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Karen Byrne
June 11, 2002

Interview conducted by Mark Schoepfle
Transcribed by Lesa K. Hagel
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Harpers Ferry Center
PO Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
HFC_Archivist@nps.gov

September 11, 2001
Oral History Documentation Project
Northeast Region, National Park Service

INTERVIEWEE: Karen Byrne
Site Historian
Arlington House
(Interview No. Unlisted)

INTERVIEWED BY: Mark Schoepfle, Ph.D.
Ethnographer
Archaeology and Ethnography Program
Washington, D.C.
Gary Scott
National Capitol Region

INTERVIEW DATE: June 11, 2002

PLACE: Arlington House

PROJECT COORDINATOR: Chuck Smythe, Ph.D.
Senior Cultural Anthropologist
Boston Support Office
National Park Service
15 State Street
Boston, MA 02109

START OF TAPE

Mark Schoepfle: Yes. Please speak — okay, just start again.

Karen Byrne: I don't remember what time it was, but we report to work at 8:30, and we have about an hour before we actually open Arlington House to the public. So, those of us who were working that day, most of us were here in the office doing things to get ready for the day, and somebody said they had the radio on, and the first announcements had come over the radio that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. I believe after the second plane hit, we went into an individual's office — who had a small television, and we turned the television on, and we were watching the coverage of the events in New York. I was there, Colleen Curry, Linda Kacmarcik, and maybe someone else. We were in Malcolm Willoughby's office watching this on television.

Karen Byrne: At one point the phone rang, and the telephone call was for me, and it was our coworker, Keena Graham, who was at home. She might have actually called in and told us about the attack initially. Maybe that's the person who had told us what was going on. While I was speaking on the phone to Keena, we heard almost what sounded like maybe a minor car collision, and the building shook a little bit. So, I told her to hold on, and I needed to go see what had happened. And we looked around the building to see if, perhaps, a car had hit outside, or if something had fallen over, and we didn't see anything. And just a few moments later, the news started to come across that the Pentagon had been hit.

Karen Byrne: So, at that point we went outside, and we looked, and of course we could see the smoke, and we could hear all the sirens, and we watched, essentially, the fire at the Pentagon for a while. At the time, the senior-most person on our staff was not here; he was in a meeting up at our headquarters away from the actual site, so shortly after the plane hit the Pentagon, I called up to headquarters to find out what we should do. I think by this time the house had opened to the public, and while I was in the midst of talking to people at headquarters about what to do, we lost phone communication.

Karen Byrne: So, we closed the house, and evacuated all the visitors. I believe Keith Drews and other people were at the house, and actually took care of closing down the house, and we were told to go home. We left individually at various times. I stayed around for perhaps another hour or so, to assist with any last-minute things we needed to do to close the site, and I think I might have left around, perhaps, 11:00 o'clock or 11:30.

Karen Byrne: Getting out of the city was a real challenge, because there was so much traffic, and they had closed down so many of the roads, so leaving, it took quite a while. I live about five miles from the site, and it took, I think, over an hour to get home, because the roads were so congested. I had actually tried a couple of times to get off of Route 50 to find another way to get home, and everything, essentially, had been closed down. They were pretty much funneling everybody onto one or two major arteries, and not letting anybody go either direction on any of the secondary roads.

Karen Byrne: I went home that afternoon for a little while, and I decided later in the afternoon to go over to what used to be Arlington Hospital — it's been renamed — where they were taking some of the Pentagon victims, because I was a volunteer at the hospital, and I decided maybe they could use some extra help that day. So, I went over, and at the time I arrived, there were actually family members of Pentagon victims arriving, and asking about their family members. I volunteer, actually, on the Oncology Ward, and I went up and said perhaps I could help and free up somebody else to assist with the Pentagon victims.

Karen Byrne: And it was very bizarre. They — everything at the hospital was actually very calm, and they said thank you, but really, we're pretty well covered. And of course, later in the day and the days to follow, we would find out that there had been very few survivors — victims — to take, to take to hospitals from the Pentagon. If I remember correctly, I believe the site was closed the next day, and I didn't come to work, and when we did return to work, and resumed regular operations here, that is to have the house open to the public, we instituted some new security measures; we really went on high alert, and had lots of extra people out roving the grounds, keeping an eye on things, making sure we were very tight about not having any unsecured areas open. We kept the museum and our exhibit closed for a number of days; since we can't man those areas, we didn't want to have those open.

Karen Byrne: And relatively quickly, the way Arlington House functions, we actually returned to normal fairly soon. One of the few things that affected us, I suppose, was we were accustomed to either arriving at work or leaving from work through Fort Meyer, which of course, that was immediately closed down to the public, so we were no longer allowed to access our work site through Fort Meyer, and for quite a few days the roads that run essentially in the immediate vicinity of the Pentagon were closed, as well. So, it was quite limited, how we could come and go from work for a number of days.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. How did you come in?

- Karen Byrne: How did I come in that day?
- Mark Schoepfle: I mean, if you couldn't use Fort Meyer, did you come up through [inaudible]?
- Karen Byrne: Oh, to come into work, we would have to get onto the George Washington Parkway, and enter work through the main cemetery entrance, and then for a few days, to exit. Obviously, you couldn't drive by the Pentagon, so for a number of days — in fact, I think that went on for several — at least a couple of weeks — so that meant leaving either by Route 50, or actually going practically into Alexandria.
- Karen Byrne: In terms of how things at — as far as how our site operates — there haven't been a lot of long-lasting impacts from September 11th. As I said, we developed some new security measures that we kept in place for a while, and we try and operate by those when possible, but we really usually don't have enough staffing to have quite as much extra security in terms of having our personnel out roving the grounds, as much as we would like.
- Karen Byrne: The only real incident we've had since September 11th is a number of weeks — I believe it was quite some time after the attacks — there was a gentleman on site, and he may have been of Middle Eastern descent. I wasn't really highly involved with the incident, but apparently, he made comments to someone to the effect that the Pentagon wasn't going to be there much longer, or something along those lines, and so instantly — almost, it seemed like — there was a large presence — when this was reported in. There was a large presence of Park Police, and other law enforcement officials here, and that's really the only incident I can think of in terms of a threat, or anything perhaps somewhat related to September 11th, that's happened here since the attacks.
- Karen Byrne: In the days immediately afterward, of course, our visitation was quite low. In fact, access to the cemetery for the public was essentially — the cemetery was closed, I think, to the public on September 11th, and I think on September 12th, as well. And many people who come to the cemetery now, of course, ask, "where is the Pentagon?" and "Were you working on that day, and did you see it?" and things of that nature.
- Karen Byrne: To my knowledge, nobody on our staff saw the plane hit the Pentagon, but we believe that the instant that we experienced here, thinking that there had been a minor collision outside, or perhaps a car had hit our building, and the impact that actually shook our office building, as far as I know, that was the plane hitting the Pentagon.

- Karen Byrne: Two of us were standing out front shortly after we heard that the Pentagon had been hit, and if I remember correctly, the plane was all white, or all silver — it didn't look like an ordinary commercial plane — and two of us observed this plane fly essentially directly over our office building, which was very unusual. That's not a traditional flight pattern for National Airport. And we looked at each other, and essentially said, "what was that?"
- Mark Schoepfle: When did this happen? Just before the crash or how? When did this occur?
- Karen Byrne: I think this had happened just a very short time after we received word that a plane had hit the Pentagon, because at that point, pretty much, everybody went outside and started, of course, to look over toward the Pentagon, and it was a short time after we had heard that two of us were standing right out in front of our office here, and noticed this strange — this unusual plane fly directly over the house, and we commented what was that? It didn't look like a commercial plane, and it was not in a traditional flight path. It may have been a military plane, but unfortunately, I really don't remember, other than seeming to recall that it was white or silver or not a traditional, commercial flight.
- Mark Schoepfle: About what time did that occur? If you could give me an approximation of when that was?
- Karen Byrne: I would guess this would be, perhaps, between 10:00 and 10:30.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mhmm. Okay. You were mentioning a couple of things here of interest. All right. Now, let's see if I could backtrack here what was going on. You had gotten there early in the morning, before 8:00 o'clock, and you all were at your offices. And you, Linda, Colleen, were in the office, and then the first announcement was the World Trade Center got hit, and then you heard the announcement that another plane had hit the World Trade Center, so by that time you were in that office watching the TV together.
- Karen Byrne: Right. Now that I think back, I'm almost certain that Keena Graham, who was an employee here, but happened to be off that day, was at home watching the news, and she is the person who actually alerted us as to what was going on. We weren't listening to the radio, we didn't have the television on, and I believe she called in and told us about the attacks on the World Trade Center, and I believe by that time the second plane had already hit. So, at that point we went into Malcolm Willoughby's office and turned on the small television that he had and watched coverage of what was happening in New York for quite a while.

- Karen Byrne: And eventually, Colleen, our curator who was doing an inventory that day, she left, and it was after Colleen had left that we later learned that a plane had gone into the Pentagon, and I went over to tell Colleen and a colleague, Mary Troy, who was here helping with the inventory, to tell them that the Pentagon had been hit. And that's when, really, there started to sort of be more of a feel of chaos here at the site, particularly because, as I said, the senior-most person was not here, and so at that point, we really needed to start making decisions about what did we need to do, and trying to evacuate visitors and staff safely and quickly.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. All right. Did you evacuate staff? What did you do to evacuate staff and that kind of thing?
- Karen Byrne: When I was — when I called up to our headquarters to discuss what we should do, after I learned that the Pentagon had been hit, I was very worried, because I actually reached one of the secretaries, and obviously that was not going to be the person who was going to make the decision, and I was very concerned about the safety of visitors on the site, and I wanted to, essentially, close the house immediately. She was checking with our Deputy Superintendent as to whether we should close the house or not, and just about the time that — she couldn't find the Deputy Superintendent right at that moment — I was, I think, on the verge of saying I'm going to close the house, and it — I think she had just said — they were shouting back and forth at headquarters — and I think she had just said, "Close it," when we lost our phone communications here.
- Karen Byrne: So, at that point, we got word over to the house to close the house to evacuate visitors, and then staff, essentially, were told to leave immediately. As I said, people left individually, sort of of their own accord when they decided to go. I stayed around a little later, as did Frank Cucurullo, and I believe perhaps Keith Drews might have stayed later to take care of the last minute things of closing down the house, because we didn't know, of course, exactly when we would be returning to work, so we had to secure our buildings and things like that.
- Karen Byrne: I remember being one of the last people to leave. A number of other people had left earlier, and I do remember after the Pentagon had been hit. One of our employees, Joy Kinard, had gone over to look, and she came running across the lawn, and looked very nervous and upset, and she called someone on the telephone, and said, "Oh, my God. I've got to get out of here. I've got to get out of here." She may have been one of the first people to leave.

- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. Did the public leave pretty quickly, the people that have been looking through the house, and around the house? I mean, did they hang around?
- Karen Byrne: I would assume that people left very quickly. I stayed on this side of the site, where the office areas are to tell staff here, and to tell people that we were to leave — to close our buildings and leave the site, and the Rangers who were working in the house when it opened at 9:30, took care of closing the house. I think Keith Drews was over there, and perhaps Joy Kinard, and I'm not sure who else. They actually took care of closing the house, and evacuating visitors, and I've never really discussed with them how that transpired, but I would assume that they evacuated the house very quickly.
- Karen Byrne: And that day we actually had a new volunteer who was coming to the site to go through the initial training and signing up; his name was Jim Pearson. He had actually, I think, driven past the Pentagon after it had been hit, and he made it up to the main entrance to the cemetery and was turned away. This would be fairly early, probably by 11:00 o'clock at the latest. So, by that time, access to the cemetery was actually being denied.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. So, the cemetery was closing, and trying to get the visitors out, as well?
- Karen Byrne: Exactly. Exactly. There's a separate staff that's essentially a guard force that takes care of opening and closing the cemetery itself each day, so I would assume that their people were out, rounding up everybody that was in the cemetery and telling them that they had to essentially evacuate the area. We didn't really handle the cemetery, itself, other than visitors who would have been around, of course, in the immediate vicinity of Arlington House.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Backtracking, if you could a little bit, when you're talking about the Pentagon getting hit, there was a minor car collision sound, and you were all at this point in watching the TV, and later on somebody went out to look — who do we have here that I — that you had mentioned? — went out to take a look and saw a fire or smoke? Did I get that right?
- Karen Byrne: Yes. Again, I can't really speak to exactly what happened at the house, itself, when we realized that the Pentagon had been hit, because they would be closer and have a better view of the Pentagon from the house than we do here from the office. They may have realized it before we did.

- Karen Byrne: As I said, we were just confused; we were, of course, concerned about what was going on in New York, and I was speaking on the phone to Keena Graham when I heard it; just the building shook slightly, and it sounded like there had been some kind of small — perhaps a collision outside. I thought maybe a car had hit the building, or perhaps something had fallen over. It wasn't a gigantic sounding explosion, and I told her I needed to go see what had happened, and it was shortly after that that news started to come across that the Pentagon had been hit. A short time after that — I don't remember exactly how much time had passed, but not much — that's when reports started to come across that there had been a bomb at the State Department.
- Mark Schoepfle: Ugh.
- Karen Byrne: And that's when I think, at least for me personally, there really started to be more of a feeling of panic, was that how many things were going to be hit, and this was happening very fast. Now, we found out later, of course, that apparently, that had been a false report, but once we knew about the Pentagon — the crash at the Pentagon — and then heard that, perhaps, there were attacks going on in the city, itself, that may have been when I really started to feel a sense of panic — that we need to close the site and get visitors out of the area. And that's probably about the time that I made the phone call, and we really were not even able to complete the phone call when we lost phone communications here. And at some point, after that, Frank Cucurullo, the senior person on staff at that time, arrived from Turkey Run, and more or less took over, I assume, helping to evacuate Arlington House, itself, or the grounds around Arlington House.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. Very interesting. And all of this was occurring, probably — around what? — 11:00 o'clock or so, you figure, was it?
- Karen Byrne: I think, perhaps, a little earlier than that, yes. The house opens at 9:30, and the house had not been open for very long when — probably when the Pentagon had hit, but certainly by the time we found out about the attacks in New York. So, there probably were not — depending; I wasn't over there — there may not have been that many visitors in the house, if it had just opened. I don't know exactly at what time we knew about the Pentagon attack, and of course, would have soon after started to close the house.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. So, were there any — was there any indication from the visitors, or was there any problem with the visitors, or were they — was that pretty much — I think you were saying that you didn't really see a lot of the visitor evacuation.

- Karen Byrne: Yes. I wasn't too involved with that. I would assume there probably would have been a fair amount of panic, particularly if people from various places — I'm sure, since many people come here with cell phones, people were probably immediately getting on their cell phones, and talking to people who would have had more access to radio or television. I would assume news probably spread fairly quickly about the New York attacks, the Pentagon attack, and then probably the false report of the attack at the State Department. So, I would assume there might have been a fair amount of panic, particularly because it was disconcerting enough to live in the area and try and leave the city. And I can imagine that that must have been even worse for people who are from out of town — who are not as familiar with Washington as those of us who live here. It was very disturbing to leave the city that day, and some people obviously tried to leave using the Metro system; other people drove out.
- Karen Byrne: I drove, and it was just a very eerie feeling to be sitting out on Route 50 in just a traffic jam, not moving, because so many people were trying to leave the city on these very few arteries, and thinking that if anything else was coming, there was absolutely nothing we could do. We were just stuck out there. And I do remember — I do remember seeing Joy Kinard that morning, who I believe had been working in the house, and she was very disturbed by the attacks. After, I guess, looking at what had happened at the Pentagon, I do remember her literally racing over to the office, and getting — collecting her things — and calling somebody, and saying, "Oh, my God. I've got to get out of here!" And she left shortly after that.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. When she said, "I've got to get out of here," just getting out — getting away from here, or does she have family that might be over there, or what?
- Karen Byrne: I've never discussed it with her, but my sense of it at the time, is she just felt like she wanted to get out of the immediate area, feeling like it was not safe here, and she just needed to get out of here as quickly as possible.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. Okay. And you then went to Arlington Hospital, and generally were watching as some of the family members had been arriving there, and that you had noticed that — you'd gone over there anticipating that there'd be all sorts of need for extra help there, because of the wounded that would be coming in, and the injured?
- Karen Byrne: Right.
- Mark Schoepfle: And, essentially, it was kind of bizarre, because you said that it was pretty calm there?

- Karen Byrne: It was quite calm; none of the staff seemed at all shaken. Everybody was very calm and very professional, and the one gentleman that I remember, in particular, who had come seeking out a family member who had been at the Pentagon, was relatively calm. The few people I saw that were asking about family members who had been at the Pentagon were doing a good job of staying calm.
- Karen Byrne: When I first arrived at the hospital, I asked the volunteer ladies who work at, essentially, the lobby entrance where would be the best place to go — you know, to help out, and they rather calmly said, well, I don't really know. And I said, well, I'll go up to Oncology, since that's where I volunteer, and when I went up there, again, everything was very calm and collected, and I said, well, perhaps I could assist here, if you need to send some staff elsewhere to help out with the Pentagon victims, and they were very calm, and said they actually had plenty of help, and it was fairly slow on Oncology, and there wasn't really a whole lot to do. So, I stayed for a little while, and just assessed that there really was not a pressing need for extra help, so I thought it was best to just get out of the way and go back home.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. What did you do at home in the afternoon, when you were — I shouldn't assume afternoon. This was what? About what time?
- Karen Byrne: This probably would have been around — when I returned home from the hospital, this might have been around 4:00 o'clock — 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock — and like, I guess, most people — I live by myself — I just was glued to the television for the next few hours. I had a number of people call me to make sure I was all right, so I talked to a few people on the phone. And later, my brother, who lives in the same building that I live in, came up to make sure that I was okay, and we talked about it for a little while. And eventually he left, and I pretty much just spent the rest of the day watching the news.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mm-hmm. What happened in the days immediately afterwards? You mentioned some of that — you know that the area was closed down for a while, and that kind of thing, but tell me a little more about what the days were like afterwards.
- Karen Byrne: Well, in the days immediately following the attack, which I believe we reopened the house on September 13th, we were most concerned, of course, about trying to maintain a safe atmosphere — for the visitors in particular.

- Karen Byrne: So, I actually — at times different people here — assumed supervisory responsibilities when the senior people are not here for various reasons. And one of the days shortly following the attacks — maybe it was that weekend — I was the senior person here, and I developed a list of procedures that we were going to follow, while I was in charge, to make sure that we could, essentially, maintain the safest environment possible. That meant closing down areas that somebody could leave a package — a bomb or something in. We decided not to have those areas open, because we didn't want to take the risk. We tried to have, as often as possible, people out sort of patrolling the area, looking for anything suspicious, checking even — you know, trash cans, watching for anything unusual, and we did that for a number of days.
- Karen Byrne: At some point, and I don't remember exactly when, we decided to reopen our museum and our exhibit area. We became much more vigilant about what people could actually bring into Arlington House, itself. In the past, whatever people brought, essentially, they could bring in, so we of course, instituted no large backpacks; no suitcases, things of that nature, and we didn't allow anybody to leave any of their articles unattended anywhere. We made people with strollers take everything out, and carry their belongings into the house, and that is a policy that we pretty much still observe — not allowing anybody to leave any kind of belongings unattended.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mhmm. So, if they have a big backpack, you allow them to — have them put it somewhere, or do they bring it through the house?
- Karen Byrne: In the past, traditionally, what we had done when we would see people who are obviously backpacking, or business people who sometimes had suitcases and things with them, they would often say, you know, "it's heavy, and I don't want to — can I just leave it out here on the porch?" And we would say yes, and we've really not allowed anybody to do that since September 11th.
- Karen Byrne: I know some sites, such as the USS Arizona Memorial out at Pearl Harbor, have actually — Park Service sites have instituted a policy of not letting visitors bring anything — you know, purses, backpacks, briefcases — they're not allowed to bring those kind of things actually into the park. We never adopted that kind of policy here. It was just more a matter of people had to keep their belongings with them at all times, and just making sure we kept a very close eye on people who did have any kind of large package or object with them, and then for a while, closing areas where somebody could have left a bomb or something of that nature.

- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. Another question of — and this sort of interests me — what would people have normally been bringing in here? I mean, I'm a little bit surprised that somebody can manipulate, for example, a stroller — some of these baby strollers, which are fairly — at least from my experience on the Metro, are a fairly big logistical production. What would they normally have been bringing in, and how did you handle that before?
- Karen Byrne: Well, in the past — as I said, they brought in everything from, as you say, sort of large, bulky strollers to large, full backpacks. A number of people have had suitcases. Previous to September 11th, essentially, people could bring in whatever personal articles they had with them, and as I said, if it seemed to us obvious that it was some kind of traveler, who had to carry their belongings for whatever reason, we would usually be accommodating, and say, “oh yes, you can leave your suitcase here,” or “your backpack, you can set that down here.”
- Karen Byrne: We haven't allowed anybody to do that since September 11th, and the strollers — in the past, you know, it's common to see families come with small children, and the stroller is loaded up with all their souvenirs and cameras and lunch bags, and that kind of paraphernalia. And we basically instituted a policy of “it's impossible to get a stroller up to the second floor of Arlington House.”
- Mark Schoepfle: I was going to say. Yes.
- Karen Byrne: So, in the past, when people had brought strollers in, they either would leave their stroller out on the porch, or they would take the stroller in, and essentially, the stroller, and somebody to attend the stroller, would stay down on the first floor, while the other members of their party would go up to the second floor. So, after September 11th, we allowed strollers in the house, but we said — or actually, I should say we kept strollers outside — and tell people they had to remove all their personal items from the stroller and carry those things with them.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. And the same thing, say with suitcases, and that kind of thing?
- Karen Byrne: Yes.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. But essentially keeping it with them at all times —
- Karen Byrne: Exactly.
- Mark Schoepfle: — their stuff with it?
- Karen Byrne: Exactly.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yes. Did people complain, protest? Do anything like that? Or was it like a real imposition on them? Or how did they react to that?

- Karen Byrne: I don't recall anybody getting upset about any of the policies that we had. Nobody complained or objected to having to keep personal articles with them at all times. I think people were very understanding after September 11th about needing to have extra security, and just not being too — basically grant people what would have been courtesies in the past to help them out. I never encountered anybody who complained or protested.
- Mark Schoepfle: Did they do so beforehand? Or was there [inaudible]?
- Karen Byrne: Well, prior to that we — as I said, to try and accommodate people — we would let them leave these kind of articles in some kind of common area, where we could watch them, to be accommodating, and so in the past there wouldn't have really been much reason to complain.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mhmm. Okay. Well, another incident you had mentioned was that there was more — in regard to more patrolling that had been going on around the grounds — you had kept people more sharp-eyed regarding the supervisory, or just regarding supervising what was going on. And you — somebody had picked up this fellow who had said some rather offhanded remarks about the Pentagon. Could you tell me a little more about what happened there?
- Karen Byrne: Well, this was a visitor who, apparently, had come through Arlington House, and I was not working in the house at them time. It happened near the end of the day, and I went over in the afternoon to assist with closing Arlington House, and the exhibit and museum areas, and by that time the police had arrived and were interviewing him. I'm not certain — Joe Werzer, one of our staff members, might have told me about what had happened, and that was that the gentleman had said to somebody along the lines of, "Well, you see the Pentagon there? It's not going to be there much longer," something along those lines.
- Karen Byrne: And someone who overheard this remark — I don't know; I guess it was a visitor — someone was very concerned about that remark, and perhaps reported it to Joe, or to someone who summoned law enforcement. I would assume that would have been somebody on our staff, would have been approached by a visitor, and they would have called Park Police.
- Karen Byrne: I do remember that our supervisor at the time, Frank Cucurullo was annoyed that the Park Police did not really follow-up with us. We never really got a report on exactly how that all was resolved. I know, eventually, the gentleman was essentially let go, but our supervisor felt there was not really adequate communication from Park Police, as to how — how that was resolved.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. Well, that sounds interesting that this fellow was out there making these kinds of remarks; was picked up by Park Service employees, and all sorts of things going on, but you never really found out what happened on this sort of thing, other than you were just assuming — you mentioned that he was let go, or did you find he was let go later on?

Karen Byrne: If I remember correctly, by the time I was actually leaving work that day, perhaps, one of the Rangers who was at the house, told me that maybe they checked in, or overheard essentially the Park Police had, I guess, released him, or were not going to take him anywhere, detain him beyond — detain him here at Arlington House. And as I recall, when I left at the end of the day, which would have been around — somewhere in the vicinity of 5 o'clock, I think I remember looking, when I drove past the house, and he was still sitting there, and Park Policemen were still talking to him. And not — as I couldn't hear the conversation, you know, at that point they may have just been talking about — I don't know — perhaps they'd finished questioning him. I'm not really certain, because I couldn't hear the conversation, but I do remember that Park Police were still there, although some of them — there were quite a few on scene, originally, and even when I was over earlier in the afternoon helping to close down the site, some of the Park Police staff had started to leave at that point. A number of the officers were leaving, so that said to me, obviously, they feel like it's well under control, and it's not a serious threat.

Karen Byrne: But when I did leave, sometime around 5 o'clock, there were actually still some officers on the scene, and the gentleman in question was still there. And if I remember correctly, as I said, he — I don't remember him real vividly, but I do seem to remember that he did look like he might have been — you know, Middle Eastern.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. When he was free, at least, I imagine he watched what he said a little closely afterwards, if he didn't want all that attention. Just curiously, you had mentioned that you had put together some procedures for greater vigilance, and this kind of thing, do you by any chance still have a copy of that around, or was this put down on writing, or ...?

Karen Byrne: It was put in writing, and we may still have a copy of that somewhere.

Mark Schoepfle: Just curious. Okay. So, this was in the — days and the weeks immediately afterwards — right? — that we've been describing so far?

Karen Byrne: Yes.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Was there ever a point in which things kind of got back to normal, or where people sort of figured this is the way things are going to go for a while, and that kind of thing?

Karen Byrne: Well, the most obvious, lingering responses of September 11th that I can remember, of course, it seems like — for two days it seemed like the Pentagon continued to burn, and that was very disturbing. It may have been on September 13th, perhaps, that I returned to work, and of course, visitation was obviously very far down. There were very few people coming to the cemetery, or to Arlington House, and I remember just sitting on a little hillside in a direct line of sight with the Pentagon watching it burn, and just feeling like, you know, that it was amazing that the building was still burning in some areas.

Mark Schoepfle: [Inaudible]

Karen Byrne: Yes. It was still on fire. And that sort of brought home to me this feeling of — you know, you could understand why I was just so, I guess, surprised when I had gone to the hospital in the afternoon of September 11th, that there wasn't chaos; there weren't tons of ambulances bringing victims in. They really didn't need any extra help, and after — you know, 48 hours later, the Pentagon is still burning. It sort of underscored there were going to be very few people that would have needed to go to a hospital, unfortunately. So, I have very vivid memories of sitting and watching the Pentagon still burn.

Karen Byrne: And then, of course, for those of us who work and live in this area, obviously the various road closures that stayed in effect for quite some time, that dictated how you would come, and arrive at work and leave. I definitely remember that, and I can vividly remember the first time that you could actually drive. They had sort of reopened the roads around the Pentagon, and you could drive almost right past where the plane had hit, and it was for many days to drive past there and just see the devastation; it was just hard to believe it was real, even driving past it day after day after day.

Karen Byrne: And I can remember on many occasions, for weeks afterward, when I would be driving — leaving the cemetery in the evening to go home, and driving past the Pentagon, there would be scores of people down there who had — you know, parked their cars, and were getting out to take pictures, and then there's a little area, sort of a little hill, across the highway from the Pentagon, where people had set up a sort of impromptu memorial, and for weeks there were tons of — you know, of course — notes and flowers and crosses and candles, and things like that there. I guess, eventually — I don't know exactly who — but somebody more or less gathered up all those things, but they were there for quite a few weeks.

- Karen Byrne: In the first few days after the attacks, it really — there was a feeling like, I guess a lot of people felt after Pearl Harbor, that life is never going to be the same. And then I've been rather astounded, personally, how quickly in a very real sense, things have gotten back to normal. There's still obviously some law enforcement officials that they now have posted on the roads around the Pentagon that were not there before. So of course, there's some holdovers and some reminders, obviously, of September 11th that continue to this day. But in terms of how I go about my day-to-day life, I've been fairly amazed at how quickly in many ways life has returned to normal. And the first few days after the attack, it felt like it would never get back to that.
- Karen Byrne: There have been a number of different reports in the media, particularly one recently, that talked about how people sort of on the eastern seaboard, particularly the Boston to Washington corridor, how a lot of people in that area feel very unsafe, and feel like we would be the first place to be attacked again. And I guess I'm a little surprised that I just — I don't think about those things on a day-to-day basis, that — oh, we're living — particularly living in the Washington, DC area — that "oh, this is — it's not safe here, and we'll be hit again," and things of that nature. Really, where day-to-day life is concerned, for the most part, I'd say life, at least on a personal level, got back to normal astonishingly quickly.
- Karen Byrne: I do remember — I used to travel out to California a lot, so I fly regularly, and it's really never bothered me, but I do remember that the first time I had to fly after September 11th, that was very disconcerting. I was actually going out to Pearl Harbor for their sixtieth anniversary conference, and so, of course, from Washington, that was a long flight to get there, obviously, and it was — it was a really vivid reminder in early December to get out to the airport and see, you know, armed MPs at various security checkpoints in the airport. Of course, that's not something we're used to seeing, and then to make a very long flight, immediately after that — that was somewhat worrisome.
- Karen Byrne: At the time, that I went out there, it was an early morning flight, and I happened to be one of, I guess, the random passengers —
- Mark Schoepfle: Go ahead, just a second.
- Karen Byrne: Okay. I happened to be one of the random passengers that they picked for extra security checks, so they took away your carry-on or checked luggage, and then sort of went through everything that you were carrying onto the plane, and asked you a number of questions, and — you know, I didn't feel offended by that at all, but it was just a big reminder that life is very different after September 11th.

Mark Schoepfle: Hold on just a second.

END OF SIDE 1

START OF SIDE 2

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Go ahead. I'm sorry. You were mentioning, regarding the air travel and the random search.

Karen Byrne: Right. Well, the search was just — as I said, just a very obvious reminder that it's a completely different world in that regard since September 11th, and then it just was unsettling to be flying, relatively soon after September 11th. It was somewhat unnerving, but I remember at the time, lots of people were canceling any kind of travel plans that they had, whether it be for business or pleasure.

Karen Byrne: Many people were, "I'm not flying." And I didn't really feel that way. I was going out there to Pearl Harbor for the sixtieth anniversary to interview survivors of the Pearl Harbor attack, to take part in the oral history interviews that were being done, and I thought at the time, I don't care how frightening it could be to fly, or what kind of reports are going around, or how many people are canceling travel plans, you know, that's an opportunity of a lifetime, and I'm not going to let, you know, sort of a climate of fear prevent me from going, even though a lot of people did cancel very important plans, because they were afraid to fly in the weeks and months that followed September 11th. I never thought about, oh, I'm not going.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. About what time did — and if you could put your finger on a date or on the calendar — did you figure that things sort of reached a new equilibrium, or normalcy — you know, when — I know you said you were surprised about how quickly things got back to normal. About when did that occur, and what were some of the indications of it to you?

Karen Byrne: Well, it's hard to pinpoint an exact time when I would feel like this happened, but I guess certainly by — and probably earlier — certainly by Christmas time, and probably actually, sometime prior to that, it just — as I say, and I don't mean to suggest that living in the Washington area, there are some obvious changes since September 11th, but I guess I'm speaking on more of a personal level in terms of — you know, you think about how you go about your day to day life, what is — what is significantly different? I really, other than perhaps maybe using a different pattern to come to work, there really are not a whole lot of distinct changes.

- Karen Byrne: And I would say that really was the case just a month or two after the attacks. I do — I can vividly remember — and this was just — just maybe in the first two or three days after the attack had happened; I think and like a lot of other people for the first 48 hours or so, you just walked around in this fog, and you could — all you could do was watch the news and hang on every development, and I can actually remember the first time after September 11th that I felt happy about something, and that was coming out of a church, and there were these flowers planted outside that were blooming and were really beautiful, and I kind of noticed the flowers, and I thought, you know, these flowers are beautiful, and it was kind of like the first, happy, normal thought I think that I had since the attacks. I can remember that, and that would have been in the first couple of days after the attacks.
- Gary Scott: I have a question. From your viewpoint, how would you characterize the Park Service management response to that day? What steps were taken, and what steps you might concede might have been taken, or might not have been taken?
- Karen Byrne: Well, I think, at least, here at Arlington House, in particular, I think we responded very well. I mean, obviously, it sounds like we're still harkening back to things that people said about Pearl Harbor, but obviously, you know, I think you can say fairly honestly, nobody anticipated that coming, so to have really had some kind of plan in place for something that catastrophic, and that unexpected, I don't really know that that's terribly realistic, so we didn't have any kind of plan in place to deal with something of that magnitude, and I would expect that most places would not.
- Karen Byrne: I guess the worst part about what happened here, to me, that day was just feeling very — very stressed about the fact that the senior person at the time, Frank Cucurullo, was attending a meeting that morning, and I don't believe we had officially, if anybody had been left as the acting supervisor that day; if somebody was, I don't remember that, so it was very disconcerting to be here, on site, and feel like this cataclysmic thing has happened, and decisions needed to be made quickly, and yet, you know, who was going to make them.
- Mark Schoepfle: Who's in charge, then?

Karen Byrne: And after — I think it was after hearing about — obviously, when we had first learned that the Pentagon had been hit, that was sort taking up all of our attention the first few minutes after that, and then once we started to hear the false reports that there was a bomb, that this bomb had done off at the State Department, that's when to me something close to panic sort of set in, and feeling like, well, how many things are out there? How many things are going to be hit? And we need to get visitors out of this area.

Karen Byrne: So, I just took it upon myself at that point to — particularly, because we were here in the office, and we had access to radio and television, that's when I decided to call headquarters, first, and ask for guidance, and when I heard that, well, we're trying to find the Deputy Superintendent, I just really started to feel like I don't — come what may, I'm going to make the decision just to close the site down, because I don't feel it's safe to have visitors here, and that that should be our first priority is to get them out of here.

Karen Byrne: And I think I was saying to the secretary — I was sort of just saying to her, “Bonnie, I'm just going to close the site,” and about that time, that's when there was this shouting going on up there at headquarters, and she said, “Close it.” And that was like the last thing I heard before we lost phone communication. So, somebody may have been acting that day, and I just don't remember, but it's kind of made me feel like if there's one thing that, perhaps, needs to be done better, is it — even if somebody's only going to be gone for an hour to go a meeting, there should always be very clearly established who is in charge, and perhaps better — maybe some written procedures in place that may exist, and I don't know about them in terms of who has the authority, and under what circumstances to make the decision that I feel the visiting public is in jeopardy, and I'm going to close the sites on my own authority.

Karen Byrne: But once we actually had received the word that we needed to basically evacuate the area, and then for all of us to leave, I think that was handled very well. Nobody on the staff with the possible exception of Joy Kinard — I really, the people that I saw, nobody really panicked, and we did first worry about not really our own safety, but first and primarily getting the visitors out of harm's way, if that was possible at that point, and then securing the site, itself, and then each of us individually leaving. So, I think once we — the decision was made that we needed to close the site down, I think that was handled very quickly and very professionally.

Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. So, one of the main points, just looking back on this is in form of lesson learned, is that we need better written positions on who's in charge and who can make a judgment call for evacuation, is that right?

- Karen Byrne: Yes. As I say, maybe that policy exists, and I'm just not aware of it, but usually, of course, we work through a chain of command, and I had just personally reached the decision at that point where, pretty much, at the very point that I guess the Deputy Superintendent was found and had said close the site down, I just did not feel comfortable right up at that point to waiting any longer to get the official word, so I had — it was about at that time that I had said to Bonnie, "Bonnie, I'm just going to close it." And I was particularly worried after hearing about the bombing at the — the bombing that didn't happen — at the State Department —
- Mark Schoepfle: The State Department, mmhmm.
- Karen Byrne: — was feeling like we just don't know what's going to happen next, and where, and that was when I was saying to her, "Well, I'm just going to close the house." And about at that time, that's when she said to close it, so, if those procedures are not in writing, yes, I think they should be, and I think there just should be a policy that essentially — and there probably is, and I'm just not aware of it in writing somewhere, that essentially, when there's a serious even perceived threat to the visiting public that anybody really should be able to make the decision to close the site, if they honestly feel that's what's needed in the interests of public safety, and that may well be a policy that's in writing that I just don't know about.
- Karen Byrne: And it just kind of underscored to me, that there are many times when the senior-most people here are not on site for various reasons, whether they're off, or they're in meetings, or what have you, that even if it's only for an hour, it should always be very clearly established if the senior-most person is not here, who is in charge, and perhaps in writing, what — you know, technically, what kinds of rights and authorities do they have over the site, in times of some kind of severe emergency like this. And if those policies already exist, they really should be — you know, everybody should know about those, I think.
- Mark Schoepfle: It's been almost a year — well, it will be a year before we begin to really write things up. Looking back over this year — or over this year — how should the Park Service, number one, and perhaps number two, how should the nation remember what happened around here?
- Karen Byrne: Well, one of the first things I would have to say; one of my strongest impressions is that when we talk about September 11th, so many times — well, obviously the major focus has been on New York, and I do feel like, to a certain extent, the victims in the Washington area have really been sort of considered secondary, if you will, but what's far more disturbing than that is way too many times, the people who died in Pennsylvania, seem to be completely forgotten, to me.

Karen Byrne: So, many times we hear about New York, and maybe — you know, New York and Washington, but I've noticed many times people do not remember to say, "and Pennsylvania," and I think that's a real oversight. I know it's not a deliberate thing, but those people died in a way that might have been, perhaps, one of the worst parts of the tragedies, in that apparently, most of the people on the plane knew what was coming, and we can at least hope that the other people didn't. And, of course, now there are some indications that the people that died in Pennsylvania died essentially saving other people by taking over control of that plane. I guess we don't know that for certain, but if that's true, it really behooves us to remember those victims, I think, and I think too many times they're not mentioned; it's "New York and Washington."

Karen Byrne: I think whatever we do to memorialize the people, it should be everybody that died that day, and really understandably, obviously, New York had the vast majority of the victims, and that's a terrible tragedy for their city, but everybody who lost their life that day is an equal 16 victim, in my opinion, and everybody deserves, you know, equal memorialization. In terms of how we should do that specifically, I honestly don't know the answer to that.

Karen Byrne: I know that we manage — the Park Service manages the memorial in Oklahoma, and I've never been there; I know I've always felt kind of curious — well, not knowing at all how — what our real involvement at the site is in terms of day to day — you know, programs and things, what exactly is done there. I don't know, but I thought at the time, it just seems so strange to have a memorial to a great tragedy like that, and have it be a Park Service site. How can you possibly interpret that to people? And maybe we don't. I honestly don't know, but if there is some kind of formal memorial made, I guess I see it as something that really almost needs to speak for itself. There's just no way a Ranger, or anybody else for that matter, can stand up and really — you know, make some kind of meaning out of this, or interpret that to the public, so I would like to see something that — some kind of memorial, really, that just speaks for itself.

Karen Byrne: I think the best thing we can do to sort of pay tribute to those people, really, is how we go about living our lives, because I remember thinking at the time, you know, I hope if I ever have children, I can teach them how destructive hate is, because that's what — you know, brought on this horrible day, that every future generation will talk about, and we'll see written up in their history books, and to have been so close to where one of those tragedies occurred, you know, I just — I hope most of us, what we can do is say the best way we can honor the victims is to remember how destructive hate is, and also to be very grateful for what we have.

- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. Would you have another question you'd like to ask?
- Gary Scott: Karen, for the record, what is your position here at Arlington House?
- Karen Byrne: I am the Site Historian at Arlington House.
- Gary Scott: How long have you been here? I'm just curious.
- Karen Byrne: I have been here five years in January of 2002.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. Did you — have you been elsewhere in the Park Service before, or is this your first area?
- Karen Byrne: Before I came here, I had worked at Ford's Theater for three years, and I worked for a summer at Appomattox's Courthouse.
- Mark Schoepfle: Appomattox Courthouse? So, that's where you came on board, or —
- Karen Byrne: That was my first park. Yes.
- Mark Schoepfle: Oh. What got you over to Appomattox?
- Karen Byrne: I lived near there, and it was — or my parents did — and it was a great summer job during college.
- Mark Schoepfle: Oh. So, that got you interested in the Park Service or —
- Karen Byrne: It did. Interestingly enough, I had a colleague in our graduate program at Virginia Tech who worked at the park. He had actually worked there for a number of years, portraying a soldier who was at the surrender of Appomattox Courthouse in living history, so I knew someone who worked there, and he had spoken very highly of the park, and working there, and that's one of the reasons I became interested.
- Karen Byrne: I worked that summer, and was invited to come back the next summer, and I think at that point I had finished my master's work at Virginia Tech, and I was looking for more of a, obviously a permanent, full-time job, and so — I didn't want to go back to the greater Lynchburg area. So, I did not go back there that summer, and then once I relocated up to the Washington area, interestingly enough, I really — it didn't occur to me to pursue a Park Service career. I had — I'm a little ashamed to admit — looked at mostly teaching jobs, and then happened to see the next summer, an ad for summer help on the National Mall, and applied and was accepted, and that's when, happily, a short time after that, I became a permanent of the Park Service, and went to Ford's Theater almost immediately after that.
- Mark Schoepfle: Neat. So, where to from here?

- Karen Byrne: Well, at this point, I would see staying here for some time, anyway. Things are very good at Arlington House right now, ironically, and so right now, this is a very good place to be, so for the next couple of years, anyway, I would see staying here at Arlington House, and then at some point in the future, I think I would like to, perhaps, work at the National Register.
- Mark Schoepfle: Oh, neat. Do you have any other questions?
- Gary Scott: None on the record.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Are there any — these pretty much conclude my questions. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to mention?
- Karen Byrne: Hmm. I guess not. The only thing that particularly — as I've been giving the interview, the only thing that really strikes me particular is it's amazing to me that this was really just a few months ago that all of this happened, and maybe because of the shock of it happening at the time, it's just impossible to recall the exact details, but I'm really kind of amazed to be able to sit here just a few months later and say, well, I think I was talking to this person, and they told me, and I think it happened this way, or it might have been about this time. When I was out in Pearl Harbor, I was really impressed, and very frankly, just surprised — astounded — that the veterans could describe their experiences during the attack on Pearl Harbor sixty years later in remarkable detail, recalling exact names, and exact times of when things happen, and the exact sequence of events, remembering all these things sixty years later.
- Karen Byrne: And somebody said, well, to some extent some of these gentlemen, of course, have told their stories so many times, and obviously, you know, most of us have not been doing that about our experiences on September 11th, but it just strikes me at very fascinating that — to live through our generation's version of Pearl Harbor, if you will, and to already, just a few months out be — you know, not be able to recall exact, specific details about various things that happened that day, when these people, who went through something equally traumatic, it seemed, could recall it with crystal clarity, sixty years later.
- Karen Byrne: And another thing that struck me about doing the oral history interviews at Pearl Harbor, was realizing that people become emotionally very entrenched in their version of what happened, and I guess specifically by that, I'm thinking that there are still Pearl Harbor survivors that swear that a bomb went down the smokestack of the Arizona, even though it's pretty much been disproven that that happened. Well, I've come to realize that just for whatever reason, your own personal version of the truth — you really can't be shaken from that.

Karen Byrne: I don't — I guess I don't know 100 percent certain — with certainty — that the noise that we heard that day at our building — shaking — I assume was the plane going into the Pentagon. If for some reason, somebody could — you know, demonstrated that, well, it wasn't actually the plane hitting, it was a secondary explosion or something to that effect, I don't think anybody could, you know, persuade me otherwise that what we heard and felt at that moment was the plane hitting the Pentagon, and I really don't know why it's so important to feel like that's — that's the truth, and that's what happened, but I've thought about it a number of times since then, and realized I don't care what kind of scientific evidence somebody showed me in my own mind, I'll probably always be convinced that on September 11th, I felt the effect —

Gary Scott: You felt it.

Karen Byrne: — of the plane going into the Pentagon.

Mark Schoepfle: That's true, and if it's any comfort, it's — that kind of solidification, from what we've been able to see in psychological testing, occurs about ten minutes after the event. So, it's interesting that if you get there within that ten-minute timeframe, you can often get people to really [adopt] a very different wide-open set of impressions about what's going on. After ten minutes, it gets locked into your cognition, the way you're going to define it.

Gary Scott: Or if you've taken a snapshot of it?

Mark Schoepfle: Yes, exactly. The snapshot is there, you know? Well, that pretty much concludes the interview, and do you have any questions? I should also ask about us, what we're going to do. The tape recorder is still on, so I'll have to be — I'll have to be held to this [laughter].

Karen Byrne: No. No. No.

Mark Schoepfle: Well, great. Well, I'd like to thank you very much for your time on this, and if you have any questions or things you'd like to add, please don't hesitate to call us, and to do so.

END OF TAPE