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Chris Murphy
May 8, 2002

Interview conducted by Janet McDonnell
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NPS History Collection
Harpers Ferry Center
PO Box 50
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425
HFC_Archivist@nps.gov

INTERVIEW WITH CHRIS MURPHY

U.S. PARK POLICE

CONDUCTED BY

DR. JANET MCDONNELL

MAY 8, 2002

START OF TAPE

Janet McDonnell: I guess the best place to start is to ask you to tell me how you first learned about the attack on the World Trade Center?

Chris Murphy: Well at about 9:00 A.M. or so my brother and I were moving furniture for my mom. We were just pulling into my parents' house and the Maytag repairman was coming. He was actually, he had his head out of the window and he was saying, "Oh, a plane just hit the World Trade Center." My brother and I looked at one another and said, "How can that be?" My brother is a Port Authority police officer. So, we both looked at one another and then very soon we went inside, put the TV on, and right away another plane hit the other tower. And right away my brother and I said this is an act of terrorism. It had to be. You can't miss something like that.

Chris Murphy: At that time, I was living up in Edison, but I was down in Tom's River, so I told my mom, "Let me get something to eat really quick and then head home. Get about four or five uniforms and then head to work," because I knew I'd be there for a while. My brother thought the same thing, but he waited until he got called in. He didn't get called in until a day later. So basically—

Janet McDonnell: Were you actually called in or did you just decide to go on in?

Chris Murphy: No, I went in on my own. Actually, yes, I went home to Edison, which is about a 45-minute ride, and when I was about 20 miles away, I was able to see smoke. And I was listening to, I was actually listening to Howard Stern and he was talking about how everything was, everything that was going on. And it was hard to believe because when I go over the Raritan River there's a bridge there, and you can see the World Trade Center from there. It's about 10-15 miles away. And when I went over the bridge that day, I saw nothing but smoke. Couldn't see the city at all, just the smoke. I got home to Edison and then I tried to call work. And everything was, every circuit was busy. So—

Janet McDonnell: Both land lines and—how about your radio? Did you have a radio with you?

Chris Murphy: I didn't have my D9 radios with me, no.

Janet McDonnell: So where do you work out of?

Chris Murphy: I work right here. I work at the Statue.

Janet McDonnell: Okay.

- Chris Murphy: I grabbed some uniforms and some food, because didn't know how long I'd be there, and I headed up to Ellis Island here because this is how we drive over the bridge. I have to take the turnpike for that. So, I guess it was, I was making my way up the turnpike and all of a sudden, I hit dead traffic. What happened was is the State Police were detouring everyone off of the turnpike onto the parkway because the turnpike headed right towards Manhattan. I had to show my credentials. I was able to get by and then everything was closed. The Holland Tunnel, everything was closed. They thought the Holland Tunnel was under water. They didn't know really what was going on. So, it took me, it normally takes me about 30 minutes to get in, it took me an hour to get in, which I didn't think was that bad.
- Chris Murphy: And the park here, Liberty State Park, was actually open at the time. Well, they did have law enforcement people there. So, once I got in, I noticed right away about 300-400 ambulances that were lined up all along this road here. They were expecting mass casualties. They had ambulances. They were setting up tents, because Ellis Island is designated to be a morgue during a disaster.
- Janet McDonnell: Under a city plan or under a [unintelligible] plan do you know?
- Chris Murphy: I really don't know. I know, I think the Lieutenant Comrod or whatever, (?) the superintendent of the New Jersey State Police did come here. And he was the one that said Ellis Island was too small to be a morgue and that they would move it on the mainland. They brought in big refrigerator trucks, like four semi-trailers that were just refrigerated to put the bodies in.
- Chris Murphy: So anyway, came in here and when we were going over the bridge you can see the whole city. It's like the best view around. You couldn't see anything because of the smoke. And it smelled like ash, like burnt ash. So, I got dressed right away and everyone was running around. I got here about 12:00 and at that time there were some boats bringing over some casualties. They brought over about 200, maybe 250 people that they—right down at Battery Park there. I know there was a fireman that had a compound fracture. I think only two or three other people had to go to the hospital. Everyone else was pretty much like walking wounded. They were covered in ash like they had snow, or they came out of the freezer. They were all white.
- Janet McDonnell: Were they coming over on all kinds of boats as well as the ferries here?
- Chris Murphy: I really couldn't tell, because I was only in the parking lot, and I don't know who brought them over here. It might have been that the staff of the Park Service brought them. I'm not sure of that.

Janet McDonnell: So, when you showed up, who did you report to? What assignment were you given?

Chris Murphy: I was told to go outside and go down to Post Three area, which is on the other side, it's on this side of the bridge because the far side, which is called Post Four, where you check in, that was a madhouse. The Jersey City Police Department wanted to come in. New Jersey State Police wanted to come in. Port Authority Police wanted to come in. Basically, everybody wanted to get in here for what reasons we don't know. Basically, everybody thought that they were running the show. It was a little confusing who was, you know, I mean.

Chris Murphy: But basically, we closed the gate. Shut the gate. We had some guys with shotguns out there because ourselves, we didn't know what was going on. We didn't know how many more attacks would take place. So basically, there were a lot of rumors going around that there were 10,000 dead. And then it went up to 20,000, but they weren't getting any more casualties. They did, they had busses come in to take them out to the ambulances.

Janet McDonnell: I've not come across the bridge. I always come from the ferry.

Chris Murphy: It's a narrow bridge.

Janet McDonnell: So, if you just sort of lay it out geographically for me. The ambulances were on the other side of the bridge or running along the bridge?

Chris Murphy: They were on the mainland and there's a small access road, a narrow access road to get to Jersey City Liberty State Park to here. And they were all lined on both sides of the road.

Janet McDonnell: Okay.

Chris Murphy: And then we have a little guard shack out there and then we have a fence.

Janet McDonnell: And that's what you closed?

Chris Murphy: Yes, that's what we closed down. And then the bridge is about a half a mile long. That's the only vehicle access to the island. So about 200 casualties left, and I guess it was like I said, it was pretty crazy because people, we heard rumors that more buildings were falling. And the Port Authority police were coming here saying that they thought their dead were here, but no bodies were brought here. So, they had enough ambulances, enough water. They must have brought about three or four truckloads of water and soda, but there wasn't anyone to give the water to. No one ever came.

- Chris Murphy: So I worked until about 12:00 and I guess about dusk they realized that there wasn't going to be any casualties coming so what they did is all of the ambulances went over, they went north through the park, Liberty State Park, to the old railroad terminal. They use it to sell the Circle Line tickets now. And the Salvation Army set up a post there.
- Janet McDonnell: So, at what point was it determined that this wouldn't be a morgue site after all? I mean at what point did they pull those refrigerator trucks out do you recall?
- Chris Murphy: Well, the refrigerator trucks were here for a week or two. They brought them in the back, north of the island here. So, they had two here and they had maybe two or three in the main parking lot over near the park on the mainland. They didn't know what to expect, really.
- Janet McDonnell: Well, I guess that makes sense because they were still hoping for, they were still digging at Ground Zero.
- Chris Murphy: What happened was is we have a boat, a small boat here, a police boat, so we were taking people back and forth, you know, supplies. I mean the EMTs brought over oxygen. They brought over supplies, and then one of our bigger boats from Jamaica Bay came here. And that could take about 30 people at a time. And they were running back and forth, constantly. Just basically, our agency for this first couple of weeks was used to bring other agencies back and forth. I mean Ellis Island is a, I think it is a pretty strategic area because your kind of a distance from the mainland. You're protected. They did a lot of staging here. A lot of big wigs and the New Jersey State Police, Park Service, this was a staging area for them. They have a cafeteria here that stayed open 24 hours-a-day for us. We have a lot of resources here. We have a lot of fuel, a lot of diesel fuel, so they used this as a staging area, basically.
- Janet McDonnell: Did you get the sense that that coordination worked pretty well, I mean the interagency cooperation?
- Chris Murphy: It's something we talked about a lot. You can plan for certain things and disasters, but when it comes down to it you really couldn't plan for something like that. I mean it was such a mass amount of - you're trying to get information, trying to decipher what's right and wrong. And then they were talking about Washington, D.C., the Statue of Liberty, the officers that were working here at the time said a plane flew right over the Statue about maybe 100 feet off of the torch and it just shook everything. There were other planes in the air, too. So, no telling how many planes that, when they shut everything down, if there was a plane heading for the Statue.

- Janet McDonnell: What was the most challenging thing, not just that first day, but I guess probably in the days afterwards as well in responding to all of this?
- Chris Murphy: I think the long hours. The first two or three weeks I was getting, I was working about 90-100 hours overtime. Some of these guys were working even more than that. I normally work a four-day week, four 10-hour days, and for the first three weeks I was working like seven days a week almost, 12-, 13-, 14-hour days. So, you know, it takes a toll, plus I was in the middle of a move. I was moving from Edison down to Toms River, so I had to do that and still maintain a family and everything.
- Janet McDonnell: How has your job changed since then? Or has the way you view your job changed?
- Chris Murphy: I think I'm very lucky. I mean I couldn't—there's a lot of my friends that worked over there in the World Trade Center financial area. And I thank God none of them got injured. But, you know, I could have been working that day. And I could have been in the Statue and one of those planes could have hit the Statue or my brother could have been at the World Trade Center working. I think, I don't know. The Statue itself, the whole island was closed for about three months. And it made us think about how vulnerable we actually are. How can someone get on a plane and fly something like that into a building without any ifs, ands, or buts?
- Janet McDonnell: Have you seen any changes in your interaction with the public? Do you think the way the public views Park Police has changed at all?
- Chris Murphy: I think people have more of an understanding towards us. They do treat us—well, in the beginning it was them on the band wagon, you know, "God bless America," "You guys are doing a great job." Slowly they're gone back a little bit, which I understand. But its—people haven't really complained that the Statue is still closed. They're kind of happy that it's closed, because they say they don't want to be in it if something happens. You can't really argue with that.
- Janet McDonnell: Did you get the sense—I guess I would just like sort of a, granted you were outside, is that correct? You said Post Three and it sounds like you were primarily sort of securing that area.
- Chris Murphy: The back door.
- Janet McDonnell: Yes. And so maybe you won't be able to answer this, but I'm trying to get sort of a feel for what it must have been like here, to get a sense of was it calm? Was it well organized? Just to get a picture.

- Chris Murphy: I think at my level, like the private, regular police officer, it was, I mean we were just told to pretty much don't let anyone in the gate. I don't know what management was doing at the time. But they had more to worry about than who's at the gate. But considering everything and everyone thinking the worst, I think it ran pretty smooth. Like I said, you can train for so much, but when it comes down to something like that you don't expect something like that. Maybe a fire, you know, because we do practice for a fire here for an evacuation of the museum or the Statue, but not when you have 16 square acres to secure down.
- Janet McDonnell: That's right. You can have contingency plans, but none of them would have covered an event like this, I suppose.
- Chris Murphy: And from here we watched the people walking over the bridges going home. It got to a point where every aircraft that was like say unauthorized, they sent up military aircraft to make sure that they were supposed to be there.
- Janet McDonnell: Is there a moment or, you know, or a person or an image from that day that just really stands out in your mind?
- Chris Murphy: From that day? Well, the image just not being able to see the city at all. As far as the eye could see into the horizon, just smoke, and probably just, probably the people. What happened was back here there's a sidewalk that, a little tunnel that goes out to the parking lot. And that's where they brought the people out. And the local concession there was giving them shirts to put on, because the people were just covered in ash. They were taking their clothes off. And the concession person gave them T-shirts to wear. Just their faces, they were like in shock.
- Janet McDonnell: It seems sort of surreal.
- Chris Murphy: Yes, they all had blank looks on their faces. They didn't say a word to anybody. They were just in shock. So, I think that's what stuck out the most. They kind of looked like they were just waking up after a long sleep. They didn't know really what was going on.
- Janet McDonnell: Well, is there anything that I haven't asked about that you want to add to the record?
- Chris Murphy: I don't know. Just the harbor was closed for about three weeks. No one was allowed to traverse. And some of those sanctions are still in order.
- Janet McDonnell: And you're still on longer shifts, too, as I understand.
- Chris Murphy: Yes, I work about 60-70 hours a week.

Janet McDonnell: Well, I appreciate you taking the time.

END OF TAPE