

ONE DAY IN SEPTEMBER:

An Eyewitness Account

By Gary Hanley

0848 hours: "ESU lieutenant to Central! A plane just hit the World Trade Center Tower One!"

And so it begins, the deadliest day in the history of American law enforcement. Tuesday, September 11, 2001 in New York City began as a splendid late summer day with a promised high temperature in the mid 70s, no humidity and a crystal clear, azure blue sky.

Before 0848 hours the greatest city in the world went about its daily business. Commuters rode their trains and buses, while motorists moved along in moderate traffic. School children began their classes while office workers greeted each other and prepared their coffee. This was a day to be savored, a perfect day in the Big Apple.

For those workers in the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan, no one knew they were about to embark on a trip directly into Dante's Inferno. The World Trade Center was completed in 1974, a marvel in engineering. The intent of the buildings was to house international commerce in New York City all in one place. This idea actually came from the medieval marketplace. It never quite worked out that way, but instead became an international financial center.

The World Trade Center was in reality made up of seven buildings, the most prominent being the 110-story, 1,360-foot Twin Towers. Each floor in a tower covered an acre of space. Twelve million square feet of floor space was available to the 325 companies occupying the site. The towers weighed 1.5 million tons and contained 71 escalators and 254 elevators. There were 600,000 square feet of glass in the 43,600 windows.

The World Trade Center was in fact a city within a city, housing approximately 50,000 people a day with millions of visitors a year, 100,000 a day. The center had its own subway station and PATH commuter trains. The sublevels housed Manhattan's largest indoor shopping mall.

Out in Queens that morning, at Emergency Service Squad (ESS) 10, Police

Officers (PO) Steve Stefankos and Rich Winwood were still in quarters. POs Tom Langone and Paul Talty had just left to go on patrol, as had Sgt. Paul Hargrove. Up in the Bronx, POs Dave Brink and Mike Garcia of ESS 3 were checking their scuba gear. There is an old saying in the NYPD: "When a citizen needs help, he calls a cop; when a cop needs help, he calls Emergency Service." The men and women of ESU are an elite team of the New York City Police Department and, in essence, the city's last resort in time of crisis. They are SWAT operators capable of overcoming virtually any tactical situation; they are emergency medical technicians, who can administer life-saving treatment to the victims of any and all disasters; and they are craftsmen, who can rescue trapped survivors from overturned vehicles or from collapsed buildings with remarkable speed and resourcefulness. They are the best of the best that the city has to protect its citizens – and its cops. Their motto, "Any time, any where, any place." Of the 40,000 police officers in the New York City Police Department, 380 are assigned to Emergency Service.

A LIEUTENANT'S STORY

I am a lieutenant in the City of Yonkers Police Department Emergency Service Unit. Yonkers, a city of 200,000 people, borders NYC to the north. I was off duty and at home when I flicked on the TV at 0850 to have noise in the house while I did some chores. I froze in my tracks as I watched Katie Couric saying a small plane had accidentally collided with the World Trade Center. I said to myself, "bullsh—t." That was no small plane and certainly no accident. Just then, the second tower erupted into flames and I knew the world had just changed. I called my wife, and told her what was happening, that I was going to work and had no idea when I would be home. As I sped towards my office, I joined a convoy of other police officers and firefighters hurtling towards the city. News radio was announcing a mobilization of all NYC police officers and firefighters.

As Dave Brink and Mike Garcia crossed over from the Bronx into Manhattan on the Westside Highway, lights flashing and sirens screaming, they could see the smoke pouring into the sky. Brink said, "Looks like we'll get some work today!" The highway was at a standstill so they had to maneuver the heavy ESU vehicle around hundreds of shocked motorists. Meanwhile, Stefanakos and Winwood came across the East River from Queens into Manhattan with light traffic and made good time.

0903 Hours

Brink and Garcia arrived at the corner of West Street and Vesey Street (north and west) just as the second plane hit. They heard a "huge boom" and saw the flames explode from the building. They opened the storage bins on the sides of their truck and grabbed their Scott packs (self contained breathing apparatus), rescue harnesses and ropes as well as their forcible entry tools. They teamed up with POs Rich Hartigan, Bob Steinmann, Steve Lanoce and Evan Schwerner from ESS 4, also in the Bronx. They figured their assignment would be to force open doors in stairwells and elevators. They put on their rescue helmets, threw their air bottles on their backs and made their way towards Building 1, the North Tower.

Sections of the building façade and airplane parts were falling all around them. They had to run towards the towers looking up to watch for falling debris to avoid being crushed. Then they saw the people falling. They could see the people in the windows, trapped above the fire floors, waving cloths, hanging on, leaping. Some people were holding hands; some were on fire as they plummeted toward the earth. These people disintegrated when they hit the ground. The officers, who are all veteran, qualified rescue workers, felt totally helpless as they watched this horror. The team wanted to get to Tower 1 by way of the underground mall but they were forced back by crowds and a security guard telling them not to go through that way.



Lt. Gary Hanley giving orders. Photo: Jim Murphy, YDP

Meanwhile, POs Stefanakos and Winwood arrived at Church Street and Vesey Street just north and east of the towers moments after the second plane hit. On their way across the city, they did not know if it was an accident or an attack, so they began planning for both. When the second plane hit, their worst fears were confirmed. They met with Sgt. John Coughlin, POs Steve Driscoll, Brian McDonnell and Joe McCormack from ESS 4. Sgt. Coughlin ordered McCormack to run back to the truck and get his rappel harness for him, while he and the other ESS 4 men moved towards Tower 2, the South Tower.

At West and Vesey the team encountered Mayor Rudolph Guiliani and Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik. The Commissioner stopped Sgt. Coughlin, shook his hand, slapped him on the back and said, "Be careful Sarge." Two years previously, Sgt. Coughlin had saved the life of Commissioner Kerik's infant daughter. The child was choking to death and Sgt. Coughlin cleared the child's airway.

Sgt. Coughlin's order saved Joe McCormack's life, as Coughlin, Driscoll and McDonnell all died when the towers collapsed.

1000 Hours

Stefanakos, Winwood, Pete Appice and Sgt. Hargrove were designated Team 6 and sent to meet the Aviation Unit at

Chambers Street and West Street. They were told they will attempt to rope onto the top of the towers above the fire floors. As the men were preparing to board the helicopter, Tower 2 collapsed. They sought shelter in a construction trailer. Stefanakos relates, "The sound was intense. Like a freight train times 100, floors collaps-

ing into each other picking up speed." Then there was a huge gray cloud rushing at them and suddenly, nothing. The world was gone, zero visibility. They donned their Scott packs for air. Then they heard another plane roaring overhead. They were sure the end was coming, another wave in the attack. It turned out to be an F-18 speeding in to protect the city. POs Langone and Talty met Team 6 and then moved off towards the collapse. As they moved away, Langone said "Be safe, see you later." Langone was a nationally-recognized expert on technical rescue, building collapse, a rappel master and a veteran of the Oklahoma City bombing. He was also a contributing writer to *The Tactical Edge*. It was the last time Langone and Talty were seen alive.

I was in my office when the towers began to collapse, organizing a recall of all Yonkers ESU personnel. ESU Lt. Joe Barca was on the road with the on-duty officers handling bomb threats and securing key locations in the city. Capt. Frank Messar, commanding officer of ESU, was at Police Headquarters meeting with high-level city officials. As the buildings began to come down, I had visions of what the base of the World Trade Center looked like during the first attack in 1993. My mind's eye saw dozens of emergency vehicles and rescue workers directly beneath the 110-story buildings. I knew hundreds of them, including some good friends, were now dead. For many years NYPD has been a good neighbor, always helping when asked. It was now time to pay the piper and help out NYPD.

TEAM 5 RESPONDS

ESU Team 5 (Steinmann, Brinks, Hartigan, Lanoce, Schwerner, Garcia and Lt. John Murphy) made their way to Building 5 and moved through it to make their way towards Building 6, the U.S. Customs House. PO Steinmann remembers seeing luggage, body parts, glass and aluminum, everywhere. He even saw the nose assembly to an airplane in the street. They knew they were in danger. Hartigan said, "We are all going to make it." Steinmann had his doubts. Lanoce recalls seeing chunks of debris as "big as a small car" crashing into the plaza. They utilized the small overhang on Building 5 for some protection and ran as fast as they could towards Building 6 when it happened.



NYPD's Steve Lanoce, Rich Hartigan, Evan Schwerner, Bob Steinmann. Photo: Gary Hanley

The officers estimate they were 60 yards north of Tower 2 when it began to collapse. Dave Brink recalls hearing three explosions and then what sounded like distant thunder getting closer and closer. Bob Steinmann heard an "incredible roar, like an atomic blast," and then came the shock wave. Steve Lanoce heard "a roller coaster multiplied by 1,000 plus the roaring of a jet engine." Team 5 was knocked to the ground as day turned into night. Officer Brink recalls tightening every muscle in his body as he lay on the ground waiting for the building to impact him and thinking "This is going to suck!" In eight seconds the 1,360 feet, 110 stories of 2 World Trade Center was gone. Nothing was left except the debris pile, the flames, and smoke and horrible choking dust.

Team 5 lay in the pile gasping for air. Although they had SCBA on their backs, there had been no time to don their masks and the masks were filled with ash and dust now. Eyes, ears and mouths were all caked with the deadly debris. Dave Brink recalls placing the open end of his glove over his mouth and nose and trying to breath

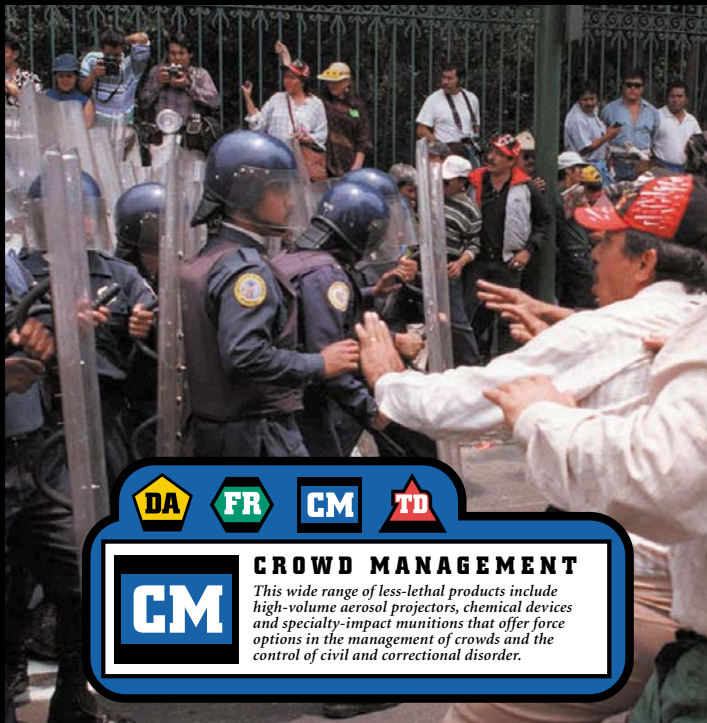
through it as a filter. Bob Steinmann buried his face in his helmet. They were in total darkness. Officer Brink turned on a flashlight and said it was like headlights in a blinding snowstorm, reflecting off each particle of dust. The team members began calling out to each other and found that they were all alive and well. However, they did think they were trapped and radioed for help. Every one of them was disoriented and dazed.

Ever so slowly the air cleared and they realized they were not trapped and began to make their way to Building 7, across Vesey Street. They broke out a window to get in but Building 7 was on fire and they found it too hot to remain there. They made the decision to pull out of the area but they saw people coming out of 1 World Trade Center as well as Building 6 now. In spite of their own fears the team decided to go back and help evacuate the civilians. They formed a human chain and began passing people down the line. They estimate they moved about 150 civilians from the area this way. Evan Schwerner repeatedly went

out into the plaza to lead confused civilians to safety. At one point he was trying to assist a heavyset woman who could go no further. Debris was falling everywhere and Schwerner thought he would be killed at any moment. Suddenly, Rich Hartigan was at his side getting the woman up, and the two carried her to safety. Schwerner stated "I was never happier to see an 'E-man' than when Rich showed up. He saved my life." Lt. John Murphy was directing operations and talking on the radio when pieces of debris fell from the building and struck him on his rescue helmet, bounced off and cut his hand almost completely in half. Steve Lanoce immediately began to assist Lt. Murphy, bandaging the injured hand and applying pressure to the brachial artery. The team decided to withdraw to the area of Building 5 while Lanoce took Lt. Murphy for help.

Officer Lanoce led his badly injured lieutenant to an ambulance but there was no room for them. They headed east towards Church Street.

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Lt. John McArdle, NYPD



Sgt. John Scrivani, NYPD



Sgt. John Flynn, PAPD

1029 Hours

Officer: The tower's coming down. Central, central, central, the building just fell, central the building just fell!

Dispatcher: The second tower is down!

Second officer: It's coming down...get away from it, get away from it! Everybody move away from the tower!

Officer: That's a 10-4. 10-13. (Help) We've got a second tower down!

Dispatcher: All non-essential personnel, move away from that collapse. Non-essential move away.

Officer: Get all the frigging cops away from the building! What's wrong? Let's go!

Dispatcher: All units remove yourselves from location at this time. We got another tower collapse.

As they regrouped, 1 World Trade Center collapsed just yards away from them. It was gone in less than 10 seconds. Once again Team 5 was buried in debris, gasping for air. Miraculously everyone survived, but all were injured. They climbed out and walked up the moonscape of West Broadway. Cars were on fire everywhere. Buildings were destroyed and damaged. There was an eerie quiet, as in a snowstorm. The silence was broken only by the crackle of the flames. Officer Lanoce and Lt. Murphy, separated from the main group, heard the roar as the building collapsed and were plunged into total darkness again. Something struck Lanoce on the helmet and cracked it leaving him dazed and confused. He and Lt. Murphy shared one Scott pack and stumbled into a building. Once inside, Lanoce passed out. He awoke sometime later in the back of an ambulance with a concussion, dislocated shoulder and twisted knee. Meanwhile the remainder of Team 5, a bloodied band of officers, made their way to Saint Peter's Church where they cleaned themselves up and prayed. They then made their way to

the hospital, their ordeal finally over.

On Sept. 12, Lanoce was back at the command post to do anything that was needed. He was assigned to assist the families of the missing officers. Officer Lanoce found this to be extremely hard emotionally. He needed to be strong for the families but could not express his own grief for the loss of so many friends and colleagues. Lt. Murphy has since undergone reconstructive surgery on his injured hand and has returned to duty with ESU.

TEAM 6 RESPONDS

Sgt. Hargrove's Team 6 was moving towards 1 World Trade Center from the south when it began to collapse. Officer Winwood related that he had to force each step out, and thought of his family with each step. His partner, Steve Stefanakos, remembers an unreal cracking sound, like a jackhammer, as floors collapsed and slammed into each other. A horrible fright invaded every man. As the building came down, it fell mostly towards the west. The team made its way up West Street in total darkness, calling out to one another. POs Stefanakos and Winwood held each other's arms to keep from becoming separated. As they moved they heard the ESU Tac channel on the radio going insane with people calling for help or checking on the welfare of fellow officers.

Team 6 heard officers on the air saying they were trapped in Building 6. Stefanakos and Winwood along with Jim McEniry pulled a ladder from an overturned fire truck to try to reach the men, but to no avail. They related climbing over mountains of debris, ash and wreckage. Fires were everywhere and random explosions occurred in the pile.

In the midst of the chaos, the Emergency Service Unit began to regroup by the Hudson River. It was here that the extent of the loss was first recognized. Stefanakos has been a

friend for many years and has always been proud of being in ESU, but now he could not find the words to express how honored he was to be able to work alongside such heroic, selfless people. He could not believe the courage he witnessed from his fellow officers who went about their jobs calmly in the face of total horror.

John Scrivani of ESS 4 was newly appointed to the rank of sergeant, off duty and at home. A phone call from his wife alerted him to the disaster. By 1035 he was on scene at Barkley Street and Broadway assisting Lt. John McArdle set up the eastside ESU command post.

Scrivani's first job was to account for all Emergency Service personnel on the scene. This became a nightmare for the sergeant, since officers were responding from the 10 Emergency Service Squads on duty, as well as auxiliary staff from ESU headquarters at Floyd Bennett Field and off duty personnel. What was a saving grace for Scrivani was the ingrained discipline of the ESU officers. All personnel, both on duty and off, reported to mobilization points and were assigned as teams. Even with this working for them it took the command staff 14 hours to account for everyone. PO Ken Winkler, a veteran officer of ESS 1 in Lower Manhattan, was highly instrumental in this critical function.

As the accounting went on, Sgt. Scrivani was sent out with a team to recover the numerous ESU vehicles, which were now damaged or had their crews among the missing. Firefighters, civilians and other police officers, to get to the much needed rescue equipment, were breaking into many of the vehicles. Sgt. Scrivani got a crash course in how to hot-wire a car and soon recovered three large ESU trucks, one of which was on fire, and eight of the smaller rescue trucks, two of which were on fire.

The need for a large command post became apparent and the temporary post was moved to Stuyvesant High School. Hundreds of ESU officers from NYPD, neighboring departments, off duty and even retired policemen were reporting to the command post for assignment. Poor or nonexistent communications seemed to him to be the biggest obstacle to overcome.

I had to coax Sgt. Scrivani to tell me about his part in what may be the most dramatic rescue of the entire incident. Lord knows there were precious few rescues due to the extent of the destruction. Sgt. Scrivani was notified by a firefighter that some Port

Authority police officers had been located trapped near Building 5. The sergeant, with officers Scott Strauss and Pat McGee of ESS 1, moved as quickly as they could over the debris to the site. Twenty feet deep in a hole they found a U.S. Marine. The Marine stated he could hear the officers deep under the rubble. The rescuers had to crawl through a narrow shaft for 10 feet, hang a turn and continue down another 10 feet. Deep in the crushed debris they also found Police Officer Jimeno of the Port Authority Police Department. He was on his back with a Scott pack strapped to him. He was badly injured and trapped by heavy rubble and rebar. He had been there for over 12 hours. It was too tight for the rescuers to wear their own air packs and they had to strip most of their gear, including their rescue harnesses, to reach the officer. Officers Strauss and McGee had to dig with only their hands to begin the rescue.

To add to the complexity of the rescue attempt, fires still raged nearby and deep within "The Pile." Smoke and dust hindered their efforts and restricted their breathing. Sgt. Scrivani related that it was so hot the soles of his boots melted and his helmet

began to melt as he rested his head against a huge mass of collapsed concrete. It took over an hour to get some useful tools to the site. Working in almost total darkness, the officers cut through rebar. Trauma surgeons were brought in to perform a field amputation if it became the only way to save the officer. An airbag, normally used to lift trains or cars, was brought in to lift the mass of concrete from Officer Jimeno's legs. Three hours after the ESU officers got to Jimeno, he was free. Sgt. Scrivani and his men were physically and emotionally spent. They wanted to continue to dig as Port Authority Sgt. John McLoughlin was located alive behind Jimeno. They just could not continue; the toll on their bodies was too much. They were all sent to the hospital for much needed treatment as other officers stepped up to continue the rescue.

Eight hours later, Sgt. McLoughlin was freed from his concrete prison. He was the last man taken out alive from "The Pile."

After a brief stay at the hospital, the dirt-covered Sgt. Scrivani and his men made their way back to the command post for reassignment.

MIDNIGHT ON THE PILE

Lt. Owen McCaffery normally works from 2200 to 0630. He did so on Sept. 11. When he arrived at home he went to bed but was awakened shortly afterwards by the ringing of his phone. Alerted to the first strike, he got up and started driving back to work. He got behind a speeding police car and used it as an escort. He arrived at the World Trade Center five minutes after the collapse of the second tower. At the mobilization point, he organized 10 to 15 ESU officers and made his way towards the Vista Hotel, Building 3 of the complex, which stood between the Twin Towers. However, the fires were so intense they were forced to withdraw. The officers found several fire trucks buried in the tons of debris and broke into them for equipment. They cut the trucks apart looking for trapped firefighters but found no one.

Lt. McCaffery worked at The Pile for the remainder of the day and acted as the on-scene supervisor during the rescue of Port Authority officers Jimeno and McLoughlin. For the next three weeks "Midnight Owen" supervised the 1900-0700 tour of duty in The Pile. He estimates that crews under his direc-

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U.S. Customs House, Vesey and West Streets. Photo: William Howell, YPD

tion recovered between 50 and 60 victims, including six NYPD officers.

McCaffery more recently worked half his time at the Trade Center and half supervising the midnight ESU patrol force. During his time on the site he stressed safety precautions to his men. He made sure all Haz-Mat precautions were made. Small but important rules needed enforcement, such as no eating near The Pile, wearing filter masks and washing hands. He is very proud that no officer was seriously injured during any of his tours. Lt. McCaffrey also credits technology, training and animals for making it safer for officers. The lieutenant routinely employed search and rescue dogs, drop cameras and listening devices to search areas that appeared too dangerous to enter.

PORT AUTHORITY HEROES

Port Authority Sgt. John Flynn was on his way to work after running some family errands and chatting with his best friend and partner, Gregg Froehner, on the phone. A cell phone call from his wife told him of the crash. Sgt. Flynn rushed to Jersey City, N.J. to retrieve his marked unit. Froehner had already departed for the World Trade Center.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Police Department is responsible for the security of the World Trade Center, as well as the bridges and tunnels leading into NYC. They also police New York's LaGuardia and Kennedy airports. The Port Authority has 1,300 officers to accomplish this mission.

Sgt. Flynn was in the Holland Tunnel when the second plane struck. At the Port Authority ESU mobilization point at Vesey Street and West Street, he met with Capt. Bob Sbarra (now promoted to Inspector). Inspector Joe Morris, a no-nonsense guy, had ordered that no one was to enter the buildings until they were assigned to squads for accountability. They organized into teams and were assigned specific floors that they would be responsible for searching.

As they moved out towards the site, Tower 2 collapsed. A huge wall of smoke and debris rushed towards Sgt. Flynn. He dove to the ground not knowing what had happened. He grabbed a helmet and put his face into it using the small pocket of air to breathe. He lay in the middle of West Street praying as debris fell on him. Not realizing that the entire tower had collapsed, he feared being run over by a car. He reached out and found a fire hose and began to crawl along the hose. The world around him was pitch black. He crawled until he hit the fire hydrant. He then followed another hose to its nozzle and began to spray the water to clear the air. As he sprayed the air began to clear to the point that he could see shadows.

He climbed over mounds of debris until he reached West Street and Chambers Street. Another roar alerted him to another debris cloud as the second tower collapsed. He crawled under an emergency truck but decided the cab might be easier to breathe in. He climbed into the cab, closed the windows and air vents. Three more officers rushed up and

wedged themselves into the cab with him as the cloud overwhelmed them. Sitting there, they slowly came to realize that the towers had collapsed but had a hard time coming to terms with the scale of the disaster.

When they were able, the Port Authority officers continued to move north to the Borough of Manhattan Community College. They broke out the windows to get in and here they established a command post. The Port Authority Police are well trained in weapons of mass destruction and incident command. Knowing they were under attack, they set a security perimeter and swept the building with bomb dogs searching for secondary devices. It was here they began to gather information and account for their personnel.

Sgt. Flynn headed back towards the World Trade Center. Huge clouds of smoke and dust obscured all visibility. He could hear numerous rounds going off as fires reached the ammunition stored by several federal agencies beneath the towers. As he approached Vesey and Church streets he was jarred by the destruction. He related that there was no activity. Nothing moved in the moonscape. There were no injured. There was just no one. He stood there staring in shock.

As he moved through the debris field, he saw a holster in the rubble. Digging into the pile of concrete and steel with his hands he recovered the body of Port Authority Officer George Howard. He was the first Port Authority officer recovered. President George Bush now carries Howard's shield with him to remind him of the awful events of that day in September.

At about 2000 hours, a report came in that some Port Authority officers were located in The Pile. Sgt. Flynn and dozens of others formed a line to pass equipment up to the officers working to free PO Jimeno and Sgt. McLoughlin. After many hours, PO Jimeno, secured to a backboard, was passed man to man down the long line to safety. As with Sgt. Scrivani, Flynn wanted desperately to recover Sgt. McLoughlin but exhaustion overcame him. He could not continue to function. He went to sleep on the floor of the Brook's Brothers Clothing store opposite the World Trade Center.

Recovered with Sgt. McLoughlin and Officer Jimeno was the body of Port Authority Officer Dom Pezzulo. Sgt. Flynn's best friend and partner Gregg Froehner was also killed at West and Vesey streets, just yards from where Sgt. Flynn lay in the street when



ESU officer in street. Photo: NYPD

the first tower collapsed.

Sgt. Flynn also recalls PO Dave Lim. PO Lim is a Port Authority K-9 officer. When the planes struck, Lim left his K-9, Sirius, secured in his office in the lower levels of the tower. In a true miracle, Lim survived the collapse of the tower — he was inside the tower when it came down, and dug his way to freedom. His partner died. Sirius, who wore a police shield on his collar, was recovered from the wreckage on Jan. 24, 2002. His body was covered in an American flag as Lim and his brother officers carried him out. Dozens of officers stood at attention and saluted their fallen comrade.

Thirty-seven Port Authority officers died when the towers crumbled, more officers at one scene than any other department in the history of the United States.

TAKING COMMAND

Lt. John McArdle was on what is known in the NYPD as terminal leave, since July. He was using up his acquired time waiting for his retirement to take effect. He was working on his suburban home when the phone calls started at about 0850. He watched the TV in stunned disbelief as the second plane struck the south tower. He put on his old uniform, got in his car and sped back to the city he has served for many years. Back at ESU headquarters at Floyd Bennett Field, he broke into a locker and retrieved his sidearm.

Getting into a police car he sped to Lower Manhattan to the ESU mobilization point and called for the ESU squads to respond to him. He felt the first thing to do was to account for the personnel on scene. Police officers started to stumble in, most with some type of injury or in shock and all covered in gray dust. He ordered a triage center established and began to find out who was missing.

As more and more ESU officers arrived from elsewhere in the city as well as from home, the decision was made to move to Stuyvesant High School and re-establish a command post. Many of the officers and supervisors who were caught in the collapse of the towers were in shock. Lt. McArdle, a forceful person to say the least, began to assume a command presence and task out various assignments. They needed to establish an Incident Command System; search and rescue teams needed forming and dispatching. Logistics needed to be addressed (equipment, vehicles, tools) and a command post group put in place to handle communications, account for personnel and call hospitals.

With so many officers injured and missing, emotions were running high. Most if not all of the officers reporting to the command post wanted to get to The Pile to begin digging. Lt. McArdle related to me that he had to place his emotions aside and make hard decisions for the benefit of all.

Order and discipline needed to be brought to the chaos and only strong leadership would accomplish that. He reached out to his veteran officers and supervisors and used them to pull things together.

Moving back and forth between the CP and The Pile, he made his presence felt everywhere. As the night wore on, plans needed to be made for relief of officers on scene. A schedule of 12-hour shifts was established, people were sent home to rest and others were assigned back to their home commands. In spite of the disaster, the city still needed to be policed on a day-to-day basis. The families of missing officers needed support. A million details needed to be addressed.

John McArdle stayed at the World Trade Center for three and a half weeks before he went home for one night to see his wife and three daughters. It seemed to me, that no matter what time of the day or night I went into the command post, Lt. McArdle was there, organizing, planning, yelling or cajoling. A month into the incident Lt. McArdle found the time to get to 1 Police Plaza (HQ) and get officially reinstated into the NYPD. He informed his wife, a federal agent, that he would remain in ESU until this job is done. I have no doubts.

YONKERS ESU ARRIVES

The Yonkers Police Emergency Service Unit arrived on scene at about 1430 hours. As we sped down an empty Westside Highway onto West Street we could see the smoke rising hundreds of feet into the air. As we rushed southwards, sirens wailing, we passed dozens of dust-covered people walking north towards their homes. They reminded us of refugees from WWII documentaries. We flew past at least 100 ambulances lined in a staging area on West Street. We were directed to report to the ESU command post, which had been established in the Stuyvesant High School Theater.

The building had no power and no running water. A generator-driven set of lamps provided light. The unit was immediately put to work running phone lines into the building. It was here I ran into my friend, Bob Steinmann. His uniform was a mess and his left arm was in a sling. He threw his good arm around me and we just held each other. With tears in his eyes, he began the litany of the missing, Coughlin, Driscoll, Langone, Joe Viggiano, Vinny Danz, Mike Curtin. He couldn't finish the list and I didn't want to hear any more. Bob was not supposed to be



NYPD and YPD rally after leaving The Pile. Photo: Jim Murphy, YPD

there, he was listed as being in the hospital. He just could not stay there knowing there was work to do, so he walked all the way back to the command post. He was soon captured and ordered home by his supervisors. Shortly thereafter he was back to work assisting the families of the missing officers.

At about 1700 hours we were assigned to evacuate a senior citizens' facility close to the disaster site. At 1720 hours as we loaded the elderly people into buses, Building 7 collapsed behind us. We could do nothing but hunker down and let the giant gray cloud of debris pass over us. It was like watching a tidal wave coming closer and closer with nowhere to hide. By the grace of God no one was injured, and the seniors were soon speeding to safety. As I walked back towards Stuyvesant, a rabbi stopped me, put his arms around me and asked me if I was OK. He then blessed me and walked with me a little while. I remember wondering, why is he concerned about me? After all I'm just here to help.

We returned to the command post to await a new assignment. I watched as groups of ESU officers wearing rescue harnesses and helmets entered the theater and collapsed into chairs, exhausted from their grief and labors. Covered in the awful gray dust they looked like ghosts, their red eyes staring at nothing. Soon they would gather up their gear, grab a bottle of water and return to The Pile.

The lobby of the school, empty on our arrival, was taking shape as a triage center. Dozens of doctors, nurses and EMS workers

were setting up tables, lights and operating rooms. The determination in their faces and movements was evident. They knew they could help, they knew they could save lives when the rescue workers brought the newly uncovered injured in to be treated.

As the hours passed, no one came in. Not one living soul from the collapse. You could see the horror on the faces as the realization set in that there were no injured, just thousands of dead. These medical professionals then set their task at keeping the police officers healthy. At that time, The Pile was the most dangerous place on the planet. Fires raged, debris shifted, steel beams covered in dust were like ice and the ever present rebar waited to impale anyone unlucky enough to slip. Debris still fell from damaged buildings, explosions erupted out of nowhere. Rescue workers were soon lined up being treated for various injuries. The doctors and nurses treated us like we were their own children. I cannot say enough about their tenderness and concern for our well-being.

As the night grew late we went back out to The Pile. NYC, my hometown, looked like a scene from a science fiction movie. I half expected to see Godzilla appear in the smoke. The world was gray, covered in dust, ankle deep. Debris was everywhere — hanging from trees, off the sides of buildings, from fire escapes. Shoes and clothing were lying ownerless in the streets. Paper, paper everywhere. Worst were the messages written in that damn dust. Written on the sides of destroyed fire

trucks, on walls, on overturned police cars. Messages of love and hope and prayers. Messages of hate and revenge. Lists of the dead or missing.

The noise was intense. Generators were everywhere running portable lights. Fire trucks running, and power tools ripping through the debris.

HELL ON EARTH

We wound our way around the flames, through the gray mud made by leaking fire hoses, across West Street to Carlisle Street and finally to Liberty Street, the south end of The Pile. There are no words to describe the extent of the destruction. Every American has seen the pictures on TV, in magazines and newspapers. No picture can convey the scale of the disaster. What had been 110 stories tall now stood 30 feet high. Hundreds of rescue workers had formed lines to hand-move the debris, the now famous Bucket Brigade. Everything looked surreal in the harsh lights. Smoke and dust was everywhere. We found no survivors. An estimated 50,000 people worked in the World Trade Center. They occupied thousands of desks and chairs. They filed in thousands of filing cabinets and worked on thousands of computers and phones. In all the hours and days I spent in The Pile I found one thing that was recognizable as man made, one floppy disk. That's it.

I had the opportunity to witness hell on earth. I stood in the middle of the worst event in the history of New York City. I could not begin to describe the condition of the victims we recovered. I witnessed honor and respect in the most profound way. As I stood in the wee hours of the morning, one endless night, the body of a police officer I had helped to recover was carried from the destruction. All movement except the honor guard carrying the flag-draped body stopped. All machinery shut down, silence engulfed the site. Two hundred dirty, tired police officers from many agencies stopped and stood at attention, in ranks, right hand saluting, as the body of their slain brother passed between them. It may have been the saddest moment of my life. I watched some of the hardest, iron-forged officers on the planet silently weep as the body passed to an ambulance marked Emergency Service Unit. With lights flashing the ESU ambulance slowly moved into the darkness and the site resumed its beehive activity. It was like this

for every victim recovered. It took its toll.

I also had the chance to witness kindness, hope and virtue. Images will always be in my mind of the Hasidic men who arrived with food for all. Of the young man with no legs, in his wheelchair, who continually brought water to the rescue workers. The bone-weary exhaustion of the ESU officers and the solid determination in their eyes. Kindness administered by a nurse binding a wound. Volunteers bringing all kinds of food and clothing to workers who could not leave. There were the hundreds of just plain folks who stood on West Street and cheered and waved flags as we left the site. I witnessed organization brought to a chaotic scene. And from the dust and debris, from the flames and twisted steel of New York City's epicenter, I witnessed the spirit of America rise and spread its wings. That spirit is indeed an awesome and beautiful sight to behold. I will close this account with the words of Sgt. John Flynn, "We were here, we are here and we will remain here until the job is done."

God Bless America. ■

THE FINAL TOLL

NYPD

Sgt. Michael Curtin
Sgt. John Coughlin
Sgt. Rodney Gillis
Sgt. Timothy Roy
PO John Dallara
PO Vincent Danz
PO Stephen Driscoll
PO John Leahy
PO Brian McDonnell
PO John Perry
PO Glenn Pettit
PO Paul Talty
PO Ronald Kloefer
PO Jerome Dominguez
Det. Joseph Vigiano
PO Mark Ellis
PO Robert Fazio
PO Thomas Langone
PO Moira Smith
PO Ramone Suarez
Det. Claude Richards
PO Santos Valentin
PO Walter Weaver

PORT AUTHORITY PD (PAPD)

Christopher Amoroso
Maurice Barry
Liam Callahan
Robert Cirri
Clinton Davis
Donald Foreman
Gregg Froehner
Thomas Gorman
Uhuru Houston
George Howard
Steve Huzko
Anthony Infante
Paul Jurgens
Robert Kaulfers
Paul Laszcznski
David LeMagne
John Lennon
John Levi
James Lynch
Kathy Mazza
Donald McIntyre
Walter McNeal
Fred Morrone
Joseph Navas
Alfonse Niedermeyer
James Nelson
James Pacham
Dominick Pezzulo
Bruce Reynolds
Antonio Rodrigues
Richard Rodriguez
James Romito
John Skala
Walwyn Stuart
Kenneth Tietjen
Nathaniel Webb
Michael Wholey

Det. Joe Vigiano and PO Tom Langone also lost their brothers, who were New York City Firefighters.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lt. Gary Hanley has spent 28 years with the Yonkers (NY) Police Department. He is a member of the NTOA Board of Directors and the recipient of the NTOA Award for Merit.