

COMMISSION SENSITIVE

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Interview of Joseph Morris, Chief of Port Authority Police

Date: Monday, November 10, 2003

Location: Port Authority Offices at Holland Tunnel Tech Center

Prepared by: Sam Caspersen

Team Number: 8

Participants – non-Commission: Joseph Morris, Chief of Port Authority Force; James Begley, Port Authority, Deputy General Counsel

Participants – Commission: Sam Caspersen and George Delegrosso (“Staff”)

The interview began with Staff first thanking Morris for taking the time to discuss these difficult subjects, and Staff then gave a brief overview of the Commission.

Background

Joseph Morris joined the PAPD in 1972 as a cop and worked both the Lincoln Tunnel and Path commands. He was promoted to Sgt. in 1982 and worked Path, Bus Terminal and marine terminal Commands. He was promoted to Lt. in 1987 and worked at Lincoln Tunnel and then at HDQs as absentee officer. During his 3 years as absentee officer he reduced the average from 21 annual absences to 10 per officer. At the very end of his time as Lt. he was HQS' liaison to the WTC bombing site and in charge of the day tour for 6 weeks following the bombing when there were initially 120 and then 70 PAPD police on duty (as opposed to normal day tour of 7 pre-bombing and after WTC fully recovered from bombing). He was promoted to Captain in 1993 and worked the Holland Tunnel and Bus terminal and then was put in charge of Special Investigations (Internal Affairs), then became Captain in charge of Detectives. He was promoted to Deputy Inspector in 1997 and was in charge of labor relations. The position of Deputy Inspector was collapsed into Inspector in 1998. In 1999 he gained Command of the Western Zone, which included Holland, WTC, and Newark Marine Terminal, and also was in charge of millennium preparation (terrorism concerns). At the beginning of 2001 he gained command of LaGuardia Airport. He became Chief of Department on September 26, 2001, and he currently holds that position.

'93 Bombing

Morris was in Jersey City when bomb exploded. He zipped through Holland Tunnel with Chief Nachstien and Deputy Inspector Daniel Mihnevich. Nachstien was Chief of Operations at that time, but there was no Chief of Police; so he essentially filled that role. The three of them arrived approx. 22-24 minutes after the explosion and went to FDNY command post on West St. by VIP Drive. Morris was directed to walk around scene and do appraisal of complex and of the actual bombing zone/hole. From Morris' days in the Path command, he was very familiar with the WTC's basement levels. The mobile command bus had been up at the GW Bridge and responded to West and Albany, which became the PAPD command post, although representation remained at the FDNY post further south. Captain Marella was PAPD WTC commanding officer at the time. Morris used his radio on a very limited basis, because "You don't focus on radios in the middle of a crisis." He recalls a good number of people using Channel Able that day. Morris states that he had little interaction that day with FDNY, NYPD, or PA civilians. He confirms that FDNY was in charge, without question, "until it was confirmed that fires all out and evacuation 100% complete at about 10 AM the next morning. He said evacuation was "slow but orderly" and that the ambulances were well organized, lined up single file like taxis at an airport, to pick up injured. Morris thinks OEM deserves credit for this. Morris thinks there were about a 1,000 injuries that day – most being dust or smoke inhalation.

After the bombing Morris was the liaison to the WTC site, in command of the day tour, which had 120 officers immediately following the attack, down to 70 or so 6 weeks later, before the complex re-opened. During this period NYPD assumed responsibility for patrolling outside, and PAPD focused on internal space in the WTC complex.

Post '93 Bombing

We then asked Morris lessons learned and applied as a result of the '93 bombing, and he responded by saying that the PA spent a lot of \$ on building improvements at the WTC. He did state that training on elevators increased substantially, with ESU officers repelling down all 110 stories. ESU training in general was increased. ESU was job wide for Path Command, one ESU always on duty on day and afternoon tour at WTC, and as of 2001 a cadre at JFK and Kennedy. In January of 2000 18 officers in the WTC Command were given advanced WMD training, and all officers received preliminary WMD training. Morris noted that after the Sarin attacks in Tokyo subway system [1996?], the PAPD was first U.S. police department to do gas training. Everyone in the Western Command had gas masks in time for the millennium attacks. He mentioned a major drill with FDNY at Holland Tunnel in 2000.

Morris was rather vague in discussing SOPs and any changes made post '93 bombing. There did not appear to be any changes made to dispatch or mobilization SOPs. As for incident command, the PAPD was given training by NJ State Police. See also binder from Begley. Morris indicated that the PAPD believed more in general guidelines than detailed SOPs. As for mobilization, he said Central Police Desk ("CDP") would tell a

Command to mobilize to command post. Morris indicated that much of this was the traditional practice, but not memorialized in written SOPs. He was vague about dispatch SOPs, stating that there were guidelines/

September 11

Morris was in his office at LGA when someone shouted from outside the office, "A plane has hit the World Trade Center!" Morris didn't wait for a mobilization order, instead mobilizing everyone he could from LGA while still leaving adequate coverage at the airport, which still open to the public at this moment. A total force, including cops, detectives, some of whom in their bunker gear to respond to aviation fires, congregate, and caravan with 6 police cars following an ESU truck. While on the BQE he can see both buildings on fire in a big, big way. Morris attempts to contact CPD on Able, but can't get through. (Morris later learns that Able depended on antenna on 5 which knocked out when Flight 11 hit 1.) As they enter the Williamsburg bridge with a very good view of the on fire WTC towers, Morris knows the situation is much more serious than 1993. "Those buildings are cooking." They drive towards Vesey Street, which is covered in debris and park across from Barclay Street ramp (at West Broadway Street). Morris and the other men from the LGA Command put on their bunker gear and make their way to the PAPD Mobile Command Bus, which on West St. about 15 yards north of Vesey, facing south. In this area Morris sees approximately 40 PAPD. There also are a significant number of NYPD, FDNY and FDNY apparatus. Looking down West Street, towards the plaza, Morris sees a "killing field" of falling bodies. Joe Dunn of NYPD approaches and asks if Morris is highest ranking PAPD on scene, and Morris responds in affirmative. Dunn then asks for confirmation that all PA bridges and tunnels closed. Morris has this confirmed via hard line on command bus calling CPD. Dunn leaves upon receiving confirmation. Morris cannot communicate on Able; so only can communicate on LGA frequency. Neither he nor Command Bus can communicate with WTC Command [confirm this]. Morris then goes about breaking the PAPD into groups of 3-4, each group with a commanding officer and orders them to stay put while he evaluates, before putting his men into harm's way. Part of Morris' caution results from the fact that he sees very few civilians coming up West St., leading him to question how many civilians are left at the scene to rescue. Morris then decides to take Lt. Seplevita and walk to the command post in Tower 1 in order to evaluate the incident. Morris and Seplevita are under the foot bridge by Custom House when 2 collapses. Morris shouts, "Fuck! Run!" Morris sprints the 70 yards to the Command Bus and jumps in. They closed the door as the dust/debris cloud approaches, but then there are people knocking on the door. So they open the door and let in Chief Ollie and 2 NYPD types, all of whom look "like snowmen." Once things settle down after the collapse, Morris exits bus and goes to FDNY rescue truck on south side of West Street where he retrieves an oxygen tank for Ollie, who is need of it. Some of Morris' men (Kennedy and O'Candy") are trying to get the bus started. Morris goes to the Verizon building on West St. (again, a bit north of Vesey) in order to determine whether this would be a good staging location for PAPD. But Morris finds that the building is a wreck. When Morris goes back outside, he is approached by Captain Whitaker who urgently tells him that they area is not safe, because tower 1 is coming down. Morris, along with 2 PA civilian employees

(General Counsel Jeff Green and Chris Ward) then jump into the command bus. Morris learns that Kennedy and O'Candy were "cool enough customers" to clean the filters of the command bus, get it started and reverse it a few blocks north as tower 1 collapses. More people get into bus, and Morris throws garbage cans out of rear in order to make room. Eventually get the bus up to Chambers Street, and then the command post at Manhattan Community College Gymnasium is set up. On the order of Chief Hall at about noon Morris walks back down to West and Vesey in order to see NYPD command post. Morris had tried to talk Hall out of this order, because he didn't think there would be any command post down there anymore, and he was proven correct. Morris then went to 1 Police Plaza, which the NYPD now was using as its incident command post. Morris saw that there already were two PAPD detectives (Al Geshay and LeClair) present whom he trusted to represent the PAPD. Morris returns to gymnasium command post and gets involved in very emotionally difficult job of head count, by asking everyone to break down into their commands. Morris makes the difficult and unpopular decision not to allow any PAPD types back to ground zero for the time being [see Barry Pikaard interview for confirmation that this order very much upset PA cops who wanted to search for missing colleagues].

Post 9/11 –

Morris says that because of security demands the PAPD has not been able to do nearly as much drilling or training as he would have liked. However, in November of '03 did a major WMD drill at Port Newark, along with Homeland Security and Coast Guard.

As for lessons learned, Morris said that in the future, when a major incident is occurring, first responders need to have a military mentality of "knowing what is on an enemy occupied island before sending troops to storm the beach." So Morris believes that a staging area should be a good deal removed from an actual incident.