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Sergeant Ronald Galey
December 17, 2001

Interview conducted by Janet McDonnell
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INTERVIEW WITH SERGEANT RONALD GALEY
NATIONAL PARK POLICE AVIATION UNIT

CONDUCTED BY DR. JANET MCDONNELL
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DECEMBER 17, 2001

START OF TAPE

- Janet McDonnell: If you'd begin just by explaining what your role here is with the Park Police Aviation Unit, a little background about yourself.
- Ronald Galey: I'm assigned as a section pilot. And I have a collateral duty of budget and finance for the section. And I guess as seniority goes, I'm the senior pilot here.
- Janet McDonnell: Well, maybe if you just started by telling me how you first learned about the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, and we'll just sort of go somewhat chronologically?
- Ronald Galey: That morning of September 11th, we were actually outside in the hangar. There were four of us cleaning the hangar, washing the floors. It was a nice day. The door was open. There were some people from the Uniformed Health Services from DOD out in the field practicing for the IMF demonstration that was coming up. So, we were all busy doing little chores and training. And one of the section members, and I really don't remember who, it might have been even Sergeant Stasulli had been watching CNN and saw, they came on with the plane hitting the World Trade Center. And he yelled at us, "You guys have got to come in here and see this."
- Ronald Galey: And we dropped what we were doing and came in there. When we first looked at it, we thought, collectively, we were thinking, well, that's a strange accident to have happened, but we didn't know it was a commercial airliner. And while we were still watching the coverage, the second aircraft came around. We saw that live and it hit. And it seemed to me it wasn't but a matter of minutes after that, I mean we just looked at each other and we knew that, you know, that we were going to have a problem.
- Ronald Galey: And I went back out in the hangar, actually, and heard the explosion and saw the smoke coming up from the Pentagon area. Right about the same time, the aircraft crash phone from National [Airport] rang. And I picked that up and the air traffic controller said that they had had a 757 crash somewhere in the vicinity of the Pentagon. By that time, all of us were scrambling getting equipment, getting ready to launch the 412s, which we did in a matter of a couple of minutes because from our timeline, we were probably on the scene, on the ground, 3-4 minutes after the initial impact, so that was pretty good response.
- Janet McDonnell: Well, tell me a little bit more. You were on Eagle One?

Ronald Galey: Eagle One. That was myself, Sergeant John Marsh, and Officer John Dillon.

Janet McDonnell: And you were piloting?

Ronald Galey: Yes, I was the pilot. And John was the paramedic. And John Dillon was also a paramedic, but he was in training at the time.

Janet McDonnell: Okay.

Ronald Galey: And when we arrived on the scene, actually, there was a lot of smoke and fire. Eagle Two had already picked a landing zone on Washington Boulevard and it was shooting its approach. There was some discussion in the cockpit, well, where's the 757? The damage, initially, didn't look that great. It certainly didn't look like a 757 had hit it. There was absolutely nothing that we could see that was noticeable of any kind of an aircraft on the ground at all, but there was a lot of fire, a lot of smoke. I could see, I saw a couple of people on fire running away from the building, initially.

Ronald Galey: While we were doing all of that the tower called me. We were still circling.

Janet McDonnell: But you hadn't set down yet.

Ronald Galey: No, we were still circling, and the tower called and said that they had a report of another aircraft 20 minutes out, inbound, an unauthorized aircraft inbound. So, we just kind of registered that in the back of our heads and continued to circle. We were waiting for, we actually picked out another LZ that we could land in to pick up more patients, because we were getting various reports that we had anywhere from 11-20 more patients to be MEDEVAC'D. There was a lot of confusion.

Janet McDonnell: Where were you getting those reports from?

Ronald Galey: From fire ground information. So, it was a lot of confusion at first. And somewhere in the midst of all of the talking back and forth that my paramedic was doing with the ground people, the air traffic controller at National Airport or Reagan National Airport, advised me that, and it was just kind of like a happenstance voice, he goes, "oh and by the way, we're abandoning the tower. You've got control of the air space." And I'm thinking this is just what I need to do right now.

Janet McDonnell: Explain to me a little bit about what that means?

Ronald Galey: Well, what that means is he is literally turning over their function to me, to our aircraft. We were going to be in control of that air space.

Janet McDonnell: That air space for the D.C. area?

Ronald Galey: Yes. And I immediately asked him if the air space had been closed down, and he said yes. And he gave me a frequency of 125, 65 to contact NORAD. The NORAD had taken over command of the national air space. I knew that the only time that that happens is in a time of war. So, we were obviously at a high DEFCON level.

Janet McDonnell: But that simplified the task a little bit better, didn't it?

Ronald Galey: Oh, yes. Nobody was going to come in or out of the air space unless we asked NORAD for authorization to do that without being shot down. And that was as simple as that, other than the military, of course.

Ronald Galey: So, the next event was that we landed, right after we had gotten control of the air space, we landed. And my, the two paramedics had deployed from the aircraft. Right at that time, we got another update that the unauthorized aircraft was about 10 minutes out. And just while we were on approach getting ready to land, there were two F-16s that came screaming by our aircraft.

Janet McDonnell: There were two of them. I didn't realize there were two.

Ronald Galey: Yes, two of them. And they had been preceded about 10 minutes before that by two others that were really high that I saw going across. But these two guys came in low. And apparently, they were a flight, had been a flight of four. Two of them peeled off to stay in D.C. and the other two went up in Pittsburgh, quite earlier.

Janet McDonnell: But you didn't get any radio communications about them being in the area, right?

Ronald Galey: No, NORAD didn't tell me that they were coming. But neither did I nor would I expect them to do that. They're not going to share everything with us. And they knew we were busy. They knew what we were doing.

Janet McDonnell: But NORAD knew that you were there.

Ronald Galey: Yes, right.

Janet McDonnell: Okay.

Ronald Galey: My crew came back, and John Marsh advised me that no, in fact, that the only patients that were to be MEDEVAC'D had been MEDEVAC'D and we were to do a command and control function, but to standby, that they

were still bringing people out. And I was thinking at the time there was no way I could do both jobs. I can't do this command and control, and also do MEDEVACS and rescues and whatever else they wanted. We're going need some help. And I asked John to get a hold of our dispatcher to contact the Metropolitan Police and ask them if they could get their aircraft up in the air. And they've got a smaller aircraft that wasn't capable of doing MEDEVACS and such, but they were capable of doing the command and control function. And they did launch their aircraft and took over the command and control function.

Janet McDonnell: This is D.C. Metropolitan Police.

Ronald Galey: Right. And that allowed us to do a lot more with our aircrafts, stand by for MEDEVACS, and in fact, we ended up taking the fire chief and a couple of other people to do a command and control function. He ran the fire ground for quite some time.

Janet McDonnell: How long would you - I realize things were happening very quickly, but how long would you say that you had the command and control function?

Ronald Galey: A couple of hours.

Janet McDonnell: Oh, really?

Ronald Galey: The command and control function for the air space, probably no longer than 30 minutes.

Janet McDonnell: Okay. But you're talking about?

Ronald Galey: But the command and control function for the fire department lasted pretty much the entire day and some into the next day, actually, too. So that was pretty much it for the scene. I mean there's a lot of little whole communications back and forth in there. The FBI almost immediately when we got on the scene, the FBI contacted and asked us to turn on the microwave downlink because they were capturing the video. So, they were right on top of it. They were there almost instantly, and they set up a command post, which is actually pretty impressive.

Janet McDonnell: They set up a command post there at the Pentagon.

Ronald Galey: Immediately, well, right up the hill.

Janet McDonnell: Okay.

Ronald Galey: It was in a trailer up the hill, wasn't it, Bernie, the FBI?

Janet McDonnell: Not too far.

Ronald Galey: Not too far. And they did that quite quickly. So really, it was very much organized chaos. The fire department did a wonderful job, Arlington did, of coming in and setting up their incident command structure.

Janet McDonnell: And what kind of coordination went on there between you and the Arlington Fire Department?

Ronald Galey: Right, we could talk to all of the fire departments. We have all of the frequencies. So, we were in contact with Arlington, and Alexandria, and some of the other fire departments that responded. And it was interesting that some of the ground fire departments couldn't talk to each other. They could talk to us and we would relay that information. So, there was a communications, there was a mutual communications problem there that they had on the ground, but obviously along with the post incident stuff they're going to address that. We had no problem talking to anyone. We had all of the frequencies in the aircraft.

Janet McDonnell: So, you had started to tell me about taking the fire marshal?

Ronald Galey: The fire chief.

Janet McDonnell: The fire chief, excuse me.

Ronald Galey: Well, they were having a lot of difficulty getting their equipment into the proper locations to fight the fire. As problematic as the fire was, it was added to by the fact that the impact of the aircraft actually went in four levels through the Pentagon. And it happened to be in some of the areas that they had put a steeped roof on and the fire was all on the roof. And they had a real difficult time doing it. And the only way he could really get a real feel for it was up in the air in the aircraft. So, he probably made 4-5 flights, an hour each, to position his various firemen and firefighting apparatus to get to the fire.

Janet McDonnell: What was he able, I mean was he actually able to see like flames from the roof? To see?

Ronald Galey: Oh, yes. And what helped them tremendously was the infrared unit on the aircraft. We gave him the infrared image and the imager was able to see through the roof and show him where the hot spots were, where the fire was underneath that hadn't broken out yet. And that was what he was really, really interested in, also.

Janet McDonnell: So, a difficult situation to fly in?

Ronald Galey: Yes, there was a lot of smoke.

Janet McDonnell: Smoke and are there currents set off, too, by the fire?

Ronald Galey: Not so much that, but it was, visibility was a problem. And there was a lot of concern about what kind of smoke we were flying through, too. I mean what we were breathing in.

Janet McDonnell: Okay.

Ronald Galey: And in fact, we did find out there was a lot of hazardous materials down there burning, so.

Janet McDonnell: So that was like the next 4-5 hours you were taking him up?

Ronald Galey: Right.

Janet McDonnell: Were there some other missions in that time?

Ronald Galey: There were missions for the FBI. There were missions for the Pentagon staff, itself. There were missions for just about anybody that you can think of that would have any concern wanting to, it was almost endless. I mean it was like, the FBI, the Department of Defense. We took the Army up. We were the only aircraft there for quite some time. The military aircraft actually didn't start arriving until late that afternoon.

Janet McDonnell: Okay, so for about 4-5 hours. Are there any of those missions that you can talk about on the record?

Ronald Galey: Well, yes, I mean they were, for the FBI, most of them were documenting the scene. For the Department of Defense, a lot of it was, again, they were documenting.

Janet McDonnell: Documenting with video cameras?

Ronald Galey: Right, everything. Video cameras, still cameras. Some of them were, you know, one or two of them were officials who just wanted to see it for themselves so they could better allocate their units. We took up the commander of the 82nd Airborne so he could deploy his troops around. It was just about anything you could think of to use an aerial platform for was used for that day.

Janet McDonnell: Well, tell me then about, I mean you were onsite then at least until late afternoon. And then what did you? Did you come back? I mean was that sort of it for the day?

- Ronald Galey: We had made a conscious decision that we were going to, we, the Park Police aircraft crews, we were going to do our mission and we were going to get the heck out of there and let the military do theirs. That there was, there was just not, we wanted to come back here not knowing if this was over with and stage, replenish, refuel, and make sure we were fresh for whatever else was coming.
- Janet McDonnell: Sure.
- Ronald Galey: And in the middle of all of this, we'd had, we were given the heads up that we were going to have to evacuate the Secretary. And we had to keep an aircraft ready to do that in case they were going to evacuate her by air. And I think they finally, they didn't do it by air. They did it by ground.
- Janet McDonnell: Right. Let's go on to the following weeks and the aftermath. Did your tasks change at all?
- Ronald Galey: Oh, it changed dramatically. It changed dramatically from 9:30 on the 11th until today and probably forever.
- Janet McDonnell: And what are some of the?
- Ronald Galey: It's a reprioritizing of what we're going to do. I mean in the past, aerial checks of the monuments and memorials weren't done routinely, because they were then P56. And we tried.
- Janet McDonnell: What does that mean?
- Ronald Galey: The prohibitive area around the Capital and the White House. It's a little - you have to get special permission.
- Janet McDonnell: That's called P56?
- Ronald Galey: P56, right. But now that's done very routinely. You know, there was a lot of attention down here trying to, not to disturb the tourists and such. Now it's, well, they're going to have to put up with some disservice. They're going to have to put up with some noise and such. The security is going to be paramount. So, it's a shifting of understanding within, not only up over here, but within the Park Service, too. I mean it's, yes, we're trying to be there for the people and do the land management, but at the same time now we have this overwhelming issue of security. They've got to do it safely.
- Ronald Galey: So, we're doing that. We're checking the bridges, every single bridge, river crossing, Cabin John Bridge, Wilson Bridge, all of these bridges. Then we're chasing around, Ryder Rental Trucks as they—every Ryder and

Hertz Rental Truck coming into the city was stopped. Everyone in the city was stopped and searched. So that kept us busy. A part of.

Janet McDonnell: How would you be involved with that?

Ronald Galey: Spotting them. We were spotting them and bringing the ground resources in to bear.

Janet McDonnell: I didn't realize that.

Ronald Galey: Oh, yes. The 12th and 13th, we had the Secret Service - at this point they were no longer requests. It was Secret Service orders. We kept one of these 412s was on station above the city 24 hours a day. We would relieve each other on station. They wanted an aircraft up with two agents in it round the clock. And that's very, very tiring and demanding on the equipment.

Ronald Galey: After about two days of 24 hours a day being up in the air, that went back to checks every hour, and then checks every other hour, and then as we got further away from the 11th, they started winding it down as the likelihood of more attacks became less and less.

Janet McDonnell: When you say checks, you mean these patrols?

Ronald Galey: Patrols. Well, it was, as you can well imagine, we were going from report, report, report. You know, check this person. This person is on route. Check this car. We got a report of this. And they had, you know, they had a list of 600 suspects that they wanted to be stopped and detained as a part of all of this. And the FBI and the CIA came up with that list instantaneously. And 600 suspects can yield 1,200 cars. And it just went on, and on, and on, for days, and days, and days.

Janet McDonnell: Sure, sure. So how well did that coordination work with the FBI and the Secret Service?

Ronald Galey: Very well. Very well. All of the agencies, in my estimation, that used to be very, they squabbled a lot. The FBI and Secret Service are notorious for protecting their turf, so to speak. All of that fell by the wayside. They were really working well together. So much different atmosphere now than it was before the 11th. I mean people aren't so territorial. Agencies aren't so territorial.

Ronald Galey: But at the same time, and this is just subjective. I mean I've been on the department now for 30 years. So, it's, you know, you're going to have some people that just don't ever get it. But by and large, I even see a

startling change in the Park Service. I mean the Park Service is now, a lot of admission that, yes, we've got a problem here.

Janet McDonnell: All right.

END OF SIDE A

START OF SIDE B

Ronald Galey: Okay. I started seeing a radical change in direction with the Park Service particularly after meeting the new director. And she was very concerned about the security and law enforcement and protection. And in the past, although it was a concern, there wasn't a lot of emphasis, a lot of resources placed toward it. But now there are. And I mean, for instance, the Statue of Liberty is still closed and they're not going to open that up until they have good security in place there. And that's going to cost a lot of money, but they're finding the money for these things now.

Ronald Galey: And it's, these are things that as a law enforcement agency, not only us, but the law enforcement Rangers have been screaming about for a long time. They said, "Look, we have a lot of vulnerable, very vulnerable in these areas. And we've really got to protect these resources that we have here." It's just like everything else. Priorities shift when something happens. I think that this priority though is probably going to stay in place for a long, long time. This is not going to go away in anybody's mind anytime soon.

Janet McDonnell: But how much of a challenge is that for you in your budget and finance capacity? I mean there was no, as I understand it there was no emergency funding authorization that would cover some of the cost of, say the extra duty hours that you displayed?

Ronald Galey: There still isn't. We're actually cashing checks we have no money in the bank for yet. There's just an assumption that well, we have to do this. This has to be done. Somebody is something, the famous somebody has to come up with the money. To a certain point, we've been mandated by Interior to do it. And Interior is hoping that part of that 40-billion-dollar package is going to sit down. But that's so far above me that. No, to answer your question, no. There were obviously no resources in place to possibly contend with what happened on the 11th. And we're still playing catch up and probably will for a year or two.

Janet McDonnell: And as I also understand, you're flying with three person crews now, too, which add to your costs.

- Ronald Galey: It adds to the cost because we really don't have the manpower to do it, so the extra person has to come out and be paid overtime, essentially, to do that. But on the 11th, the three man or three person crews proved to be invaluable. And given the circumstances of that day and what we might find ourselves in the future, we just made a decision here we were just going to stay with the three person crews. These aircrafts are so sophisticated, and they have so many great resources on them that two people can't possibly, the pilot is supposed to be flying the aircraft. And in this air space around here, that is a full-time attention job.
- Janet McDonnell: Sure.
- Ronald Galey: With all of the other resources that are on that helicopter, the microwave downlink, the flares, the video cameras, the recorders, the moving map displays, and the ton of radio communications, just too much for one person to do.
- Janet McDonnell: You mentioned commanding the scene, command and control on the scene, too.
- Ronald Galey: Exactly. So, we've gone with three person crews and we're striving and bending over backwards, and wearing people out, trying to keep that with the thought that this is not over with yet. And so far, management has seen the same thing that we have seen, that this is an important function and they're going to try to maintain it as long as we can.
- Janet McDonnell: And then you saw that, I think you said you saw that even before September 11th, that Fran Mainella's administration, you know, has sort of increased the emphasis on security issues and law enforcement issues?
- Ronald Galey: Yes.
- Janet McDonnell: Someone told me the other day that he thought there was a problem in that Congress and OMB [Office of Management and Budget] as well probably haven't in the past viewed the National Park Service as a law enforcement agency or viewed the Department of the Interior as a law enforcement agency. And therefore, when it came to divvying up the pie, the money for things like security and law enforcement that we didn't get.
- Ronald Galey: I couldn't possibly speak to what the intent of Congress would be in that or how they would do things. I know that I can tell you emphatically that many of the folks in Congress, many of the Senators and Congressmen on the Interior Appropriations Committee have supported us 100 percent in getting aircraft. So, somebody up there thinks it's important enough to do that. I mean Congress, literally, has supplied this department with its fleet of aircraft, special appropriations, and in seeing that these things are

funded properly to operate. So, in that regard, yes, they do see that as an important function, or they wouldn't be appropriating eight and a half million dollars at a time to do it. As to what the entity of the Appropriations Committee, how they view Interior, I don't know.

Janet McDonnell: Well, I didn't really mean it that narrowly. Just to rephrase, whether you think there's enough, whether it's public perception, enough of an understanding that the National Park Service and Interior Department do perform these missions? I mean people think of the Park Service and they think of Park Rangers and they think of beautiful scenery. And I guess I'm talking about a level of awareness whether.

Ronald Galey: Well, I guess subjectively speaking and only an opinion after being on the Park Service for 30 years, is I think that the Park Service's view of that has been that way for a long time.

Janet McDonnell: Okay.

Ronald Galey: I mean I've had an opportunity, a very nice opportunity over years to talk to most all of the Secretaries, because we transport them in the aircraft. And most of them, for the large part are just down to earth people, like you and I, and we'll sit there and share their opinions. I know the current Secretary absolutely believes that there is an important law enforcement mission within the Department of Interior.

Ronald Galey: Again, I think the Park Service's traditional view is that the interpretive Ranger, and the beautiful scenery, and tourists picnicking in the park, and that's what we're here for. But and this is where thinking might part a little bit, but we also have to ensure that that's going to remain that way. It's going to remain pristine. And that means you're going to have to enforce the laws. And the further we get along the timeline here, the more crowded these parks are, and with people comes crime. And now we have to add in terrorism into the big mixing bowl, and holy mackerel, now what have you got? You've got a real mess.

Ronald Galey: And somebody a long time ago had the wisdom to give a Ranger a gun. And thank goodness for it, because the law enforcement Rangers are pretty much out there by themselves in some of these other bigger parks. And along came the Park Police. Actually, George Washington formed us back in 1786 and we've been here ever since. Changed names a few times, because the national parks have moved in closer to the cities, and with that, you're going to have to have almost like a city type police department to deal with the crimes, the drugs, and everything else that's in the park.

Ronald Galey: And it's a difficult pill for the Park Service to swallow, and I understand that, to make the admission, yes, there's crime in our parks, but there is.

And the goal is to try to keep it out or at least under control. So now we have terrorism. And we have targets? You bet we have targets. We have some grand targets that they would love to make a statement, not only here, I mean all over the country. So.

Janet McDonnell: Which leads me to my final question. I just wondered if you had, I mean you shared a few things just now. But any other thoughts on what we learned from this response? From the response, not from the attack, itself, but the way the Park Service, or the aviation unit, or you, personally, learned. What might you have done differently?

Ronald Galey: Here's what I know after being an employee of the government for 30 years. We'll wait and see. Everybody is reacting to a recent event. Will we have learned anything? Ask me a year from now and I'll tell you.

Janet McDonnell: Okay. That's a valid point. Well, I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me.

Ronald Galey: Sure.

END OF TAPE