

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: John J. White, Assistant Fire Chief, Technical Services Division, Arlington County Fire Department

Type of event: Interview

Date: October 20, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

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Team Number: 8

Location: ACFD HQ, Arlington, VA

Participants - Non-Commission: John White

Participants - Commission: Kevin Shaeffer; Mark Bittinger

U N C L A S

1. John White's Background: 24 ½ years of professional firefighter experience, plus 8 years in the volunteer service. On 9/11 and in the following days he given three different assignments, EMS Control, chief of the Logistics Section and liaison at the JOC.

2. EMS Control: As a mass casualty incident (MCI) it was extremely difficult to stay organized and follow plans due to the fluid dynamic nature of the incident. An MCI involves approximately 6 to 12 casualties (at a minimum) and is defined as any incident that overtaxes a jurisdiction's home resources or prohibits providing ongoing services. He never got a good understanding of what was happening in the inner court of the Pentagon and other areas, with the exception of Washington Boulevard and the heliport side of the Pentagon.

Medic unit staging was on the ramps at Columbia Pike and Route 27. Requesting support was frustrating. "50% of requested assets did not make it to the staging area at the Columbia Pike and Route 27 ramps."

The 10:15 evacuation limited situation awareness, but while they were under the underpass things did get a little better organized as they were able to make plans for a follow-on effort in the interior of the Pentagon.

Some problems that were present during the Air Florida Flight 90 crash reappeared during the 9/11 response. In particular, the District of Columbia once again was operating like an island. DC assets did not want to integrate into ICS; they wanted their own command post. Working relations between DC and Northern Virginia firefighters varies based on one's rank. At the firefighter and company officer level relations are good. The problem is at the command officer and chief officer level; they did not see eye-to-eye.

The legal implications of sovereign immunity (and Good Samaritan laws) create a barrier that require political will to fix.

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On 9/11 they did not have the 800 MHz trunk system, today they do have it.

Dr. Jim Vafier, M.D. is the medical director for Alexandria and does a monthly ride-along with the Alexandria Fire Department. He arrived at the Pentagon along with the Alexandria paramedic supervisor. Dr. Vafier is a doctor who understands how fire departments respond and he was a "tremendous help." White immediately had a role for him. Dr. Susan Allen, M.D. is the Director of Public Health for Arlington County.

The Northern Virginia Regional EMS Council, Committee on Mass Casualty Response. MEDCOM was undergoing changes just prior to 9/11. Today the Inova Fairfax Hospital is the clearinghouse hospital and the next project is to connect local hospitals by a local area network versus only by phone.

2. Logistics: No logistics planning was done prior to 9/11. When a major incident occurred in Arlington County the EOC was either activated or not activated and ICS was in effect. Only a handful of incidents in Arlington County went over a 24-hour operational period. When 9/11 hit they had no frame of reference on how to handle the logistics. Chief Plaughter/Chief Schwartz issued guidance to Chief White and said, "Initially plan for 7 to 10 days." The Logistic Branch ran its operation out of an American Red Cross Winnebago for the first days, later the ARC obtained a mobile command vehicle from the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (Dulles Airport).

Captain Cooper was out. Captain Insley was on his way in. Other important people included George Barak, Arlington County's resource team leader in the EOC purchasing office. Chief White call Fairfax County Fire Chief Stinett and asked for logistical expertise. Chief Stinett sent over Captain Dean Cox, FCFD's logistics officer and by the second day Cox and his secretary had completely reorganized and filled out all required records.

In the early hours of the 9/11 attack logistical planning was paramount. Arlington County did not have a warehouse on 9/11. South Parking was designated as the staging area. Food, water and toilets were moved here.

Coordination problems existed with the US&R teams. Initially their supplies were not getting through site security. An agreement was worked out where all their supplies would go through the Logistics Branch.

Interestingly, White received a call from Captain Cooper, who reported that the FBI had emptied their warehouse at Quantico and sent it to New York City. The FBI now wanted to tap into Arlington County's logistics pipeline, which it did. So Arlington County supported the FBI for the duration of the incident.

Officials from the American Red Cross came from their national headquarters on 9/11 to determine mass feeding needs. By the second day all food problems were over.

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Post 9/11 the county now has a warehouse. The Shirlington Library has been torn down and the new warehouse will take its place at 700 South Ball Street.

Post 9/11 the ACFD's Support Services is organized into four branches: logistics; human resources; health, wellness and safety; and planning and budget. The logistic branch commander is responsible for central purchasing and central supply. In the reorganization of the Support Services Division it lost responsibility for the training academy which now is part of operations.

3. JOC: Captain White said he was "a little apprehensive about assuming the role [of working in the JOC]." He was familiar with the concept of the JOC based on chem./bio response planning and coordination with the FBI WFO. But of the 25 to 35 representatives in the JOC none were "experts." The experts were all at the incident scene not at the JOC. But Captain White was "pleasantly surprised" in the caliber of people at the JOC. The FBI ASAC at the JOC said to White, "You're in charge." White replied likewise that the ASAC was in charge in terms of the crime scene investigation.

The ACFD and FBI reached agreement and focused on a joint mission at the JOC. One area that occupied their attention immediately involved accountability of classified documents and safes inside the damage section of the Pentagon. The JOC put together a plan to collect the classified documents and safes.

Another area that the JOC handled was the reception of high-level government officials and military officers. (VIP management).

Every morning there was a briefing with Secretary of the Army Thomas White, General Keane, Maj. Gen. Jackson and other Military of the District of Washington folks. The briefing was task-organized the public affairs functions with DoD commenting on casualties, FBI commenting on crime scene investigation and ACFD commenting on the incident (firefighting and rescue operations). Arlington County's public affairs officer was Dick Bridges. Bridges was quite capable of handling the public affairs job.

The FBI was "deathly afraid that 9/11 was not over." They were still responding and hesitant to say anything. The FBI thought the other perpetrators were still out there.

4. New York City:

Captain White said the FDNY firefighters "did their job as best they could." "Whether the [radio or joint communications] systems were in place is up for debate."

"The potential of being killed is a part of the job."

The communications problem cannot be understated. The FDNY 800 MHz communication system was not as good as it should have been, so they reverted back to using the older UHF system. The 800 MHz system has many pluses. It has trunking, frequency agility, can segment communications versus frequency assignments, better clarity and multiple repeater sites for the same channel or frequency. Its negatives include poor building penetration, requires more

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repeater sites and cannot have multiple repeaters on the same frequency. Repeater sites are very expensive. Arlington County currently has four repeater sites and soon will have six. Alexandria has only two. More are needed in Arlington County because of the number of high-rise buildings. FDNY's primary repeater site was destroyed as it was on the roof of the World Trade Center.

The WTC ICP was set up in Tower 1 before the second plane hit Tower 2. Captain White believes it was their intent to move the ICP to a mobile command post.

The mindset of New Yorkers and of the first responders is that the WTC could withstand anything. They knew it was built to withstand a 777 airliner.

Most of the FDNY command staff on 9/11 was the same as in 1993 bombing. They had seen the extent of damage one of the buildings had taken in that blast.

"Convinced that those buildings were going to stand."

"The people need us."

A sense of boldness is needed on the part of first responders.

Self-dispatching at the WTC was internal to the FDNY

Self-dispatching at the Pentagon was external to the ACFD (self-dispatcher came from other jurisdictions). Steve Souder, former DC firefighter and with Arlington County's ECC on 9/11 told a DCFD point of contact to have 3 alarms standing by, which turned into calling 3 alarms.

Self-dispatching problem: first time, unexpected. Second time, not acceptable. A management problem, recognize and deal with to prevent future episodes. Planning key.

Chief Schwartz:

ASSUMPTIONS WERE PUT TO THE TEST ON 9/11

- SOME ASSUMPTIONS WERE CORRECT
- SOME ASSUMPTIONS WERE INCORRECT
- NOW WE HAVE A WHOLE NEW SET OF ASSUMPTIONS

Bottom line: 99% of the people were trying to mitigate the situation.