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Bryan Waite  
May 7, 2002

Interview conducted by Janet McDonnell  
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Harpers Ferry Center  
PO Box 50  
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425  
HFC\_Archivist@nps.gov

INTERVIEW WITH LIEUTENANT BRYAN WAITE

CONDUCTED BY

DR. JANET MCDONNELL

MAY 7, 2002

## START OF TAPE

- Janet McDonnell: What your role is here with the U.S. Park Police.
- Bryan Waite: I'm a field commander in charge of a shift, 10-hour shift, for all patrol activities during that time period. I supervise, basically, three sergeants at the time, and the sergeants supervise officers on patrol, two marine, two horse mounted patrol.
- Janet McDonnell: How did you first learn about the attack on the Trade Center?
- Bryan Waite: From a radio station, an FM radio station had reported that there was a fire at one of the twin towers. Report that a plane had hit it. And basically, just listened further and further and found that units had observed the smoke and had observed the collision and got everybody into gear. Most of the Staten Island people went to the Statue of Liberty to secure Ellis Island and Liberty Island locations. We closed down the Fort Wadsworth area and (?) Parks in Staten Island, and secured Floyd Bennett Field proper. And basically, all of the marine units responded over to Ellis Island and Statue of Liberty Island, to help triage and bring patients from the North Cove Marina at Manhattan Island to Ellis to be transported to the Jersey City Medical Center.
- Janet McDonnell: So, you just drove immediately to Ellis Island?
- Bryan Waite: I drove, I was out on Highland Boulevard when I heard on the radio. I drove back to my office over here to Fort Wadsworth. And then we found out that, yes, all of the units had been responding to various locations.
- Janet McDonnell: Well how did, well then you had to contact your—
- Bryan Waite: I contacted my supervisors and we found out that the staff, those over here, had moved basically to Ellis Island.
- Janet McDonnell: No, but I mean then did you then contact your officers, the ones you supervise?
- Bryan Waite: Yes, I responded here, and I took care of the Staten Island operation. Basically, it was determined through the command staff that Lieutenant Wall would take care of the Brooklyn District, I would take care of the Staten Island District, and Lieutenant Buckley, Sergeant Everett Campo from here and Captain Lauro would respond to take care of activities at Ellis Island. So, we kind of set up three separate entities, instead of having like one operation, we had three separate worksites under a lockdown mode.

- Janet McDonnell: I didn't realize that. What were some of the things going through your mind, things that you know, gee, this has to be done and this has to be done. What were you thinking?
- Bryan Waite: Well, first we thought it was a plane accident. And we figured if this is a collision. You figure, well, it's going to be an injury accident. It's going to be something that really shouldn't have an impact for us per se. But then when the people who are on the overlook here observed the second plane, they knew it was no longer an accident. We knew it was a terrorist attack. Then it was a lot different. We weren't treating just one accident. We had two accidents. And then we had listened to the radio, the report of the Pentagon, we all realized we were underneath an attack, the United States was underneath an attack. So again, we thought now with all of this, across the harbor you could see the smoke. You saw the collapse and the ground just filled up, 30 stories with dust, go from west to east, and you said, boy this is not just a little accident. This was a planned, big attack.
- Bryan Waite: What's going through your mind? You figure well, we're next to a big bridge. We've got a good view of the harbor for commerce. The bridge could be next. So that's why eventually we started getting people off of the overlook here. It was unsafe because we said they had fast movers coming in. You don't know if there are other planes. An unidentified aircraft, they say there's a fast mover coming in. You don't know if it was the National Guard, the Air Force, or another hostile attack. So, we got people off of the overlook because everybody in my (?) didn't because we've got binoculars mounted for permanent display and they were able to see the collapse. So, of course, a lot of people here saw the first. If they were up there, they may have been up there for the second one, saw the second plane. And anybody who was up there at all saw the collapse and you saw the dust. And you just couldn't imagine people getting out.
- Bryan Waite: And, of course, our boats were going back and forth shuttling people out. And you were hearing stories and you were hearing radio transmissions. It was chaotic for the downtown people, but for us we could just watch in amazement and just feel. It's like, gee, could they hit here, because the bridge would be an ideal attack, knock out commerce. We're right next to the bridge. You could see it out the window. And again, the Statue could have been an attack. People said the second plane may have been to hit the Statue of Liberty. Since the first plane didn't take out both towers, maybe he diverted from the Statue to hit the second tower. No one really knows. So, I'm sure people at the Statue, they were more concerned than anybody else was, because they were at Ground Zero also.
- Janet McDonnell: Sure. So, tell me, what were some of the other things that you, I mean you obviously indicated that you needed to get people off of that particular

site, off of the view site. What else, what other measures were you thinking about at that point? Were you calling in staff?

Bryan Waite: Well, we called everybody in. At communications dispatchers were calling any available person that we could reach at home to respond back. The midnight people had gotten off at 8:00 in the morning, so they were on their way home or had just gotten home and we called them back. So, the dispatchers without little direction they did what they were supposed to do. They called all of the people that went home, called them back to the district and the district supervisor would give them their assignment, whether it would be to close the front gate. I dealt a lot with the Park Service, the Coast Guard, and the DLA, because DLA was very fearful of attacks. So, I worked with the Coast Guard, the Park Service to get Jersey barricades up. We had to close off the entrances as best as we could. It took a couple of days to get things, but I negotiated where we could obtain the necessary items to form a perimeter to close the back gate. We used an Army truck and Reserves to close the back gate, the only entrance was from the front gate. So, it took time, but during that day that's what we were arranging. We were arranging how to secure the place, make sure everybody had ID coming and going.

Bryan Waite: Miller Field was utilized by NYPD for a staging area and for a possible morgue. So that day I worked 7:00 in the morning until 11:00 at night working with other agencies, because they needed space. And as the event grew longer, again, they needed more space, so they utilized the hangar for a possible morgue, but it didn't work out to be needed as a morgue. They had used a site, a location in Manhattan and they put them in trailers. So, it was all basically coordination, shutting down, making sure Great Hills (?) was close, Miller Field was closed, and making sure Fort Wadsworth was a secure site. We controlled people coming in and out. We had visitor checkpoints. We had car checkpoints, so people had to show ID. If you drove in, you had to have your vehicle searched.

Janet McDonnell: At what point was the fort actually closed down?

Bryan Waite: As soon as it happened, we shut it down. You had to have a Government ID, you had to work here to have access into it.

Janet McDonnell: So how smooth was that? You just indicated that you had to coordinate with a number of other agencies, Coast Guard, DLA—Defense Logistics Agency—how smooth was that coordination?

Bryan Waite: It was remarkably smooth, I think. You don't have all of the assets that you think you would have available. Like the Jersey barricades, we don't have them sitting in a storage yard to say, "can I use ten Jersey barricades," and then go and find a forklift driver. So, thinking back, it

took a day to get everything in place where we wanted to. We didn't have the supplies, but everybody was willing to help. The Reserves that got activated, they provided me with access with a deuce and a half, and operator for a bigger forklift. A small forklift couldn't handle the Jersey barricades that were over 10 feet long. The 8 footers, we had a forklift for. But again, we don't necessarily have a forklift sitting available for any use other than like a warehouse use. So, looking back I think everybody worked. Everybody pitched in. Coast Guard, they helped patrol here. They gave assistance on the 4X4 on the beach areas making sure nobody came by shore. I went up to the command post for the Coast Guard and I gave them one of our radios, so in case of an emergency if they had any tracking, they could advise us over the radio. It goes around to what we were doing, but one of the biggest things was the injured. Again, I had to go over to the Coast Guard station at Rosebank Station in New York and ask them to see if they could get me a chopper with the flight surgeon because we needed doctors over at Ellis Island. And again, that was coordination. They don't always have a surgeon available, or they don't know where the helicopters are that are stationed in New York, because the helicopters come from a different location.

Bryan Waite: So again, I was going back and forth with different tasks all day. But again, they were willing to say, "We have a helicopter, what do you need now or later?" So, it worked out fine. I mean it's not like going to the cupboard and getting the can of soup that you needed or pasta that you needed. But everybody knew what your needs were, and you were able to accomplish it when they had their personnel advised. But everybody had got to get permission. You just can't get a helicopter automatically. I mean I know we're underneath an attack, but they couldn't commit a helicopter. But they said, "We'll try to get it." And again, they'd call back and say, "I've got a helicopter available." And I said, "I need these supplies," because with the boat guys they said they were needing gauze pads, trauma kits. So that's where a lot of people got coordination through and it was.

Janet McDonnell: But you were calling the Coast Guard.

Bryan Waite: I went there.

Janet McDonnell: Or physically went over there to, that's how you gave them those requirements.

Bryan Waite: Right, because phones also went down, because when the towers went down, we lost telephone conversations.

Janet McDonnell: Okay.

- Bryan Waite: So, a lot of the thing was like line of sight, you had to actually talk to the person. Coast Guard activities, the vessel tracking system which is up here in Fort Wadsworth, they had one of our radios and they had a command meeting there with outside agencies to discuss shutting down the harbor, because the harbor was shut down. They had one of our radios for here. The station in Rockaway, the substation in New York was a little different. They didn't have any communications, so I had to go there in person and say, "I'm Lieutenant Waite. I'm going to have a little bit of authority. I need to have a helicopter at Ellis Island. I have people that need to be treated. Do you have a doctor available?" So, again, I used their doc to help get my people back and forth also. Get permission for my boats to come into the station, offload, and take other personnel up. So that's where my role is, just administrator. I was the go-to. "You make this happen," I had to make it happen. They would tell me their needs and I would make it happen.
- Janet McDonnell: So, were there some real advantages in being co-located with the Coast Guard here?
- Bryan Waite: Oh, definitely.
- Janet McDonnell: It sounds like maybe there were.
- Bryan Waite: Oh yes, because they have docs here, so we could get our personnel here, because when you shut down the bridges, people couldn't get in and out of the cities either. So, we had people here. Our people from Jersey, they were able to get across. We could get them to the Statue by our own boat, or by Coast Guard boat, or by personal craft. So, we don't have any dock space here, but the Coast Guard does. So that was one good thing with the Coast Guard here.
- Bryan Waite: The Coast Guard police also helped with the housing area here because they have something like 300-400 units there. So, they can help keep their people safe. And they're concerned about the safety of their family also. So, it's, NYPD, basically, didn't interact with us as you might imagine. It was all Park Police and Coast Guard operations at Fort Wadsworth because the city was involved with the other operations.
- Janet McDonnell: Well, it sounds like there were a lot of requirements and a lot happening very fast. And I'm wondering if you can tell me anything about how you set priorities or prioritized your requirements, I guess is a better way to put it. Can you tell me anything in general, what was going on in your mind or what process you used to do that?
- Bryan Waite: Well, it's sort of like it comes natural. I don't know really what, there's no check off list. You always think, you're always looking up. You hear

planes, you always look. You don't know what's going on. You want to make sure everybody was off of the overlook. That was one thing, because we figured this was a threat, so we wanted people off of the overlook. We wanted to keep the operations for NYP, which was over at Floyd Bennett Field, so we shut down Floyd Bennett responsibility. But that was within Lauro's Field.

Bryan Waite: I made sure Staten Island was safe as far as Fort Wadsworth locations for the housing and for the government tenants here, and just basically support for everybody who was downtown. I mean we weren't a threat. We don't have any icons here, but the icon is in the water there, the Ellis Island statue, which we are responsible for. So, whatever they were asking for on the radio, we would accommodate them. If they wanted a helicopter, we tried to get them a, I know how to get a helicopter. If they needed property. The home port was giving out supplies, the Home Depot gives a lot of products out for recovery issues. And we figured how to get things that we need. People needed respirators. We had to organize search teams, who'd be available.

Bryan Waite: And again, we had to prioritize believe it or not for the next day. This was not a one-day event. We said we have to figure out who's got to go home tonight because again for the troop effort, I got to figure out, the next day we've got to put a detail up. Who's going to come to work tomorrow? Can't work people 18, 20 hours and have nobody tomorrow, so we had to figure out how to cut people off and say, "Go home today because you're going to have to come back tomorrow." So, we started to give them a rotation of 24 detail with 12-hour shift, so we cut the place in half. Instead of having three 10-hour shifts - well, we have a work we go through for a press week, four 10-hour days. So, we changed it to 12-hour shifts. You have two shifts. So, it gave us an extra squad of men to perform security at Federal Hall, of course, at the Statue and Ellis.

Bryan Waite: But prioritizing here was just basically physical security and providing the resources to people who were going downtown, whether it be first aid kits, respirators, gloves, BDUs, because people were needing clothes. Doesn't sound like much, but you just did whatever you had to do. If you were there, people, everybody was trained to do what they were supposed to do. But it's—

Janet McDonnell: Were there any operational plans that you could pull out and use or was this event so unique that?

Bryan Waite: This was unique because it wasn't a track, like we have track flow plans for things at this park. We have evacuation plans, fire alarms, bomb threats, but again, this wasn't on our property. So really, we didn't have any plans in that aspect. We do have, since then, done different levels of



like a DEFCON like the military uses. They have I think five or something where they use colors. We now have implementation where the gate will be monitored, the gate will be close, the second gate will be closed. We have steps now so in case we have any other national threat what our assignments are. It's clear cut now exactly who is going to have access, where they're going to have access from and to. You have your right gear available, any resources that we have enabled. But at that time, we didn't have any say we're going to implement level 1 or level 2 or level 3. We just said secure the areas, and what you see reasonable, you would do.

Janet McDonnell: Well, what was most challenging about all of this?

Bryan Waite: Getting things in place. You would think you would have certain things you could just go to and get things done, but things don't happen that way. You want an ambulance; things don't happen that fast. You want to have like the Jersey barricades. Like I said, we don't have them available. So, you've got to figure where I saw things last and then where do I have an operator to move these, I mean a construction person? So those were some of the things place. That was not a problem. I had communications. My radio was working. That was, but the lack of telephone service, that was something you never really planned on. Nextel is not working. A lot of things were done by line of sight or by the radio, so that was a thing that was unique. And of course, you're thinking what's going to happen next? This is the first wave. Nobody knew how long it was going to, you know, you heard, there were three, planes, four planes. No one knew exactly how long the day was going to be before you saw an end. For me it was just long because I worked until 11:00 that night, so it was a long day.

Janet McDonnell: So how has September 11 affected day-to-day operations, some of the other traditional missions that you and your team?

Bryan Waite: You take, well, as always you take, everybody values the American life and our liberties, because that was what was under attack. So, you value the freedoms that we have that other people don't have. But that's more or less like a political statement. The thing that has really changed us here is now you've got to worry about are we going to have package bombs? So, people can be blowing things up with, this is the Statue of Liberty. Now are they going to be trying to blow it up? Are they going to come by a smaller plane, like the kid in Tampa, where he flew into the bank building? You have to think that could be a legitimate threat now.

Bryan Waite: Everybody always said you had these threats you never recognized them. I think you have to recognize that anything could be a threat now. So, some people are a little bit more cautious with the visitors, the questions that they're asking. People say, "Why are you asking these questions?" It could have been an innocuous historical question, "How do you build the World

Trade Centers?" "How do you build the Verrazano Bridge?" But now they could be saying, "I want to figure how to knock it down." "The Statue of Liberty, does it have a fire suppressing system?" "How do I take it out?" So, the questions now, you're a little bit more hesitant saying, "Why are you asking this thing?"

Bryan Waite: And also, the biggest burden right now is the fact that the protection that we have to deal, we didn't plan on having to add eight extra personnel to a shift. And it's diminishing our resources. And people are getting tired and people leave to be federal air marshals. So that's really crippled our agency, but again, that's I think every agency now is probably seeing people leaving for another agency, because the air marshals are hiring 3,000 agents. The money is there. So, we're double taxed with more responsibilities and fewer and fewer resources.

Janet McDonnell: I guess another way of asking that is have the day-to-day law enforcement functions suffered in any way as a result of this emphasis now on security and?

Bryan Waite: Yes. Our patrol activity is. Your activities instead of being directed for patrol are directed towards security of the Statue, really. Most of our resources are going to the Statue of Liberty. Battery Park inspection site, the Liberty State Park inspection site, the Statue of Liberty proper, Ellis Island proper, Federal Hall proper. We're basically keeping those icons and monuments safe as opposed to patrolling for resource management violations, patrolling for traffic violations, criminal investigations. That's the biggest impact.

Bryan Waite: And the people that live in the area, a lot of people get used to planes going overhead. And those are the AWM (?) and the other fighter jets. But it was a constant remembering. We never had these noises before. Why are we hearing these supersonic jets going through? Because there's a threat and no one knows when it's going to end. So, people are on edge, but I don't think that anybody is paranoid, but I think everybody is realistic. It could happen again very easily.

Janet McDonnell: Has it changed the way you view your job at all? Do you view your work differently in anyway?

Bryan Waite: Well, it seems that patrol can be put aside. But it seems that protection of the big monuments and anything else is really what the job is now. So instead of worrying about things happening in little parks, which are the recreation areas inside of Gateway, our biggest emphasis is on the Statue, and rightly so. It is something that is typical of all America. You see it on every commercial. I don't work there per se. But my men that are detailed there because they're short staffed, I know what they're going there for.

They're going there for a reason, to keep the threat away. We have laser protection, so we're trying to make sure it is as hard a target as possible, and that's why a lot of the officers from Staten Island are being detailed there, to help support the Statue because their staff level was only able for the normal daily activities. Now with the high risk it's not adequate, so we have to send more resources. So, the job is changed, right.

Janet McDonnell: It sounds like you're telling me the force is stretched a bit thin, is that correct?

Bryan Waite: Yes, but I don't think that's the purpose of historical portions. It's really, yes, we're stretched now where we've lost 10-12 people, and when you lose that out of 100 people, that's a lot of people to lose. We're very stretched with what we cover. Federal Hall, covering it on a midnight shift, day work shifts. Inspection sites.

Bryan Waite: A lot of officers are very tired. They work six days, 12-hour shifts. Sometimes they work seven days, because they work back-to-back so they can have a day or two off in a row. They don't know when the end is, so they'll get bitter. They understand, but they all go to work. They go to work and understand it's important what they do, but at the same time they wish they had more time with their families. Because again, everybody wants to be nurtured and protected, and you can't. Your wife and kids are home and you're at work and they want to know what's going on, because you mean no more than they do. Oh, you can't go home and comfort them in their times of need because you're at work. So now they're looking back and saying, "You know I came here for three or four months," whatever, and it's like they feel like they haven't been given anything in return, because they're working for the government.

Bryan Waite: But hopefully there will be a time when we look back and say it was well worth it. And people will be more reasonable as far as understanding you know; you have a vacation and it's maybe pushed off for six months. But again, that's a time when you're called, and you arise to the occasion.

Janet McDonnell: Well, on a positive note, what is it about the response that you're particularly proud of? I mean something must really stand out as—

Bryan Waite: The guys that went downtown that day. They didn't know what they were going to, and they went. The boat guys, they were shuttling people back and forth and I'm sure the water was rough that day. Oh, the fact that people were trying to get on a small boat, you know, hundreds of people trying to get on a small boat. I'm sure they had to - I think they transferred 112 people that day for triage.

Bryan Waite: And of course, we had people that were friends in federal law enforcement in that building also downtown. We met one of them and he said, "Glad you're here. Take me and my office across." So that was nice, to be able to see we got some of our friends. You want to make sure your friends were safe in law enforcement. We have a friend in ATF, a friend in Secret Service, and they both were fine. And I asked them, "Why were you running?" And I said, "I could see the dust." He says, "Yes, we were running, because it was a black wall." And I said, "I'd be running, too." He said him and his staff, they ran as fast as they could, because you didn't know what was behind that wall. All you saw was black dust. So, he ran to the water's edge. And I said, "Well, our boats were there. You should know they probably would have been there," but he got out safely.

Bryan Waite: I would think the people on the boat, it was a remarkable response. We got every single boat. We had a sergeant, who was off duty, came in a personal boat, motored in to work, got on a police boat, and continued that day working. I think that shows dedication. He was home. He could have said, "No one has called me. I'm going to enjoy my day at home," but he saw the need to respond. So, there were a lot of people that came to the plate and did what they were supposed to do.

Bryan Waite: People down at Federal Hall, breathing in that dust and dirt. It was there for weeks. You could smell it, the acrid odor of burning glass, concrete, the plastic on old pipes, and, of course, decomposing bodies. It was a gruesome somber experience when you went downtown and saw what used to be 120 stories tall was only 5 feet tall now. And the rubble and it really, nothing recognizable. It was all gray like mashed potatoes. You'd see reed bars sticking out. But you would expect to find toilets, desk furniture, things you would think would survive but didn't survive, because everything was compacted. One floor was three or four inches thick. So that was kind of—

Bryan Waite: And days there when you heard the whistle, which meant to stop, and you waited to hear in case anybody, and you tapped and waited to hear if anybody tapped back, and they'd blow the whistle again and you started digging again, you kind of feel like you're there to help the person, but it's like you know, gee, how are we ever going to hear anybody in all of this mess?

Janet McDonnell: Did quite a few officers from here go down and volunteer and dig?

Bryan Waite: Everybody, a lot of people wanted to dig, more than we could spare, but we probably sent 6-8 people every day to dig. And a lot of guys, they dug every single day because they knew firemen. They came back dirty, dusty. They looked like they were rolled in flour.

Janet McDonnell: I hadn't heard that. For how long, over a period of weeks?

Bryan Waite: No, it was probably about, I'd say seven days and then NYPD changed it from a rescue mission to a recovery mission to a crime scene. So, they kicked out the outside agencies, because then they figured there'd be no chance of anymore survivors, so they were collecting evidence. So, they had everybody else move from the crime scene. But it happened, I think it was that Monday, Tuesday, and by the following Monday it had kind of gone down to a crime scene investigation.

Bryan Waite: So, we sent people down to assist, but they really didn't ask for much assistance at that point. They kind of utilized the fire department and the NYPD to conduct the crime scene investigations. They had to organize because they were getting pilfered. You didn't know if you were going to use a black box or other important parts of the investigation. But solidly these men and females were going down there digging. And you'd just see them come back exhausted and depressed, because they weren't finding anybody, because people in the neighborhood that worked in the world financial area or the law enforcement wings, whether you were New York City, federal, or whatever, they were all in that building.

Janet McDonnell: Is there anything that I haven't asked about that you would want to add? It seems like there might have been some historically new missions for the Park Police in this. It seems like some of the things you described are.

Bryan Waite: Federal Hall was never part of our purview. It was handled by the Rangers at Manhattan sites. But we have boats, so boats can travel. The Rangers came to assist from Fire Island. They came with their boats. Again, it wasn't a Park Service location. Manhattan Island, but again, the interaction you can't say you're federal, your state, your city, your local. Everybody works together for a group disaster. Everybody came together. I don't think the Park Service wants to spend their resources doing other people's jobs, but at the same time in a national emergency I think it is right we did go that and help anybody in Manhattan because you want to save everybody's life and at the same time protect the Statue and Federal Hall, across from the Stock Exchange.

Bryan Waite: And that's changed our jobs a lot. We're in downtown Manhattan, before we were only at the national recreation areas and the Statue of Liberty and Ellis. And again, we went from a patrol operation to really a security mission. Just like the Secret Service around the President. They make sure the White House is protected. And that what we're doing that right now, where before we were maybe doing resource management. We'd be doing traffic laws, criminal investigations, the other things that occur in the parks. But now those are all second base and the first base is the Statue, is the icon.

Janet McDonnell: So, it's like the Park Police really functioned as a true partner with these other entities

Bryan Waite: Yes, we worked as a partner. The OEM works in emergency management. I mean they were in that building also. And the telephone lines. We sent people down to One Peace Plaza also so we could network and coordinate resources. So that's where we all got together and helped, because One Peace Plaza is on the East side and the other command and control center. So July 4<sup>th</sup>, another and other big events, every agency sends a rep with a phone in case they need a resource or location, they can just walk across or yell across the room and say, "Park Police, can you handle this?" "EPA, can you handle this?"

Bryan Waite: It's sort of like the Joint Terrorism Task Force issue, you get all of the heads together of all of the agencies and they work together. That was one thing. We also had a person at One Peace Plaza. Say if it happened on that Monday or Tuesday, it might not because that day we were trying to get everybody in and trying to just respond to where we had to go. Organization may have taken 2-3 days.

Bryan Waite: But it was something I don't think anybody will ever forget. The planes, you still here them overhead. You learn a difference between an aircraft going to Newark Airport or a military jet. As far as suspicious packages, people who come in here and they have things in the neighborhood which they think are unusual, they report it to the police now. The same I see a group of foreigners and it's like you don't want to do racial profiling, but—

END OF TAPE