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WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

CAPTAIN ANTHONY VARRIALE

Interview Date: December 12, 2001

Transcribed by Elisabeth F. Nason

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BATTALION CHIEF KEMLY: The time is is 1450 hours. This is Battalion Chief Ronald Kemly of the Fire Department, City of New York. I'm conducting an interview with the following individual. Captain ANTHONY VARRIALE assigned to Engine Company 24, Fire Department of the City of New York. The interview is taking place in the quarters of Engine Company 5 in the office regarding the events of September 11, 2001.

Q. Captain Varriale, tell me what happened to you on September 11, 2001.

A. Okay. At approximately 8:30 that morning -- I live in Valley Stream, New York. My son picked me up, we were going to go -- I was doing something at his house. We were heading towards Queens, I noticed a large column of smoke on the horizon. I thought it might have been something from Newark. As we got on the Cross Island Parkway headed north, I could see one of the towers of the World Trade Center, smoke coming from it. It was a clear day that day.

I said to my son, let's turn the radio on, something is happening. As we turned the radio on, they had mentioned that a Cessna might have hit the World Trade Center, at which time I told my son to take

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me back home. I picked up my pick up truck and I headed in towards the quarters of Engine 24.

On the way in, you could see that the towers were hit. I went through the streets of Brooklyn, which most of the civilian population had helped clear the streets off and I got into the Williamsburg Bridge relatively -- maybe 20 minutes. As I was on the Williamsburg Bridge, I saw the second -- the first tower collapse. I actually stopped my truck and I looked out. I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

I responded to quarters of Engine 24, which is located at 6 Avenue and West Houston, where several members were coming in also.

We got our gear. Some of the members I remember that were with me, I can't remember all of them, were fireman William McCarthy, fireman Anthony Salerno, fireman Jeffrey Anstead of Ladder 5, fireman Michael Paolone of Engine 24. Several others and one civilian. We loaded up my pick up truck with first aid equipment, some hose, rollups, whatever we felt we were going to probably need, basically first aid equipment and our fire fighting gear.

At that time, we headed south on Varick Street into West Broadway. We got to about a block

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south of Chambers, between Chambers and Warren on West Broadway, where I parked my pick up truck. Right around then, I believe the second tower came down, because it was relatively clear at that point as we were heading south. There was lots of people heading north and then when we got out of the van, my memory is a little vague on that, I'm pretty sure that's when the second tower collapsed, because we were hit with dust.

As the dust started settling we noticed there was nothing but vehicles and fire for as far as the eye could see. We actually commandeered a volunteer fire truck. It was the only fire truck we saw at that point. It was just south of Warren on West Broadway. It was from, I believe a vollie -- volunteer company from the Bronx.

My chauffeur, Anthony Salerno, got into the apparatus, we backed it up, because it was in danger of catching fire from the numerous vehicle fires that were on. We found a hydrant, I believe it was Warren and West Broadway, hooked up and stretched down West Broadway. We also hooked up a manifold. We were able to get water into some hand lines and started extinguishing the numerous auto fires and there was two busses, several trucks. As we moved south, some of the

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fire was communicating into one of the buildings on the west side. We extinguished that. I'm not sure of the address.

When we ran out of line, we shut down the pumper, disconnected the hose line and then went into -- we were now between Vesey and the block north of that. We went into the east side building, stretched off the stand pipe and extinguished a couple of busses, a bus fire, several cars and the apparatus of Engine 28, which was fully involved. That was roughly on the corner of West Broadway and Vesey.

At that time, other firefighters started showing up, Deputy Battalion Chief Paul Ferran of the 41 Battalion, and James Savastano of the First Division assigned to the Second Battalion showed up and we attempted to search and extinguish, at the time which was small pockets of fire in 7 World Trade Center. We were unaware of the damage in the front of 7, because we were entering from the northeast entrance. We weren't aware of the magnitude of the damage in the front of the building.

We made searches. We attempted to put some of the fire out, but we had a pressure problem. I forget the name of the Deputy. Some Deputy arrived at

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the scene and thought that the building was too dangerous to continue with operations, so we evacuated number 7 World Trade Center. At that time, some of my members went with another officer, I don't remember who it was, to try and search the collapse of -- I guess the number one tower on Vesey Street.

I was with one Firefighter, who I can't remember right now, over to where we were told there was a command post set up, which would be, I think it was West Street and Vesey. But I went down the block north to it, because you couldn't go down Vesey.

When I got there, there was hundreds of firefighters. Chief Fellini was there. I guess he was in charge. He was trying to give people direction. I then went with Firefighter Paolone who ended up meeting him there and Firefighter Jeff Anstead of Ladder 5.

We went south on West Street under the bridge, at which time they were just removing the body of Chief Feehan, Deputy Commissioner Feehan, and then from there, we started searching on what was West Street, south of the first bridge and I operated there for several hours. I helped remove one Firefighter from under the apparatus of Engine 34, with fireman Erik Wiener of Ladder 111, and several other

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firefighters. I know Erik because I had worked in Brooklyn.

From there I just started working my way over eastward to the north tower. I was there for hours. We ended up stretching a line from somewhere. It was a pumper on West Street, I think, that was still intact. We tried to stretch lines into the pile that would have ended up being just west of number one tower. Trying to extinguish the fires there.

We performed searches, void searches. I was also on the tower, the pile there we called it, when they removed one victim, a male. I believe he was the guy that said he was on the 83 floor or 73 floor. He seemed to be fairly intact. I was at that point where I stayed most of the day because I found a face piece from one of my members.

Actually it was handed to me from a Captain Steven Geraghty and so we stayed in that area. I thought I might be searching for members of Engine 24, while Fireman Palone and Fireman Anstead went further to the tower where they hooked up with Ladder 43 and made contact with Chief Prunty of the Second Battalion, who they said at that time was still alive. I didn't see that myself, but this is what they had told me

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later on.

I continued operating into the evening, at which time I went back to the quarters of Engine 24 just to freshen up. I stayed there maybe an hour, hour and a half, regrouped with a bunch of other guys, then we went back and I worked through the night, searching voids, and operating with some of my members. We actually had them operating a hose line now. That was on the south tower.

We were there until the day, sometime the next day. I don't remember exactly what time. Maybe around noon. We went back to quarters. Then that's when we went on the 24 hour, 24 hour off, 24 hour on. That's about all I can recall now.

Q. Okay, just a couple of things. When you say you were at, you saw, Engine 34. Where were they located?

A. I'm pretty sure it was the apparatus, what was left. It was crushed, it was buried. It was on West Street. I wasn't sure if it was Engine 34, but Fireman Wiener said it was Engine 34. There were two firefighters trapped, I helped remove one. He was dead. I don't know who it was. He was pretty mangled.

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The other one, they just didn't get him out at that time. I ended up operating -- this actually ended going from Engine 34 to the apparatus of Ladder 105, because they believed there were members trapped under that. I worked there for a while. So I wasn't present when they got the second body out.

Q. 105 is also on West Street?

A. Yes.

Q. South of that foot bridge?

A. Yes.

Q. Steve Geraghty you mentioned, where is he from?

A. Well I know him from working in Brooklyn. He is a Captain, I believe. He is not a Captain of 111. I don't know where he was assigned at that time.

BATTALION CHIEF KEMLY: Okay, if you have nothing, else that concludes the interview. Thank you.