there and then all the second wave of firemen came in and you could see the difference between the first wave firemen and the second wave firemen, because the first wave firemen had the look in their eyes like oh, my god, you don't even

know what happened.

At that point we were just I think,
everybody, the emotions were fried. Just wondering —
like, you wanted to do things, but we couldn't do
anything. We got down there. At one point in the day
we walked down there, we just got beat up with that
sand storm again and we faded back. The rest of the
day we were unloading trucks. We were just doing
whatever little things we could do, but they were
waiting for 7 World Trade Center to fall. I didn't
call my wife until 4:00 o'clock that afternoon to tell
her I was okay.

Then the Lieutenant called his wife because we couldn't get in touch with anybody or anything. We didn't know what the hell was going on. It was just people all over the place. Firemen kept showing up and they said anybody on the recall that wasn't there before the building fell, they looked like they were just going to work. All the guys who were there before the building fell had this gaze in their eyes, like holy shit.

Q. Was there any radio transmissions or anybody you might have run into that you might be able to add that might help us?

18

T. BURKE

- A. I don't know right now. Not really. Like I said, I seen Angelini looking for a mask.
  - Q. Did he get one, did you find one?
- A. I didn't have one on my rig. I saw a couple of things in the water. They had no pressure. They had no water. I heard 131.
- Q. You mentioned earlier that Engine 10 was yelling they didn't have any water. Do have any idea what their location was?
- A. No, no. I think it was Engine 10 looking for water there. They had no pressure. There was people with no pressure fighting the fire. That's from what I remember.
- Q. Do you know if they were in the towers or they were fighting fires in the street?
- A. I'm not even sure. It was at the beginning of everything. It was basically I just remember hearing it. I just remember, holy geez, there is no water anywhere, because I heard everything was wiped out. They just kept asking people to hook up to the building from what I remember. They were trying to augment from as many places as they can.
- Q. All right. Is there anything else that you can think of that you might want to add at this time

before we complete the interview?

A. I think I gave you a quick version.

BATTALION CHIEF McGRATH: You gave me an excellent version. All right. The time is 1636 hours. I want to thank you very much and this will conclude the interview then. Thank you.