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J. Melville Poole
December 17, 2001

Interview conducted by Mark Schoepfle
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September 11, 2001
Oral History Documentation Project
Northeast Region, National Park Service

INTERVIEWEE: J. Melville Poole
Catoctin National Park
(Interview No. Unlisted)

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INTERVIEW DATE: December 17, 2001

PLACE: Catoctin National Park

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START OF TAPE

Mark Schoepfle: I'm speaking with Mel Poole on 17th December at Catoctin National Park.

Mark Schoepfle: Could you back up a little bit? And you were mentioning the superintendents' meeting and what had happened regarding the site of Flight 93.

J. Melville Poole: During the superintendents' conference at (inaudible), Pennsylvania, there was a small group of National Park Service staff, led by Regional Director, Marie Rust, who visited the Flight 93 site in Shanksville. My understanding is they met with the owner of the property and his son. And both of those folks expressed a interest in the Park Service being a part of, or, in some way memorializing that site.

J. Melville Poole: The site is still very raw. My understanding is it's still closed to the public because there's active debris still in the area. Although the majority of it has been removed from the ground, there's still items there, in the trees. And I believe they had a windstorm there the day before the visit. And there was still debris that was coming down out of the trees even then.

Mark Schoepfle: Good point. I'll have to — we'll keep that in mind.

J. Melville Poole: My other point was about what will happen at the World Trade Center, because I think that there have been remarks that I've seen in the media that the Mayor and the person who owns that site speaking to how those sites will be rebuilt and that there will be buildings there. And I'm interested in — interested to see how that particular philosophy reconciles itself with the American need to memorialize the places where it happened.

Mark Schoepfle: Important point. I'd like to get back into that, actually, as we go on in the interview, if I could.

J. Melville Poole: Yes. Yes.

Mark Schoepfle: I think that that's ultimately going to be an important — what we're going to have to look at and —

J. Melville Poole: I think it's a huge point.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. Yeah. And we've got to be ready for it.

Mark Schoepfle: If I could just back up a little bit, what — on the day that this occurred, on the 11th of September, could we start at the very beginning —

J. Melville Poole: Mhmm.

Mark Schoepfle: — when you were immediately aware of what had happened?

- J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm.
- Mark Schoepfle: And, basically, what happened next and what came down?
- J. Melville Poole: Yes.
- Mark Schoepfle: Just start right there.
- J. Melville Poole: Okay. Let me give you the where, first, because that probably is interesting in and of itself.
- J. Melville Poole: I was in a meeting about three miles south of the park with the local Tourism Council. So, there was a pretty good cross-section of the community that I was with at that time. And it was in a facility that is very rustic. And it was basically a retreat or conference kind of facility called Camp Folkwood [best guess]. And the whole purpose of being there was we were having a retreat to discuss just general tourism issues for this camp.
- J. Melville Poole: As that meeting started, they made the announcement that the World Trade Center had been hit by a plane. And the interesting assumption in the room was that it was a small plane. So, we — at that point, they set up a TV for us to watch what was going on. So, we were — I don't recall whether — we saw the second plane that went in. We saw the damage from the first plane and then we saw the second plane go in on TV. And we were watching something called, I think it was News International. It was a cable channel.
- J. Melville Poole: And as the first — after the second plane went in, it was obvious that I think that was the shift between it being a plane crash, a plane gone awry, and some kind of terrorism event.
- J. Melville Poole: And so, I was on the phone at that point with the Chief Ranger there at the park. And basically, I said had he heard that two planes had hit. We were simultaneously holding an Emergency Medical Services meeting here in the park with all the coordinators from all the parks in the region. And he was — he was attending that. And so, we were talking back and forth on the phone. And so, I asked him if he had heard it. And I said, "Let's just make sure our people are kind of tuned up and watch, you know, just be on a little higher alert status, but get more people on the screen at that point."
- J. Melville Poole: So, we did that. It was shortly after that — we watched, I guess, the south tower, the side that came down first. We watched that. And then the next thing that we heard was that there had been a plane crash at Camp David. And, at that point in time, the room kind of turned to me like, you know, what's going on.

- J. Melville Poole: So, I went — in the particular place I was in, my cell phone — there was no cell phone coverage. So, I couldn't get on my cell phone. I went to get a hard line. As I picked up the phone, the entire trunk system for this area went down. And there was a — there's a message display on the phone that tells you the status of the phone. And it was not just that the line was busy, that there was too much traffic; the trunk went down, which is like the main line that all the other lines feed into.
- Mark Schoepfle: Wow!
- J. Melville Poole: So, at that point in time, I went out, got in the car, got on the radio, and said, "Have you heard anything?," talking to the Chief Ranger. And he said no. And I said, "Well, I think it's probably time that we meet up because we're going to get the media onslaught, whether this is true or not."
- J. Melville Poole: So, he started — he was — he basically came out of the — he told the other EMS coordinators what had happened. And they basically [returned to their ambulances]. And then he started moving towards the visitor's center. I agreed to meet him there because that was sort of the closest point for us to get together.
- J. Melville Poole: I went back into the tourism meeting. And those people were visibly shaken at that point in time. It had turned from an event that was some place away to something that was happening literally around that corner, from where they were. And then so they were very upset. They wanted to know what information I had. And I told them I did not have anything, but I felt like that they were all safe where they were and that — but I had to go into a meeting.
- J. Melville Poole: And it was kind of awkward for me because, at that time, I was the interim president of the Tourism Council. So, it was supposed to be the sort of changing-of-the-guard meeting between the old president and the new president. It was a planning meeting to sort of set up for the next year. And the real irony is it had been postponed from the summer. It's normally a June meeting for us. And we had had such a busy year that we couldn't get to get people together on dates. So, we decided to bring it as a fall meeting. We basically struck out twice for the same meeting, you know. It just wasn't to be in that particular year.
- J. Melville Poole: So, anyway, we left the meeting. And I didn't realize it at the time, but it was such an impact on me [and everybody else] at that point in time. And I came down to the visitor's center. And as I'm driving down, the Administrative Officer came up on the phone and said, "We're being deluged with calls here. What do you want us to tell them?"

- J. Melville Poole: You know, and I said — literally, every line we had was lit and rolling over at that point. And I said, “Just tell them that it’s an unconfirmed report at this point in time. We don’t have anything.”
- J. Melville Poole: So, I got to the visitor’s center and —
- Mark Schoepfle: This is regarding Camp David?
- J. Melville Poole: Yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Go ahead.
- J. Melville Poole: So, I got to the visitor’s center. And the chief ranger and I hit the door at just about the same time. And he said Secret Service had requested a closure, you know, and sort of an expanded security [presence], which is what we do when — we had done it occasionally before September 11th. And now it’s fairly regular for us, something that’s happened probably three out of four weekends, probably two out of four weeks in the month.
- Mark Schoepfle: Since then, you mean?
- J. Melville Poole: Yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay.
- J. Melville Poole: But, during that time, it was — it was only when we had a visit and we had, you know, a head of state aboard that we would — an additional head of state beyond the President that we would do something like that.
- J. Melville Poole: And so, we — the other thing that happened kind of — the other person who was standing in our visitor’s center, oddly enough, at that point in time, was the — there was a ranger from the State Park side. And we work fairly closely with the State Park System here just because the state park was actually part of [original] park back in the ‘50s. And just being across the road, you know, we’re neighbors and we work like neighbors, clearly. So, he was in the visitor’s center and he said — the park manager on the other side sent him over and said, “You tell us what you need.”
- J. Melville Poole: So, at that point in time, we were trying to close the road. And we were scrambling for barricades — we keep a standard barricade package down there. But we were scrambling to get that up. And we were short on people because we were trying to get people out on patrol. So, basically, the State Park actually put their cruiser in the road, you know, to hold it while we got the barricades set up —
- Mark Schoepfle: Wow!

- J. Melville Poole: — and begin to deal with that. So, we feel good with the way that we work with the State anyway, but that was just an example of where the boundary lines kind of started to blur for us, I guess.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm. Go ahead.
- J. Melville Poole: And then I guess the next thing that happened was that we got that closure in place. And we were doing — well, we had to close essentially both ends of the park — both central roads So we got that closure in place and then that basically sealed up the center part of the park.
- J. Melville Poole: And, at that point in time, I moved back down here. And the interesting –
- Mark Schoepfle: This was — I’m sorry — this is back down here from the corner there where you had called for the barricades?
- J. Melville Poole: Yes, from the visitor’s center to headquarters.
- Mark Schoepfle: Oh, the visitor’s center. Okay. Go ahead. I’m sorry.
- J. Melville Poole: So, we — I moved down here. And a couple of things kind of happened pretty close to simultaneous.
- J. Melville Poole: I walked through the door and the person who was working the front desk said, “Your wife called, and your sister called, and your parents called. And they want to know if you’re okay.” And so that was sort of what was happening across the park at that point in time, lots of phone calls from families. I mean people as far away as California were calling to check on people that they knew here.
- J. Melville Poole: The hard part during that is to — I guess the next thing that kind of happened was, I got a phone call out to out to my wife and I said, “Call the family and tell them I’m okay.” And then the next — the next call was from Secret Service. And they just wanted to confirm that they had not heard of a plane crash. And their quote to me was, “But we’re not talking to the media.”
- J. Melville Poole: And I guess my feeling at that point in time was that I needed to do that to try to begin to dispel that rumor that was out there.
- Mark Schoepfle: Oh, okay. At that point, the Secret Service called and confirmed that there had been no strike on Camp David.
- J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay.
- J. Melville Poole: Well, they were not calling for that purpose. They were calling to coordinate the closures and the security.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

J. Melville Poole: But that was the first item, the first issue, that we needed to deal with was, you know, had that happened, had it not happened. Because had it happened, I've got a whole other set of priorities I've got to deal with. If it doesn't happen, I've got a whole set of different ones, you know.

J. Melville Poole: So, we — they said, “We’re not talking to the media.” I said, “Well, I think I’m going to.” So, at that point in time, basically the park staff were to handle — the administrative staff had become sort of the front line in dealing with the media. And they were just passing the unconfirmed report story. And then we went from that to “there has been a plane crash in Catoctin Mountain Park.” And because of that, I think that the interest was ratcheting up — again — I think that there was sort of the feeling that maybe the government’s not telling us everything. And so, we tried to filter as many of those calls as we could. But that — I think I did, like, I don’t really remember — that day is kind of a blur.

Mark Schoepfle: That’s okay. That’s great.

J. Melville Poole: I did probably two or three television standups, a couple of radio stations, two local newspapers. All that kind of evolved from about 11:00 to about — for the rest of the afternoon. And the idea was just to get the message out that there had been no plane crash and that some — a senior official was saying it; it wasn’t a public information officer or somebody way down in the organization who would get rolled over at that point or at some later point in time.

Mark Schoepfle: So, you basically did this so — got this out that there was no plane — that there had been no plane crash at the park.

J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm.

Mark Schoepfle: Did this reach Camp David, I mean Camp David as well, or just the park?

J. Melville Poole: Well, the reason that we said it that way is that, technically, anything about Camp David is supposed to come from the White House Military Office.

Mark Schoepfle: Oh, okay.

J. Melville Poole: Oh, excuse me, the White House Press Office.

Mark Schoepfle: Got it.

J. Melville Poole: And so, I wanted to not speak to Camp David, but I could speak to Camp David by saying there’s no plane crash at Catoctin National Park at that point because Camp David is within the park. So that’s kind of the way that evolved.

- Mark Schoepfle: And, also, just to make sure I've got this right, essentially you wanted to prevent getting rolled over by getting this — you mentioned some public affairs getting rolled over —
- J. Melville Poole: What I — I think what the media was concerned with was that we put somebody out front to just sort of knock down the phone calls and say, "No, a plane did not." And I think that the state's rationale, you know, when I come out and basically say, "There is no plane crash." You know, they're more likely to attribute that statement and give it some press rather than something that came from the public information officer who can come back and say, "Well, I don't know all the facts. I didn't know all the facts. They didn't share all the facts with me," or something like that at some later point in time.
- Mark Schoepfle: Interesting. Go ahead. This is fascinating. This is great
- J. Melville Poole: I guess the other thing that had kind of happened before I got — involved myself in the story, but these two things were kind of co-evolving, is the other thing that was happening was that we were getting — well, Secretary of Transportation Mineta was starting to get all the airplanes on the ground. And, you know, we had had — basically, the minute I walked in the office, I turned CNN on. I don't think I turned CNN off for about the next eight or nine days straight.
- Mark Schoepfle: Didn't turn it on again?
- J. Melville Poole: Didn't turn it off.
- Mark Schoepfle: Off, yeah.
- J. Melville Poole: You know because it was our source of news. Well, let me back up. Let me give you one other interesting piece of information here.
- J. Melville Poole: While we were at the visitor's center, we had done a shut down. After we did that, my next phone call was to the Regional Office to tell them that we were closed. And when I got to the Regional Office, I got a person who said, "Everybody is gone already. I'm the only one left." And we let — and the entire — basically, it sounded like the entire city had been evacuated.
- Mark Schoepfle: That's putting it lightly.
- J. Melville Poole: Yeah. But it was interesting because we were trying to report upline to our Regional Office and there was nobody there essentially in the chain of command to take the phone call, which was an interesting scenario, you know.

- J. Melville Poole: So, a lot of our — for the rest of the first couple of days, a lot of our communications basically shifted and ran through our communications center over in Sharpsburg, because our immediate need was to get resupplied – to get law enforcement resources on the scene to deal with the closures.
- J. Melville Poole: So, I'm kind of jumping all around in this story.
- Mark Schoepfle: No, fine. Fine.
- J. Melville Poole: I guess the next piece that happened is that I was here in the office; we were watching CNN. And we were watching — there was something like about 3,000 airplanes in the air, as I recall, across the United States. And we were watching sort of the numbers dwindle on the screen. Because we didn't think — at that point in time, 3,000 airplanes had become 3,000 threats.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yes.
- J. Melville Poole: Two-thousand nine hundred ninety-eight threats were left, I guess. And so, we were watching the kind of countdown. It went from 3,000, to 2,000, to 1,000, and then we were down to about — then we were down to about ten planes. And the uncertainty of the situation at that point in time was — was just kind of making us all crazy.
- J. Melville Poole: You know, a couple of things kind of happened simultaneously. One is that this plane that was supposedly headed for us, I guess I had a couple of thoughts. I didn't know where that plane was coming from. And my guess was the flight path that we had on that plane was that it had originated, of course, either from the north or the west of us. And I guess what was hard about that was that the high school is immediately to our north up there. And a fair number of kids in that high school are out in Somerset and some at East Park. That's where those kids go to school if they go to school locally — including mine. And so, the question becomes, you know, do you get your own out of the school, do you notify the school, you know, how do you deal with that emotion level. I also had a personal responsibility as well as a professional responsibility, and no information to make those decisions at that point.
- J. Melville Poole: So, there was I guess an hour of terror there that was pretty real for me. And I'm sort of on the phone, and making phone calls, and trying to figure out, you know, do I call my wife and say go get my son out of school. Do I call the principal of the school and say, "Get everybody out of the school"? I didn't have any more information specifically than, you know, probably — I was getting most of my information off of CNN at that point in time, but a little bit, you know, coming from the Secret Service.

- J. Melville Poole: And, at that point in time, I was already sort of trying to deal with the media and the Chief Ranger was dealing with the Secret Service. A couple of things happened about the same time — simultaneously.
- J. Melville Poole: We got down to about ten planes. About the same time, we got down to ten planes, the Chief Ranger walks in the door and made what probably is, you know, will stay with me the rest of my career. He walked in and said, “The Secret Service has advised us that we now have fighter planes over the park.” And you could hear them.
- Mark Schoepfle: You could definitely hear them?
- J. Melville Poole: Yea. I later found out that those planes had scrambled out of Langley Air Force Base and, initially, were trying to get to the President and trying to deal with that situation, and they weren’t able to do that. They kept coming north in anticipation of the Flight 93 plane coming from the south. And they got over us probably sometime —I would guess — around 11:00 that morning.
- Mark Schoepfle: I was going to ask, yeah.
- J. Melville Poole: And that changed the complexion of things and I guess it kind of settled things for me in my mind because I figured that, you know, if we had fighter cover over the park, and somebody was going to try to come at us, that that would mean that we would sort of be protected by that. The other thing that we had in our favor is we have an air space restriction here. So that air space restriction, it’s not like they could have gotten in on top of us real fast without violating air space restriction. And that would have been sort of an opportunity for the fighters to take that action.
- J. Melville Poole: So, that kind of got my comfort factor down. I stopped worrying about the high school, you know, kind of got focused on the media for the rest of the afternoon, and just trying to get the word out that we were fine. And sometimes I guess the rumors are harder to fight than the facts because what emerged over the — I guess the next few days was an interesting take was that a lot of the park staff, especially the maintenance staff was very, very upset over the whole evolution of the incident. And we ended up — we sat down on the 13th I guess and just kind of did a “here’s where we are, here’s what’s going on” kind of meeting. And there was some pretty strong emotion in the room at that point about — many of the staff, in particular, works in a really dispersed situation. Most of the time, they’re by themselves or working with one other person.
- Mark Schoepfle: This is on the job, you mean?

- J. Melville Poole: Yeah, this is on the job. And so, they're very dispersed. And then they go for a couple of hours in a remote location somewhere. They don't have access to TV. They don't have access to radio beyond the park radio. And a lot of them finally heard an increase in traffic. But, beyond that, didn't really pay any attention to it. When they walked back into, say for lunch or at the close of business, they were suddenly confronted with messages with family all over the country, that kind of stuff. And they really probably — it wasn't probably for a lot of them until they got home that night, and they had to call these folks and tell them that they were all right, did they begin to fully comprehend everything that had gone on that day.
- J. Melville Poole: And I think that things got — that meeting, a couple of people had some pretty strong messages about what they felt. And I guess that the other thing that happened was a lot of parks around us dismissed people, dismissed their staff, and sent them home. And we couldn't do that because we didn't know what we were going to be facing security-wise and were we going to need to do more things. And so, you know, basically, we sort of stayed where we were, and I think that was also upsetting to folks. You know, they felt like the other parks are released; we should have been released.
- J. Melville Poole: And I guess there was the feeling that we had not sort of fully disclosed. And I guess that, you know, had there been a plane crash or had there been something else that happened, that we would have gone in and, you know, pulled everybody back into the stations and all that kind of thing. But we didn't — we didn't have an incident. We didn't — there that had happened that would trigger those kinds of activities for us. It was just the fact that I think people felt like we should have gotten the messages to them sooner that there had been something that happened somewhere else.
- J. Melville Poole: And so, two days later, September the 13th, we had a meeting and a lot of that got vented. And about — I guess about, oh, I don't remember the exact date, but a week or ten days later, we had a critical incident stress debriefing. And our emotions were still pretty high at that point in time. A few tears.
- J. Melville Poole: The anger is pretty much gone. It's just more the sort of frustration and sadness I think more than anything else that set in at that point in time.
- Mark Schoepfle: Anger and frustration and sadness at what?
- J. Melville Poole: Just that, number one, the incident happened. I think that right after it happened, everybody went through a period of how could they have done this to us, you know, and we're going to get them, and like, you know, vengeance, all that kind of stuff I think comes out in situations like this.

- J. Melville Poole: And I think the need for — sort of the next piece after you work through that and the vengeance of kind of, you know, I think the first 24 hours. One of the other I guess comments that I most recall is that a lot of people were saying, “how could somebody hate us this much to do this to us?” And so, I think that’s where the sadness came from is that they sort of remind us that — that there are people out there who just did not like us just because we are Americans. And I don’t think that that many people would have had that realization before. I think that touched a nerve and I think that was where the sadness was coming from was with that, that and the fact that — it was just — I mean after that happened, it was just a changed world. And I think that the problem is people didn’t know what the changes were going to be at that point in time and their point of origin. And it was just the uncertainty was so high that — I think — there was sadness over that as well.
- J. Melville Poole: And that’s, you know, I just sensed that we just got hit with lots of closure and weeping involved, and lots of continuity and readiness exercises to make sure that we don’t have all the leaders in the same place at the same time so that we minimize the ease of having multiple injuries in the same place.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- J. Melville Poole: And I guess really what was kind of interesting about this exercise to me is that we have people here that come from the entire system. We had — well, we’ve got a seasonal in here now who is — no, he just left, I’m sorry, on Sunday — came in Bryce Canyon and covered some of — you know, he was here for a couple of weeks, covering (inaudible) shifts. We had been routinely drawing people from as far north as Delaware Water Gap and as far south as Fredericksburg to manage shifts. We’re normally not a 24x7 park. Normally, we go to midnights. We would normally have — and then have two on pagers after that. With the 24x7, literally since this event has started, we don’t have the staff or budget to deal with that. And we’ve basically been living off the emergency law and order in order to do that.
- J. Melville Poole: I’ve gone through all kinds of mutual aid. We’re on the national priority list for the sites, for the — it’s kind of — I guess the other thing that’s kind of odd for us is that they talk about protecting the icons, the Statue of Liberties, and the Independence Halls, and that kind of stuff.
- J. Melville Poole: And Camp David is a real interesting situation because not too many people have seen it. Everybody has — if you say Camp David, people sort of know what you’re talking about. But there’s very few people who could — if you said, “Okay, where is Catocin,” they would have any clue.

- J. Melville Poole: So, it's hard to have a — it's more of a place name. It's not a place with a strong visual symbol associated with it. And so, I think one of the hard things that we tried to do is sort of convince some folks that on any given day we're probably as important as places like the Statue of Liberty and Independence Hall, and, in some ways, we may be more important because we've had the President aboard, the Vice President aboard, on a regular basis. We've had the President aboard on a regular basis. And so, we — if you look at this thing from the standpoint of continuity regarding that, it probably is helping fulfill a fairly important function. But it's very — it's one of those things we can't talk about a lot of the things that we do relative to making that happen because it's sort of inherent now.
- J. Melville Poole: But it's — I guess what I'm trying to get at, the dilemma has been, you know, how do we sort of make our case internally that Camp David is an important icon even though we can't really sort of explain everything that's going on up there at any given point in time because of national security issues.
- Mark Schoepfle: You mean this is explained to the public or to just the other Park Service —
- J. Melville Poole: Even internally to the Park Service. I'm not sure — you know, we've gotten pretty good support. You know, we're — it's kind of odd to look at the list of what's been protected. I mean I understand the Statue of Liberty being at the top of the list, and then, you know, the Department of Interior, going downtown, and the dams. I understand the threat to those. But we've slipped sort of somewhere in that middle tier on, probably — I'll pull a number out of the air — percent, that in the time between September 11th and today we probably have had one or the other of the two top persons in the federal government in this park. So, it presents us with an interesting dilemma.
- Mark Schoepfle: You mean like the President and Vice President?
- J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm.
- Mark Schoepfle: At that level?
- J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm. Mmhmm. It presents us with an interesting dilemma. We've been — we've gotten the resources that we need, but it's sort of been — I'm not sure of the awareness. The Multi-Regional Coordinating Group — I don't know if anybody's explained that term.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mmhmm.

- J. Melville Poole: MRCG. Basically, it's the Chief Ranger's job in the regions that the other resources and staff. We've had between — the system has been operating at between 100 and 200 rangers out of their parks since this incident happened. And it's — we're going to have to do more — we're going to be faced with doing more of that in January or February because —
- Mark Schoepfle: I'm sorry, more of what?
- J. Melville Poole: Of rangers moving out of the system because we're — well, what's interesting about this scenario for us is that we're sort of perennially short of bodies to fill shifts and fill our schedule on and on as this thing, as this incident evolves. And I guess it's going to get worse in February with the Olympics coming up. We feel we're committed — we, the National Park Service, is committed to providing 150 rangers for that event. So, it's — the future is not rosy.
- J. Melville Poole: And the thing that's tough with us, I mean we had taken — we had taken cuts in our law enforcement operation I guess about a year before. And we had been able to pretty well protect the law enforcement agency. Every other division had taken a hit or more than one hit budget-wise before the law enforcement folks did. And finally, it had cut into them about a year ago. So, they were down two positions going into this.
- Mark Schoepfle: From how many?
- J. Melville Poole: Out of ten, we lost two. And that trend was across our region. We had gone from 57 law enforcement rangers to 45. The Thomas Bill Report and the IACP Report said that we were short 640 rangers across the system. And that's what we walked into this situation with. And then we just stressed it on top of that.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Throughout — okay, so, actually, in the region you have a total of 57 and you went to 45, but this report from IACP is saying you need 640?
- J. Melville Poole: Well, that's the national number.
- Mark Schoepfle: Oh, okay.
- J. Melville Poole: That's the service-wide number. Our region went from 57 to 45 over the last ten years. So, we're in decline for law enforcement rangers. And then the part that the regional situation has played out all across the system. And there have been a series of reports. The Thomas Bill Report and the IACP Report are just the latest. And they all document that we're short and we need more law enforcement folks. And nothing seems to be happening.

J. Melville Poole: And the other interesting thing that sort of has evolved out of this is that we've gone through, we've just recently gone through an exercise to do a national emergency response plan and a drawdown response. In an ideal world, every part of the system would give up something. And it's a little bit tough when you're — when you're already short and they're asking you to give up people to go work someplace else. And we've been able to do that a little bit locally. I mean while this was going on, about three days after — I guess the weekend after — September 11th, we actually had people out of the park working at Harper's Ferry to monitor the program for the Navy guys and gals.

J. Melville Poole: So, it's just been that kind of stress on the resources, on the human resources. You know, eventually it's going to take its toll, if it hasn't already.

Mark Schoepfle: How so?

J. Melville Poole: Well –

Mark Schoepfle: I mean I can guess at some of these things, but I'd like to hear, you know.

J. Melville Poole: Well, I'll give you a couple of examples. When we ratchet up security-wise, one of the things that happens is that there are a series of threat conditions that we move through in conjunction with what's happening at Camp David. And –what it immediately means is that some of our guys are working twelve hours on and twelve hours off. At one point, to cover everything going on in the park, we had people working eight hours on and eight hours off. And so basically, what that translates to in reality is that you sort of work your shift a couple of hours on and a couple of hours off with a little sleep. Then you do it again. You can't hold people in that extended period of time.

END OF SIDE 1

START OF SIDE 2

Mark Schoepfle: All right. So, we were discussing the fact that the police had to be ratcheted up and that this — the shifts went from 12 hours on and off to eight hours on and off.

J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm.

Mark Schoepfle: If I could back up for a moment. And, basically, this went on from the 13th, 14th, and 15th until everybody began realizing that this was more a national issue.

J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm.

Mark Schoepfle: And it was just going to keep on going this way.

J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm.

Mark Schoepfle: All right. The question I've got, if we can backtrack for a moment, you were mentioning that on the day that this had occurred that other — other parks in the area had been releasing their people and basically shutting down. Am I correct on that?

J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. And, basically, you all had set up barricades, so you were basically shutting down the visitors, but maintained the position open to keep — I think you were mentioning to keep communications going and getting information out to the town around exactly what was happening, to kind of keep rumors from going on and on.

J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

Mark Schoepfle: Was this the reason you had stayed open or were there other basic reasons that you had to stay open or — I'm not exactly sure on your decision to stay open.

J. Melville Poole: Well, I guess — I guess, number one, we had gotten no direction to close from the Regional Office. And a normal closure for us, it would be a directed closure. They would call up and say — we've been — you know, the Secretary of the Interior or the Director of the National Park Service, whoever, has granted the — granted administrative leave for this period of time. And we just didn't get that kind of direction, number one. And so, I guess our assumption, initially, was that everything was staying open until we got that phone call.

J. Melville Poole: Then I guess our assumption, again, was that it was the metro area parks that were going down. And it was not until I guess the next morning when we read the morning reports that we realized that basically everything, all parks in the area, had essentially gone down.

J. Melville Poole: The reason — I guess the reason that we stayed open was that we were getting such a heavy media load and the admin staff was basically sort of filtering those phone calls. And then the maintenance staff was working to put the road barriers in place. We have jersey barriers that we have to move in place. We opened some security locations that had telephone service and utilities activated into them. So they were, again, concerned with that. There were some locations where — that we were in the process of closing. And there are — I guess those are the main reasons that we stayed open.

- J. Melville Poole: And the other part was that by the time this thing finally began to settle out at all that day it was probably about maybe 1:00 or 2:00 in the afternoon. And so, for a lot of the maintenance folks, they were almost at the end of their shift anyway because their shift ends at, you know, I don't know, 3:00. Most of them ended at 3:30, 4:00, on that day. So, it wasn't beginning to stabilize. It really didn't begin to stabilize for us until probably I guess about 8:00 or 8:30 that night. We probably got out of there maybe, oh, I don't know, 9:30, 10:00, something like that. And I'm talking about myself and the Chief Rangers. Most of the admin and researchers were released and gone home, 5:00, 5:30, something like that.
- J. Melville Poole: We were basically pretty much busy. And by the time we had any sense of relaxation, or that we had done the things that we needed to do, it was the end of the normal shift for most of them.
- J. Melville Poole: And I guess the other thing that's kind of interesting is that while other parks can kind of close the doors and walk away, we're not — we can't necessarily do that. And the only other place I've seen that's similar to this is — I spent five years at the White House before I came here. And it's sort of the same phenomenon down there, is that a lot of times when world events happen, the White House is kind of ratcheting up even at the same time that the rest of the world may be headed home at 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon. So, of course, it becomes, I mean with the law enforcement folks, there's no question; you are standing staying. You're the main staff. But there are other things that go along with that law enforcement section sometimes. I mean we may have to get people fed. We may have to get people in quarters if we have people coming from many locations. We may need to put barriers in roadways, and we may need to run the utilities into places that were not run or don't have utilities, or we need to run telephone lines into places where they're normally not active.
- J. Melville Poole: The other thing that we've done on occasion, that we did not have to do for this event, for this incident, is that we have — we have turned our gym into a full press center on occasion. That didn't happen this time primarily because the President was traveling at the time. So, he had the press corps with him.
- J. Melville Poole: And then the other — I guess the other primary focus was back at the White House. And so, we didn't have to really accommodate a press function. But we have done that in other events.
- J. Melville Poole: And I guess the other uncertainty is that we don't know, you know, that — on that day was that we knew that the President was moving around. We didn't know where he was going.

- J. Melville Poole: And so, had he come here, then one of the issues would have been do we have to do press support. I mean if we have to do press support for something like that, I mean, the maintenance needs just get huge because there's — there's just all kinds of stuff we have to do. We've got to lay a floor in the gym. We've got to run power, and set phone circuits up, park microwave trucks, and it just goes nuts.
- J. Melville Poole: That's all doable, but it's just a — you know, a lot of the problem of September the 11th for us was that we just went through a huge uncertainty for a person that day. And we got no information and we were trying to guess our way through.
- Mark Schoepfle: In going through a lot of the — just getting through all of this uncertainty, I mean, basically, you were staying open — you made the judgment call to stay open, in other words, because you're close to Camp David; you had a lot of the press corps demand. In other words, these things were part of just normal operation —
- J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.
- Mark Schoepfle: — that other parks wouldn't necessarily have had.
- J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.
- Mark Schoepfle: Is that correct?
- J. Melville Poole: Yes.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. That's what I'm kind of figuring. And what kind of — all right — was there a point at which you had the impression that things were kind of returning to normal?
- J. Melville Poole: Not for — I don't know if we've returned to normal yet or not. In the first couple of days afterwards, no. I guess — I guess, you know, there was sort of a shift from was there any kind of an immediate threat out there. And I guess at the end of the first maybe even 48 hours, I felt like that that was starting to wane a little bit, that the other shoe had not fallen, that there were no more immediate attacks that day, you know, planned.
- J. Melville Poole: I guess after that it's kind of been a long, slow trend line. And it's had some ups and downs associated with it. You know, obviously the anthrax thing sent us back up again a couple of times. And somewhere — I guess, overall, I still feel like we're trending downwards, but there are things that continue to sort of send us back in the other direction again.

- J. Melville Poole: It's kind of interesting because we had — just one example — we had I guess it was the evening of the 11th, we got a report of foreign nationals who had been in the Frederick area asking for directions up here. We didn't know who they were, and they spoke with foreign accents, but they were inquiring about this area. So, we did a full felony stop and took them in for questioning.
- J. Melville Poole: And the same thing happened about — later that night with some people who had been reported as Middle Eastern. And they turned out to be Israelis. But, you know, we didn't know that.
- Mark Schoepfle: Right.
- J. Melville Poole: I mean and neither did the people who had reported them. But those were the kinds of heightened awareness things that happened.
- J. Melville Poole: By the same token, this past weekend we had a situation with some Chinese nationals that were, you know, out and about in the park. And there was this just not a — the same sense of urgency to it that previously we had had. And so, from that standpoint, I can see us kind of — our day-to-day is more normalized.
- J. Melville Poole: The real hard part for us right now is just covering all the shifts and doing everything. Well, bodies make all things possible I guess, is the best way to say that. But there are things that people are asking us to do that if we've got the bodies, we can do them. But, you know, it's not extraordinary kinds of stuff. It's patrol kinds of functions. But if you don't have those bodies, if you don't have people in place to do them, then it really becomes tricky. And I guess the — you know, in trying to balance just all the other things that are out there as well. And, you know, life doesn't stop for anybody. You still have to — you know, people still have to get to doctors' offices, and they still have to get kids picked up at school, and they still have to do all the normal things that go along with their lives. And, you know, you can do things for three or four days, at first. But, over time, you've got to begin to pick that up. So that means that you've got to rotate people in and out of shifts, and people are trying to get off for the holidays in the sense that they would like to go somewhere and celebrate with their particular families. It may not be on the holiday, because we obviously have people working, but, you know, maybe they want to do the weekend before, or the weekend after. We try to accommodate all those kinds of needs that they have.
- Mark Schoepfle: These are just like needs of the staff and needs of the local people?

- J. Melville Poole: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You know, the — I guess the rules that we try to work under is that you can't work people more than 14 days in a row without two days off. And if they — you know, most people have been very understanding about their leaves getting cancelled. And, as I understand it, we're the only park in the region who has had to do that right now. But we had to do it. And we've tried to do the best we can with juggling that. And we're more successful with some people than others. But we're trying to make it equitable in the sense that, you know, if you're working this holiday, you'll probably get the next one off. If you didn't get the week you wanted off, then you might get the next one, or the next one, or the next one. You know, we just — we're trying to be as equitable as we can about it but balance it against our operational needs.
- J. Melville Poole: And everybody is pretty understanding about it. I mean that's really what they signed up for. And they knew that things like this would happen. And so, there's not a, you know, a lot of moaning and groaning that has gone on about it. In fact, I can't think of anybody who has really had a problem.
- Mark Schoepfle: That's good. But you're saying that over the long-term, if this kind of thing went on, people would start, what, voting with their feet, so to speak?
- J. Melville Poole: Well, you know, I guess that what happens is it's just a — you know, you get into a burnout factor.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- J. Melville Poole: And what happens is that, yeah, they'll still be showing up for work. They'll probably — they'll show up every day, but you'll see more and more of what I call the 40-yard stare; and that is that they may be with me in body and not in mind. And that has consequences for us from an officer safety standpoint. I want people who show up are alert, who are sturdy. And if they're not, they really ought not be there.
- J. Melville Poole: You know, some of that you can do just by getting time off on shift to recharge your batteries. You know, if you're not, you know, and if you can get a couple of days off and on again, then you can sort of not be chained to the same routine over and over again, then you kind of mitigate a lot of that. It's when you're working straight through and you're out there for 30 or 40 days straight that it starts to grind on you really, really bad.

- J. Melville Poole: So far, we've been fairly successful with that. And that's because other parks have sent people into us to cover for other shifts. And I think every law enforcement park in this region — in fact, I'm sure every law enforcement park in this region has contributed to that. We've had people from just about — every enforcement park in the Northeast Region has sent folks up. And we have had people from the other parks and the Southeast Region. So, we — we've actually had — well, we've actually had four regions of the Park Service because I guess Bryce Canyon is in and out, and they sent us a seaplane out of there.
- Mark Schoepfle: Wow!
- J. Melville Poole: Well, I'm going to correct that because Midwest has sent us a seasonal from out of there as well. So, we've had five — five regions of the park service to deal with this event, this incident.
- Mark Schoepfle: A dumb question on this. How did they — how did they get committed on this? I mean how did they — I mean did the word just get out? How did — I guess my question is how did you all communicate amongst each other? How is that — how did you do it routinely and how has that changed?
- J. Melville Poole: Actually, I'll give you the official way first, and then I'll talk to the unofficial way second.
- Mark Schoepfle: Got you.
- J. Melville Poole: Basically, when we need something, when we need any kind of a staffing beyond the park, the way — the way that we're supposed to do that is go through our communications center, which is based in Sharpsburg, Maryland. It's the National Capital Region communication center.
- J. Melville Poole: Oddly enough, that center has only been fully functional for maybe probably less than a year. It's a full 24x7 dispatch center. And it took a great deal of blood, sweat, and tears to get there and the commitment on the part of superintendents, the commitment on the part of the Regional Director to make that come into being. And it's like turning out to be one of the best things that this region has done in many, many years.
- J. Melville Poole: I mean the immediate payout for us was that officer safety improved tremendously when that system went 24x7. But then where that really paid off on September 11th is that they are what we call our Resource Ordering Center. And what that means is that the Chief Ranger will say, "Okay, I have three open shifts this date and time, this date and time, and this date and time." And he'll go to the Communications Center and put that out. They may be able to fill that with — just by calling other parks in the region for us.

- J. Melville Poole: And if they do that, fine. If they don't, then they would bump that resource over to Shenandoah National Park, which is the eastern interagency dispatch center. And then Shenandoah, in turn, if they can't fill it from say parks out in the Northeast Region, they bump that over to Atlanta, which is the — it's an interagency center that basically covers the entire southeastern United States.
- J. Melville Poole: And in a worst-case scenario — basically, that's sort of what we're in — it's gone to sort of a national dispatch, which is this multiregional coordinating group that I was talking about that is composed of the Chief Rangers in the rest of the regions.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. Because there was a term that had come up here when I was looking at other people's notes. There's the Government Emergency Telecommunications System. Is that sort of like this or is this different?
- J. Melville Poole: That's sort of —
- Mark Schoepfle: You're talking about the service-wide communication center at Shenandoah. That's what they call it.
- J. Melville Poole: Yeah. Well, see, Shenandoah — Shenandoah has two functions. One is — actually, it has three. In our reporting protocol for emergency reporting, to get word say up-line to the Washington office and the director on a 24-hour basis, the way that that would happen is that Shenandoah is the center that that gets reported to.
- J. Melville Poole: The other functions that Shenandoah has is that Shenandoah serves as a — as the Eastern coordination center for the Park Service. Basically, that's the Northeast Region, the National Capital, and portions of Southeast, not too much, mostly just Blue Ridge Parkway because of its proximity to Shenandoah and Virginia. And it works more in — it started out in fire and it's expanded to what we call all-risk, is what this would fall into. All-risk is any kind of incident beyond fire. So, it could be a hazardous material spill. It could be a law enforcement incident, a whole host of events, special events, would fall into all-risk. So, they would have a dispatch function at that level as well. And then they'd do a dispatch function that would just be to manage resources within the park. So, they're a multi-level dispatch center.
- J. Melville Poole: And they're also — there's multi-agency integration there in the sense that there are particular kinds of expertise that are needed. They can go — well, there's something called a shopping list that when we get into bad situations and fires that we would put a shopping list out.

- J. Melville Poole: And what that does is it says something like, “I need two law enforcement commission rangers and I need a crew boss to manage the fire,” or something like that, whatever these special skills are. And they can float that to every park under their jurisdiction. And then parks can respond to them and say, “I have a person who is available this date and this time who fills that qualification.” And that’s the — they’re sort of a matching service where there’s a park who has a need, and then the dispatch function is they shop that amongst other parks, find out who has that resource, and delivers that resource to you.
- J. Melville Poole: And there’s also something called Fill or Kill. And, basically, I may say, “I need a law enforcement ranger to report to this park by midnight tonight for a shift.” And so, the fill or kill on that is either they have to fill it by say 10:00 at night and tell us that they have somebody coming to us, or they have to kill it and say that we can’t fill it; we don’t have the resources to meet that need. And what that does, whenever you put a — whenever you put a kill on an order, what happens is they — it has the potential to bump to the next level in the organization to get –
- Mark Schoepfle: It goes to like — goes from what level to what?
- J. Melville Poole: For — well, I’ll give you — I’ll use our regional center as an example. If we were trying to fill something out of there and, you know, for a shift, say a midnight shift tonight, and we couldn’t fill that, then they would call us up and say, “Okay. We’ve talked to everybody. We can’t fill it. So, we’re going to kill the order at this level and bump it to Shenandoah and see if Shenandoah can fill it for us.”
- Mark Schoepfle: Oh, okay. So, in this regard, I can see that the Shenandoah office really is very useful from what you’re saying.
- J. Melville Poole: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. All our dispatch centers — I mean the one in this region, Shenandoah as well, I mean whenever — whenever we have to do out of region resources, basically Shenandoah is more than involved in it.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. And the other ones, just to make sure that I have those right?
- J. Melville Poole: National Capital Region Communications Center. They’re at Sharpsburg, Maryland. They’d be our first group. And then they, in turn, would talk to Shenandoah for us.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay.

- J. Melville Poole: And then the next level beyond Shenandoah, it's not — its function is something similar to what we call the MAC Group, or Multi-Area Command Group. But they call the Multi-Region Coordinator Group, MRCG. And that's basically composed of the Chief Rangers with an Incident Commander who are making decisions about what resources do we have available and where are we going to put them across the National Park System.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. And that's in Atlanta? Have I got that right?
- J. Melville Poole: Well, that group is actually functioning more by telephone. They're basically based out of the regions and in the Washington office.
- Mark Schoepfle: Okay.
- J. Melville Poole: The other thing that's made this incident a little more difficult to manage is that normally — we don't normally have jurisdiction at the Department of Interior. That's normally Federal Protective Service. And so, they — they have deputized park rangers and all DOI law enforcement folks going in there as U.S. Marshalls so that they can — they can work in that building and protect the department. So that's a twist for us because normally we're not — we don't have to — law enforcement office, we wouldn't have to deal with that building. But because of the extraordinary threat level it is under, they wanted some departmental people there and that's all they've got it.
- Mark Schoepfle: You mentioned that there was an official account of what you were saying and an unofficial account. Have you covered both of those? There was an unofficial account side of things.
- J. Melville Poole: Yeah, I guess. I don't remember exactly the context that I made that comment in.
- Mark Schoepfle: Just in communications and in coordination.
- J. Melville Poole: Well, yeah. The other thing that happened during that time, just to give you one example, was the morning of the 12th I was on the phone with the Regional Director. And I said, "We're under some extraordinary manpower needs here. And I think we're going to tap the region out pretty quick." And he said — his response back to me was that "I hear that Shenandoah has got some folks" — excuse me — "I believe that Fredericksburg has got some folks" and, you know, "you may want to try to go get them." So that was sort of a back-channel kind of communications, outside of our normal route. But that's exactly what we did is that we called our communication center and we said, "We need people. We know Fredericksburg has got people. And call Shenandoah and have Shenandoah try to get a hold of those folks to keep them for us."

- Mark Schoepfle: Okay. So, in other words, it's sort of like saying by being able to have this kind of back channel communication you could go to the normal communication at the centers, like at Shenandoah –
- J. Melville Poole: Yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: — and be able to — and have a hunch of whether they would be able to get them help.
- J. Melville Poole: Yeah. Yeah. Exactly.
- Mark Schoepfle: Direct them if they were in any way uncertain.
- J. Melville Poole: Yeah. Rather than having Shenandoah just start calling parks beginning with A.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- J. Melville Poole: And work down till they got to Fredericksburg, to F, you know, what we were trying to do was streamline that so that they would go to where resources might be. And that's a dynamic that kind of goes on all the time with what resources are available. It happens a lot in fire, in particular. And it happens a lot — I mean people literally will put themselves on the board as available for fire for these dates. And so, it's not unusual for the dispatch center to have that information. And so, they know — like if they need a start team leader on a fire, for example, or a division supervisor, if they only have one division supervisor in the region and he says, "Okay, I'm available these dates," and you're a day before those dates or the day after those dates, he's not available. So, you can — you know sort of instantaneously whether you've got people or not.
- J. Melville Poole: And there's always a — you know, there's a great grapevine in the National Park Service. And it's kind of one of a kind. You can find things out really, really quickly just by sort of plugging into the grapevine. And I think that a lot — we've seen that in operation as well. You know, there's sort of the unofficial communication system as well as the official one. And it just makes us faster. It makes us more efficient because we have that.
- Mark Schoepfle: So, you're able to find out, for example, about this — about these fellows over at Fredericksburg. You found out about them from, what, the superintendent or –
- J. Melville Poole: From my — well, the superintendent, and Fredericksburg happened to be talking to the Deputy Regional Director.
- Mark Schoepfle: And you were on the phone with the Regional Director.

- J. Melville Poole: And then, you know, I talked to the Region just to give him a status report and tell him what our needs were. And he sort of was able to match us up, you know.
- J. Melville Poole: I mean the other — there were a lot of offers that got made kind of off-the-record, under the table. A couple of my fellow superintendents called up and just left messages because they couldn't get through to us, "Tell us what you need, and we'll get the resources to you."
- Mark Schoepfle: And what you're saying that this sort of informal network is — has functioned —, it is just part of the Park Service? It is how things function?
- J. Melville Poole: Oh, it's very much the fabric and the function. You know, it's just — it's kind of one of the ways that we do business. I mean there are — there are just official ways of doing business, you know, with official channels of communication. And then there are back channels of communication.
- Mark Schoepfle: And everybody — you're saying basically everybody kind of acknowledges these and it actually helps lubricate the official —
- J. Melville Poole: Oh, I think so. Because I think a lot of times — well, I'll just give you staffing as an example. We've had people that, you know, we may want somebody for a three-day detail over the weekend or something like that. And let's say they can only work one day out of the three. Well, if they went through official channels, they wouldn't be available for us because they wouldn't be available for the whole thing. But the right phone call to the right person, you know, "Hey, I can be one out of three shifts or two out of three shifts, but I can't do the whole thing. If that helps you, that's great."
- J. Melville Poole: And then what will happen a lot of times is we've got somebody sitting out here who — "I can only work, you know, the other day of that three-day shift." So, suddenly, you've got the shift filled. And you can a whole series of shifts filled, and you've got your problem solved. But had it gone through the formal channels of going up through dispatch, and then back down, you know, it wouldn't have gotten done.
- J. Melville Poole: So, it's an efficiency, I think. And, you know, it's just a way of working — working things out off the record I guess is the best way to say that.
- Mark Schoepfle: When you say off the record, meaning it doesn't go into any official reports or anything like that?

- J. Melville Poole: Oh, no. No. And I guess the other — the other piece of that sometimes is like what are you really looking for, because, being in the government, we're all notorious for asking for more than what we need in the sense of people in particular, because we're all willing to settle, I guess for a little...
- Mark Schoepfle: Kind of like bargaining?
- J. Melville Poole: Yeah. You know, I mean, you know, we all have I guess our minimum staff and our optimum staff level. We're all trying to sort of figure our way through them. And there's a whole economics associated with staffing, I guess that we're trying to, like, maintain minimum plus some. And so, a lot of times people call up and say, "Well, you say you're looking for this, but can you get by with this?"
- J. Melville Poole: And sometimes we can say yes and sometimes we can say no, just depending on the scenario. So, it's kind of a bargaining to a degree, but it's — it helps us deal with the stuff that we need to deal with in terms of shift coverage in particular.
- Mark Schoepfle: That was very interesting, particularly to a—someone like me from the DC side of things, but never be able to understand or hear that kind of thing.
- J. Melville Poole: There's a lot that goes on. And there's — it happens a lot in the process of the organization, you know, not only with either requesting officials or any particular thing, but also, you know, there are calls that get made to Chief Rangers, there are calls that get made to ranger counterparts in other folks. It just depends on how you came up through the system, sort of who you know and who you feel comfortable talking to.
- Mark Schoepfle: How did this — did this change in any way as a result of the — this informal network, did this change in any way as a result of the September 11th incidents?
- J. Melville Poole: Did the network change?
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah, the nature of the network.
- J. Melville Poole: Oh, yeah. Well —
- Mark Schoepfle: The things you customarily did.
- J. Melville Poole: Probably it's a lot bigger and a lot stronger because it's — I guess, well, the beauty of the network is that we probably talk to people that we would under normal circumstances might only — maybe touch base with just because we were out there looking for human beings to do what we need

to do and converse with people who called us and said, “We need this or we need that.”

J. Melville Poole: So, we’re a little more wired-up post-September 11th than we were pre-September 11th in terms of people talking to people. And the network always expands. I mean we’ve got seasonals who are working for us now that before September 11th we didn’t have the money to pay them. And they would have been off the clock and doing whatever they do in the off season. But because of the needs, they are on. Since the — the incident has basically sort of generated more demand on that informal network. And, consequently, we use it more.

Mark Schoepfle: In that line, you know, considering some of these changes and how the networks are being strengthened, and also from what you’ve been talking about before, about how you had to respond to all this and how the communications or the centers helped out and this kind of thing, what lessons — before I get to that — what kind of operational changes here in the park did you see as a result of this incident? I was getting ahead of myself. Sorry.

J. Melville Poole: Yeah. I don’t know that I can think of anything that really comes to mind other than we learned some things in dealing with our counterparts at Camp David that we had not known previously. And I can’t get into a lot of those because it’s classified. But —

Mark Schoepfle: Just to characterize it generally.

J. Melville Poole: Yeah. Just in terms of security, one of the operational levels of security, we found out there was the — what we didn’t know, there was an expectation of what we would do that had not been communicated to us and that caused us some budget problems. And so far, we coped with that, thanks to our Regional Office. That’s probably the biggest operational change because we had — we had the ability to sort of coordinate a lot of that, expect a lot of that on a fairly regular basis with visits. And so, I think that it has greatly expanded the operation. You know, it was already in use. And, from that standpoint, we don’t feel — you know, we — that wasn’t the main part of the goal [for us.] It was really the only operational change I can think of we’re using a lot more senior level personnel. And that’s because we’re picking them up coming out of their summer parks. Their season would have ended, and they would have gone home. And now they’re kind of — they’re working for us. I guess that’s about the only — the only real obvious one. Well, take everything less on face value.

Mark Schoepfle: You mean like those incidences with the tourists or what?

J. Melville Poole: Yeah. Yeah. You know, everything gets checked more. I guess everybody's antennae are up about what's out there.

Mark Schoepfle: So, what kind of lessons come out of this?

J. Melville Poole: Well, the big lesson, the big lesson, I thought this prior to September 11th and I'm more sure post-September 11th is that there has got to be a significant increase in ranger law enforcement personnel in the National Park Service. We don't have enough people. I don't see any alternatives there to achieve the goals. There are other opportunities in just about every other division of this park in which I can buy more scientific research. I can contract for more particular maintenance.

J. Melville Poole: I can contract for particular administrative work. Law Enforcement is a discretionary function of government. It's even more so here because of the national security implications.

END OF TAPE 1

START OF TAPE 2

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. So, law enforcement, being a discretionary aspect of government, is just one of the things you just cannot buy more of like you could other things like that, and the staff just have to be there, is that what you're saying?

J. Melville Poole: Well, and it's even — it's even trickier than that because you can't staff up your law enforcement people because they've got to be trained. And, well, first of all, they've got to be selected. Then they've got to be — and part of that selection process is a background investigation. And those background investigations are taking anywhere from three to nine months at this point in time. Then they've got to go to FLETC to be trained.

Mark Schoepfle: FLETC?

J. Melville Poole: Yeah, Federal Law Enforcement Training Center.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay.

J. Melville Poole: Our policy right now is that it's very, very difficult to — for somebody already in law enforcement, let's say a state trooper who wants to become a National Park ranger. In all probability, even though that person has been trained by the state police academy, he would have to get back and repeat the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. So, it's not like we have the ability to go out and buy more law enforcement people. We tend not to buy them, but we tend to grow our own. And so, there's a long lead time in getting qualified law enforcement folks on board. And that's why rely so heavily on seasonal servicepeople. They already are commissioned

people. And so, they're a sort of resource already within our system. And even seasonals have constraints in terms of hours that they can work and that type of thing.

Mark Schoepfle: Okay. If I'm tracking this right, it basically means that in a lot of these law enforcement people, okay, training is part of it.

J. Melville Poole: Mm-hmm.

Mark Schoepfle: But am I also sensing correctly that there's a certain amount of which they've just got to come up-to-speed by working within the Park Service System?

J. Melville Poole: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes.

Mark Schoepfle: That they just wouldn't get if they were state troopers or D.C. police or something like that?

J. Melville Poole: Yeah. Yeah. Well, you know, the other component is that they go to FLETC and they get trained and they come out of FLETC and we call it turning them down a notch, because they come out of FLETC with a fairly hard law enforcement approach. A hardedge law enforcement approach I guess is the best way to say that. And then they come back to — not every park is a high intensity law enforcement park. And so, we have to sort of rebuild their visitor interaction skills. And sometimes we have to rebuild their resource protection skills so that they are tuned into those pieces of the job. It's not just, oh, catch the bad guys kind of job. Sometimes it's an educate the unknowing public kind of job, you know, rather than — rather than being — to use a sort of old expression, hook 'em and book 'em, you know, sometimes it's just more talking and walking kind of thing.

J. Melville Poole: But I guess that's the biggest problem that I can see. You know, it's just — it has gotten worse in the four years that I've been here. The numbers are just — they're abysmal. And it's not that we're — the numbers are flat, they're turning down. There's a clear down trend in total numbers of bodies available, you know, park, region, national even there the trend is down. And I — you know, I don't see any support at the national level, at the department level, or in Congress to deal with this.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

J. Melville Poole: And, you know, if September 11th is not a wakeup call, I don't know what would be. I really don't.

Mark Schoepfle: I'm going to make note of that. This is important to know because, you know, at our level, we just took a lot of that for granted.

- Mark Schoepfle: Well, I know you're busy, and there are more questions I think I could ask, but I've been talking to you now for two hours.
- J. Melville Poole: Yeah. Yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: Are there some other things you'd like to mention that I haven't mentioned or haven't asked about that should be looked into?
- J. Melville Poole: I don't think so. You know, this has come farther afield than I really expected it to. I mean I think that, you know, I think I said what I wanted to say. I really — you know, my main focus was this non-incident of the plane crash not getting lost because it's a — the thing that's interesting to me about it is that it's sort of like nothing happened but it took on a life of its own for a couple of hours in the American psyche, I guess. And, in many ways, it had more fallout internally than if there had been an incident.
- J. Melville Poole: I guess one of the things that we all train for and expect to happen, is that at some point in time incidents will occur
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- J. Melville Poole: And there are things that you will respond to. And, you know, I guess the mentality of the organization is, okay, if this can happen you need to do this and this and this. But if you think it happens and then it doesn't, you're sort of sitting in the garage with the motor running, I guess. And, in some ways, it's more stressful than actually going through the incident yourself because there's sure to evolve the fear and uncertainty of an incident but no way sort of to get it out, to wash it out of your system. And it's sort of like you're revving up, but you've got nowhere to release that energy. And I think that was the problem.
- J. Melville Poole: We fact — we want to think that we can kind of turn it around. And that energy that we're going to focus on an incident turns into something emotional that we kind of have to work through with some folks here. I guess it's — I mean I can't think of anything else. I mean we really kind of worked through everything.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. Well, you mentioned also, just one last thing, on the memorializing.
- J. Melville Poole: Yeah.
- Mark Schoepfle: And I promised we'd get back to that, so the last thing.
- J. Melville Poole: Yeah. I guess that the Flight 93 crash over the U.S. has an interesting connection because that was "the plane that was heading for Camp David." So, I really feel like the folks on that plane, they did a really great thing, really huge job of keeping that plane from going wherever it was

going. I think that, now, looking back on it, one of the great events, I guess. Basically, it was going any further, and that it was not coming to Camp David.

J. Melville Poole: The other interesting thing about that is that I think that because of where the plane crashed, which is in a mountainous area similar to this, the people that — the local department, the first on scene, had uniforms similar, the Stetsons, white shirt, gun, pants. I think that somebody drew a line on a map, and we happened to be on that line, and they said, “Oh, the plane was headed to Camp David.” And they also thought park ranger, mountains, Camp David. And so, I think that’s what got that rumor started.

J. Melville Poole: I guess that site, as much as any of this, leads me to think about, you know, how do you memorialize these folks. And I think that someone should read the comments on the wall the folks that went to that site, the feelings they had during the visit. And I think, you know, that site’s pretty easy. I mean I think that there’s probably right now — I don’t know this, but I guess that there’s Congressional support for making that an historic site in some way or making it a memorial site I guess is the best way to put that. And the only question is what’s the most appropriate way to do that.

J. Melville Poole: I mean Oklahoma City, obviously, was the first model with, you know, Park Service involvement in there. And I’m sure we’ll go back and draw on some of those — some of those lessons in looking at the Shanksville, Pennsylvania, site.

J. Melville Poole: The World Trade Center is a harder one in my mind because I think that that site ought to — at least part of it ought to be common green space, and there ought not to be another building on that site ever. But I also think that that philosophical bias I guess, because of the business around them, is going to bump up the cost of the New York real estate market. And there have already been media reports that the people who own that real estate said that there will be buildings back there.

J. Melville Poole: And I think there will be. I think they’re probably not as tall, probably not as, you know, maybe not as robust as the World Trade Center, but I think they’ll do something back there. I think that — I just hope that in the need to memorialize, that it doesn’t overwhelm the real estate market, or the need to sort of re-commercialize that space, I guess. Let me show you something that I have that —

Mark Schoepfle: Sure.

- J. Melville Poole: This is a plain black and white. But the thing I find interesting about this is that these are the buildings that — at ground zero. And with this progress in here, and, if you look at this, there's the potential to actually get the visual access out of that site, out of there, to the — I guess that's the issue.
- Mark Schoepfle: Mm-hmm. Yeah.
- J. Melville Poole: I'm not from New York so — it kind of appears looking at this to me that there ought to be some kind of access there and here, that there ought to be park land then. But New York is a place that doesn't have a lot of green space to begin with.
- Mark Schoepfle: Right.
- J. Melville Poole: And this is an opportunity to put some green space in there.
- Mark Schoepfle: And make it accessible for all visitors?
- J. Melville Poole: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.
- Mark Schoepfle: For all the public.
- J. Melville Poole: Absolutely. Absolutely.
- Mark Schoepfle: You mentioned that the Oklahoma City site was a model of that. Have you seen that site, checked it out?
- J. Melville Poole: Well, only peripherally. I mean I guess the — you know, I've seen pictures of the site. Some of our regional staff, our regional curatorial staff, was involved in helping curate Oklahoma City. And so, I've had some — some of those off the record discussions about, you know, what that was like.
- J. Melville Poole: And I guess the other thing about the Oklahoma City site that actually had more immediacy to me in a lot of ways than the World Trade Center site because the people at that site. I had been working at the White House at the time and there were — I don't know remember the exact number of Secret Service agents that were killed in Oklahoma City, but there were a number.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.
- J. Melville Poole: And some of those Secret Service agents I worked with. And the White House knew those folks. And so, there's sort of that connection there with dealing with a situation like that.
- J. Melville Poole: So, I guess kind of Oklahoma City was the first time that I've ever — you know, where we've tried to kind of deal with something like this. So that's the — that's the one that gained importance to me. And I kind of — I think what they did in Oklahoma City by taking that building down and

turning it into a park is exactly what should have happened. And I hope they're smart enough to do that in New York, but I'm not optimistic.

Mark Schoepfle: I see what you mean. But I've seen the site, and I was really impressed by that fact and, you know, how they've dealt with it and how they've got the fences there for people to make like offerings.

J. Melville Poole: And that's going to continue for a long, long time.

Mark Schoepfle: I'm amazed at that over the years, and people coming in, you know, on the one hand, you know, the fourth graders that are just very touched by the whole spectacle of what they've seen at the museum and it's like here's my doll, my favorite doll, or something like this. And I'm leaving this here for you. You know, very sincere kind of offering.

Mark Schoepfle: Then the other kind you have, you know, so and so's boy scout troop, or so and so's — but you're basically representing to me I guess at least saying, "We're here. We were here. We saw it. Our guys, you know, were here, and saw this, and are witness to it."

J. Melville Poole: Yeah. You know, it's kind of funny because I think we're looking at a huge — we don't realize the cultural phenomenon that we're looking at in the sense of the way we memorialize the sites. And I think that there are people who are starting to arrive at that. And I think that's one of the reasons we're so worried, we have so much fascination for everybody, is that, in a lot of respects, that's one of the first times that we really started memorializing sites in this country. And it's sort of continuing. You know, you can ride down Route 15 and see crosses by the side of the road where somebody got killed and they're — you know, I mean, and I see fresh flowers out there. There are two on opposite ends of Route 77 that are recent accidents.

J. Melville Poole: You know, I guess that's why I can say that it's sort of — it gives public expression to the community to grieve, I guess.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

J. Melville Poole: So, from that standpoint, I think that Vietnam was — the Vietnam Memorial is kind of an evolution of that because it denoted the end.

J. Melville Poole: I don't think we — you know, I think had the — I'm trying to think how to say this. But at earlier war memorials, for example, you know — I'm trying to think of one I can give an example. And they bring offerings up to the wall, like with the Wall. And, Vietnam, that's 20 years ago. I don't think we'd have picked them up. I think we'd have thrown them in the trash can. And I think Vietnam vets taught us the importance of those kinds of remembrances and that people needing to mind. They can tell us

about where we are culturally, and where we were culturally when it happened, and to what point would that evolve.

J. Melville Poole: And I think that the what we learned, I guess, at the Vietnam Memorial, I think that we clearly put it to great use in Oklahoma City. I mean we knew that all that stuff that would be left in the fence or on that bench was really important stuff that truly captured that moment in time. And, you know, is it important the day after? Is it important even ten or 15 years later? Absolutely. It captures the moment. It captures the — you know, it literally captures the feel of that event because the only real sense of that is, you know, sort of what the survivors are feeling, you know, how does the shock reverberate through them, through the community, and through more of the culture.

Mark Schoepfle: Well, that is really important because that's exactly what Oklahoma City is. It's simply of a description of that moment.

J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm.

Mark Schoepfle: And all the stuff that happened. Because a little bit of the description of, you know, how people kind of banded together afterwards, you know, with the association of the survivors, but the majority or the dominant part of it was just what happened right then and there. And it is something, yeah.

J. Melville Poole: Yeah, it's kind of odd, the reason that I remember Oklahoma City was because, you know, there's 902 and 903 on the Memorial.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

J. Melville Poole: But I remember the blast and my radio call number then was 92 at the time that it happened.

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. Now we've got 911.

J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

Mark Schoepfle: You had mentioned, I believe you said you'd been at the White House?

J. Melville Poole: Mmhmm. I was there for five years.

Mark Schoepfle: Five years. In the Secret Service or —

J. Melville Poole: No, I was with the Park Service there.

Mark Schoepfle: The Park Service there?

J. Melville Poole: Yeah. I ran — I was a Park Manager for Presidents Park. And, basically, I ran the White House Visitor's Center at 1450 Pennsylvania Avenue. And we ran all the tour operations, all the line-ups, and everything outside.

Basically, we gave them their ticket in the morning and gave that free tour. And, later in the morning, my job was to put you against the fence and hand you to the Secret Service and the Secret Service took you from there.

Mark Schoepfle: All right. Where were you before then?

J. Melville Poole: Regional office. I actually worked on Ranger Activities. I was a Resource Management Specialist in the regional office. So, I did oil spills and resource management things. The true irony is that one of the first assignments I had in that job was writing an — helping write an environmental assessment for white tail deer management at this park. So, you know that there were many, many jobs.

Mark Schoepfle: Foreshadowing the event.

J. Melville Poole: Yeah. Exactly.

Mark Schoepfle: When did you join the Park Service?

J. Melville Poole: '78.

Mark Schoepfle: '78?

J. Melville Poole: Mm-hmm. I've been around for a while.

Mark Schoepfle: What got you interested in it?

J. Melville Poole: The Park Service?

Mark Schoepfle: Yeah.

J. Melville Poole: Actually, I — well, two things, I guess. One is that one of my earliest remembrances as a kid was driving up Colonial Parkway in the spring because I drove down to [inaudible] River, in Virginia. And I just thought it was one of the most gorgeous places on earth.

J. Melville Poole: And then my father was in the Coast Guard. And so, he worked the entire Coast Guard district, which basically covers everything from the North Carolina, South Carolina line to the Delaware-Maryland line. So, a lot of the places that he worked were in parks. I mean he put the — I can't remember the storm. But it was a hurricane in 1965. Tore the roof up at Cape Hatteras. Well, he put the roof back on. So, you know, Cape Hatteras is sort of one of the places that I saw a lot of as a kid, as a teen. Assateague was another one, because he worked all the time on the lifesaving station over there and the lighthouse over there.

J. Melville Poole: What else? Just, you know, the other one that's now — that was not part of the Park Service, but it is now is the Cape Henry Memorial. It is a satellite unit of — a satellite unit of Colonial. And that was about — I spent a lot of my youth down there. It's in the middle of a military base.

- J. Melville Poole: I was a boy scout, camped all over the base. So, I saw that memorial a lot. I mean I just kind of bumped into the Park Service the entire time I was growing up. And I wrote my Congressman when I was about eight or ten years old and said, "I want to be a ranger. Can you get me a job?" He wrote me back. I still have that letter somewhere. It pops up every once and a while.
- J. Melville Poole: Just pretty much knew at an early age what I wanted to do.
- Mark Schoepfle: Outstanding.
- J. Melville Poole: And just, you know, ironically, I had given up on ever working for the Park Service because I applied for a couple of seasonal. I had a chance to go to Cape Cod. Got hired up there [inaudible]. And the housing was extraordinarily expensive up there way back then.
- J. Melville Poole: Another time I was down farther working at Cape Hatteras. And I was going to live with some visitor folks that knew my father. And it ended up that that was back in the days when we had — how we recommended who we hire was the way you got graded as a seasonal. Well, the guy that they thought was not coming back that year decided to come back, and he got this job back. And I didn't get it. So, I kind of put the Park Service out of my mind at that point, went off to college, and, you know, was in the placement office looking for jobs and saw a vacancy for the Park Service. And I applied for it. It took the Government two years from the time I actually made the initial 171 application until I actually walked in the door. And that survived three moves coming out of college. Papers follow me all over the eastern United States.
- Mark Schoepfle: Which college, by the way?
- J. Melville Poole: Virginia Tech.
- Mark Schoepfle: Yeah. And you had brought in the resource management. Did you major in that?
- J. Melville Poole: I majored in a little bit of everything. I started out as a forestry major. And I went to architecture in Texas for a couple of years. Then, finally graduated with a degree in horticulture. And then moved — I'd only been out of school probably, I think it was probably two years, when I came to the Park Service, and moved to Virginia and started working on a master's through Virginia Tech's northern Virginia center.
- Mark Schoepfle: Good. Well, I appreciate your time. I know you're busy and you've got other things to do. But this has been a real big help to me and a real eye opener, I've got to tell you.

J. Melville Poole: Well, you know, I think I'm probably just like a lot of other sites around the system. We're hidden gems. We're not in crown jewels, but we're hidden gems, I think.

Mark Schoepfle: I hiked up in here before and I loved it, yeah. But now I actually have a chance to be a Park Service person.

J. Melville Poole: And October is our busy month — is a busy month for us, obviously, because of fall foliage in September. It is probably the third or fourth place — July and August being the other two months are real, real busy. We haven't seen the numbers yet to really know what the final outcome is. But I am sure that because the first two weeks we are completely busted up, we got two of our camps back open again and about the third week in September it was a real on again off again kind of thing and people — we had groups canceling. They just weren't comfortable being in the proximity of Camp David. So, yeah, that's an important operational piece.

Mark Schoepfle: You mean there was kind of a drop off in attendance, in camping attendance?

J. Melville Poole: Oh, yeah. Well, see, the camps — the camps closed. Everything closed initially. We got Round Meadow back up, fairly quickly. And Ristino [phonetic] came up about the two-week mark. And that's about — and that all happened later in peak season for us, in peak fall season. And so, it was — I know there is an impact on overnight stays; what I don't know is how much of an impact in days it was because I suspect that some of the days got shunted to open areas, but some of them got lost.

Mark Schoepfle: Sure. Got lost meaning nobody registered it, nobody noticed it?

J. Melville Poole: Just — yeah —

END OF TAPE