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**Major Thomas Wilkins**  
**May 8, 2002**

Interview conducted by Janet McDonnell  
Transcribed by Unknown  
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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

SEPTEMBER 11<sup>th</sup> ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

MAJOR THOMAS WILKINS, U.S. PARK POLICE

Commander, New York Field Office

Conducted by Janet A. McDonnell, Ph.D.

May 8, 2002

New York, New York

## START OF TAPE

- Janet McDonnell: I'm Janet McDonnell and I'm here with Major Wilkins to talk about how the Park Police responded to the September attacks up here in New York. To start, if you would just explain what your position is here. Give me a general idea of what your responsibilities are, and how the Park Police up here is organized.
- Thomas Wilkins: Okay, I'm in charge of the New York Field Office - I'm the commander of the New York Field Office. And the New York Field Office of the Park Police provides law enforcement services at Gateway National Recreation Area units, Jamaica Bay, and Staten Island. They also provide law enforcement at the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. We work with the superintendents of those units, but we have our own line of authority back to Washington, D.C. I report directly to the deputy chief of the field offices division for the Park Police. At the Statue of Liberty, we have been providing law enforcement services there since about 1995, I believe, was when we transitioned from law enforcement rangers. There are still three law enforcement rangers that work at the Statue of Liberty that have been integrated into our operations there.
- Janet McDonnell: How and when did you first become aware of the attacks on the World Trade Center?
- Thomas Wilkins: On that Tuesday morning - I live in Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island, and we were scheduled for a housing inspection, so I was still home. I was dressed and ready to go to work but I was waiting for the housing inspections which we were scheduled to begin at nine o'clock that morning. And my wife and I were watching the morning news shows when about quarter of nine they broke in with reports that a plane had struck one of the World Trade Center buildings and showed a clip of it with smoke pouring out of the building. And at first, they didn't know the nature of what had happened, just that a plane had struck the building. I grabbed a pair of binoculars and my wife and I went up to the overlook, which is right at the end of the street where we live and has a view of downtown Manhattan.
- Thomas Wilkins: And this particular day it was a clear bright sunny day because we had rain showers the night before so it was just crystal clear, a beautiful blue sky, and we could see the smoke and fire pouring out of the one building. And I had my police radio with me, I also had a New York City police radio, so I was monitoring some of their radio traffic, but there really wasn't anything significant being said other than routine words and messages. While we were standing there watching, Captain [Neal] Lauro, who is my district commander whose office is on Staten Island, and Lieutenant [Dave] Buckley, who's the station commander for the Staten Island office

and also the SWAT team commander, came up to the overlook when they had heard the news. And they were standing there, and we were watching, looking out over the city.

Thomas Wilkins: And at some point, I looked over to the left and I could see a United Airlines plane, appeared to be fairly low but it really didn't strike me at the time because that's where Newark Airport is located. And I just assumed it was a flight coming out of Newark, taking off, and making a turn to head up north and either go up the East River or up the Hudson and head north, so it really didn't strike me as being out of the ordinary. But as the plane continued, we noticed it wasn't climbing very quickly and again that didn't strike me particularly at the time. But then we could see that it made a turn and headed straight into the other tower and then we watched it strike the tower and once we saw it strike the tower, then absolutely we knew something really was going on that was not an accident and immediately started taking different measures. Captain Lauro was contacting the Statue of Liberty and we were making arrangements to call people in back to work and it was a delay of a couple minutes when we finally heard the explosion, because of the distance, and actually heard the explosion of the plane hitting the building.

Thomas Wilkins: So, at that point we immediately went to work doing what needed to be done. I went back to my house briefly for a minute and the Park Service crew was there and wanted to start the housing inspection. I said "Absolutely not. We've got something going on here and we just can't do it today." So, Captain Lauro and Lieutenant Buckley eventually headed out to Ellis Island. And I went back to the office first, took some measures there, started working with the Coast Guard in setting up security because their offices were located at Fort Wadsworth, that's the headquarters for the Coast Guard in New York harbor.

Janet McDonnell: You mean security for Fort Wadsworth?

Thomas Wilkins: Shutting down Fort Wadsworth. We immediately closed the back gate, that's our first security measure so that you only have access, coming in and out of one gate, and put officers on the gate. Normally during the day there's no one on the gate. We have a guard that's on the gate overnight but during the day the gate's open. We immediately put a police officer on the gate and started instituting security measures. We assigned one of the lieutenants, Lieutenant Waite, to be a liaison with the park and with the Coast Guard because Lieutenant Buckley, who normally would do that, would have to go out to Ellis Island as commander of the SWAT team. And at the same time, over in Brooklyn –

Janet McDonnell: I'm sorry, what park do you mean that he was liaison with?

Thomas Wilkins: With the superintendent at Staten Island unit, which is located at Fort Wadsworth. He would work with them because any of the security requests the Coast Guard had would have to be coordinated with the superintendent. We can't just arbitrarily start doing things without working with the superintendent, so his job was to work with the superintendent and the Coast Guard security liaison to institute whatever security measures were going to be taken. At some point I called Washington, D.C. to advise them of what we were doing, and we were getting reports over the radio, eventually, that things were happening in D.C. and again the timeline there is. I don't have a good recollection of what was happening in what particular order. Eventually, I went over to the Coast Guard command post. Actually, one of the first things I did - I went down to the gas station and gassed up my car because I didn't have a full tank. I didn't know what was going to be happening and I wanted to have a full tank to get around. Then I ended up at the Coast Guard command post and checking in there to see what they were doing and to see what was going on. While I was in there, they were conducting a briefing for their personnel, their command staff, and that was when the first Tower collapsed. By then it was probably around 10 o'clock in the morning.

Thomas Wilkins: I left there, went back up to the overlook. You could see all the smoke and dust, it completely obliterated lower Manhattan. At some point, when the second tower collapsed, I decided that things were on track with my operation at that point and I headed into the city to go to the NYPD command post at One Police Plaza.

Janet McDonnell: Did you have some sort of existing plan that would lead you to do that? How did you decide to do that?

Thomas Wilkins: Well, normally, on a major event we have command posts established and will routinely send people to them. Because of the magnitude of what was going on here, everyone was pretty much busy doing stuff and I felt that I could still carry out my responsibilities yet start the liaison with the city police by going to their command post. The other command post would have been the Office of Emergency Management command post which was in Number 7 World Trade Center and that was right next to where the buildings were. So that was not a possibility. I ended up driving into the city. As I left Fort Wadsworth and I went to get on the Verrazano Bridge and they had all the traffic stopped on the Verrazano Bridge and the only traffic going across the bridge were fire trucks, off-duty firemen, and off-duty cops coming into work. So, I got across the bridge and was heading towards the city -

Janet McDonnell: Were you in your police vehicle?

- Thomas Wilkins: I was in my police car. There's a section of elevated roadway called the (Prospect?) Expressway. It goes through Brooklyn and it's just south of Manhattan. And as I was driving down the—I was seeing ash just fall out of the sky almost like gray snowflakes, just hitting the windshield and dispersing and it just struck me as very surreal. As I got down the—there are two ways that you can go at that point. You can either take the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel which takes you right into lower Manhattan or you can go up to the Brooklyn Bridge which takes you and dumps you out pretty much right at One Police Plaza. Most of the traffic was going into Brooklyn Battery Tunnel, but because that went right into where the Towers had collapsed, I felt there was no point in me going that way because I would have just gotten in the way. So, I went up, took the Brooklyn Bridge in, and pulled into One Police Plaza and went into the building.
- Thomas Wilkins: At that point they had the elevators shut off - I guess they had some power outages - and somebody else who I met up with in the building, we walked up the eight flights to the command post and settled in. When I walked into the room, it really was pretty chaotic with what was going on, with obviously a tremendous loss of life, both civilian and members of the Police Department and Fire Department. No one really had any numbers at that point. It was obvious to everyone that many people had died.
- Janet McDonnell: You, in effect, represented the Park Service there. Were there other federal agencies—
- Thomas Wilkins: Not initially. Primarily it was state and local agencies, mainly NYPD because it's such a large organization, each borough, each specialized unit has its own representative there. EMS from the Fire Department was represented and there were some other people that eventually showed up there from New Jersey Office of Emergency Management eventually showed up there. But it was primarily police - transit police, housing, just the different people from NYPD.
- Janet McDonnell: Did you have a command post, maybe you didn't call it that, for your own field office?
- Thomas Wilkins: No, because we continued operating under our normal structure, where we have a dispatcher, Captain [Marty] Zweig was in Brooklyn and he was operating there. He was in charge, so he was really taking the requests and calls that came into Brooklyn. At some point I guess we got a request from Federal Hall to send people down to Federal Hall and he took care of that request. I was trying to make calls to D.C. and eventually at some point I called Philadelphia. I spoke to Dale Ditmanson who is the assistant regional director for operations, to let him know what we were doing. People were asking if they needed any assistance from the Park Service

and at that point, the resources of the city were such that they could provide whatever they needed. They were getting donations from commercial construction companies to get the equipment, but they were setting up different staging areas and one staging area was Floyd Bennett Field, which is in Gateway National Recreation Area. So, we were working with them. NYPD Special Operations is located there so they wanted additional security there so they placed some of their officers at the front gate and we placed some of our officers there since it was Park Service jurisdiction just to make sure we could help control the access in.

Janet McDonnell: How useful or valuable do you think it was that you were physically present in that operations center, your liaison role? What effect did that have on communications?

Thomas Wilkins: Well, I think it was important to have someone there because it was really the only direct point of communications with the city. The normal channels that we would use to communicate with the city by phone to their dispatch or to their borough commands really were not effective because they were overloaded. So, it was important to have someone there. It didn't necessarily have to be me - but at that point I felt that my two captains could handle their roles and that I could function just as well there as anywhere else and fill that liaison role. I felt that at that point, it was significant or important to have someone with decision making authority right there to make decisions right on the spot if any need to be made. And as it was there weren't many to be made. Still it was important to have that liaison with them. And it still was very difficult to hope to operate there because there was just so much chaos, just so much going on, they were completely overwhelmed by what had happened. And then eventually, later in the day, they started losing phone service. The main phone switch for Lower Manhattan was right next to the tower and got damaged when the tower collapsed and apparently, they started getting flooding in the basement and starting losing phone service. When one of the towers collapsed, we lost all phone service at Ft. Wadsworth because the AT&T switch was located in the basement of one of the Towers. So, we lost all our phone service at Ft. Wadsworth and the Coast Guard lost their phone service, so it really hampered the operations in that respect, but using our cell phones and land lines as much as possible. But there were a lot of technical problems.

Janet McDonnell: I do want to ask you a bit more about communications and radios and such in a minute. But before we leave that first day I'd actually like to go back to the point where you were standing at the overlook at Fort Wadsworth for a minute and just ask you some of the things that were going through your mind. Did you have a mental checklist of "This needs to be done, and this needs to be done," and did you make the decision to evacuate Statue

of Liberty and Ellis Island at that point - or I guess maybe that was the superintendent's decision.

Thomas Wilkins: Well, it was but it was sort of a simultaneous thing. We made the decision that we were going to do it and I believe the superintendent had already made the same decision and our staff were already in the process of doing that. Luckily, the Statue had not opened or received its first load of visitors yet. At that time they were able to turn the boat around and send it back because we usually don't receive the first visitors boat during those hours, during the fall until 9 o'clock so the 9 o'clock boat had not arrived yet so we were able to turn it back. So we did not have any visitors on the island. We had just the staff and contractors and those types of people on the island. And I believe they had already initiated evacuation procedures by the time the second plane hit. We were talking the same thing.

Janet McDonnell: Was it just obvious to everyone that Statue of Liberty could be a likely target?

Thomas Wilkins: To us, it was. We knew that the Statue of Liberty has been a focal point for political protests in the past and we knew that these people - well, not these people because we didn't know who had done this at the time - we knew that if they were attacking the World Trade Center that the Statue of Liberty certainly could be a target.

Janet McDonnell: Because its symbolic value is so great?

Thomas Wilkins: It is an international symbol of American values.

Janet McDonnell: You mentioned that you quickly contacted the Park Police headquarters in Washington. Was that contacting the chief command post or had that been established?

Thomas Wilkins: I don't think that had been established yet, just calling to the division commander and telling him what was going on in New York.

Janet McDonnell: Did you receive any guidance or was it just a matter of reporting "this is what we're doing?"

Thomas Wilkins: No, we didn't get any direction or guidance from D.C. We just did what we had to do and really, we didn't have a checklist, per-say, we just started doing what needed to be done.

Janet McDonnell: Well, let's go on and talk about communications for a minute, the problems with the land lines. You mentioned that you and your officers and staff had to rely more on cellular - I guess Nextel proved to be fairly



valuable - but can you talk to me a little bit about radio communications? I understand there were a couple systems, two different radio systems.

Thomas Wilkins: We operate on different radio systems at the Statue of Liberty than we operate on in the rest of New York. Park Service operations at Gateway are on a VHF band, meaning it's not compatible with the UHF band that the Statue uses. So, I'm not really sure - it certainly was difficult to communicate between the two though we did have the capabilities to operate on the UHF frequency from Brooklyn so we could - the dispatcher could talk to anybody at the Statue and Ellis, though individuals couldn't necessarily. Where I was, I couldn't use a radio inside the building, it wouldn't operate in there. I was pretty much restricted to trying to use the Nextel and the land lines.

Janet McDonnell: To carry on with that in a more general way, how effectively were you able to communicate with that with your station commanders?

Thomas Wilkins: I would say I was able to get through to them about 50 percent of the time.

Janet McDonnell: And with the Northeast regional office. You mentioned you called Dale Ditmanson—

Thomas Wilkins: I was able to get through to Dale with a little better success.

Janet McDonnell: With cellular, not with land lines.

Thomas Wilkins: Yeah.

Janet McDonnell: Okay, and you also mentioned that the U.S. Park Police headquarters. I'd like to hear a little bit more about coordination with other agencies. You mentioned the Coast Guard and then there were the Metropolitan Police. Were there any other federal agencies?

[Tape interruption]

Thomas Wilkins: There was a little bit of coordination, at that point it's more reaction. A lot of the coordination was going on, on the ground, at Ground Zero, and really didn't have a role there. Our main role was at Ellis Island serving as an evacuation point so I was relaying information I would get from them. If there was a firefighter or a police officer standing over there, then I could provide that information to the city so they could keep track of where their injured people were going. I did some liaison with the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration]. There was a question about planes that were in the air and whether or not they were authorized and there were some FAA reps at the command post. But, beyond that, I made them known of the availability of the resources of the Park Service but again it

was very minor compared to the availability of the resources of the city itself could muster.

Janet McDonnell: Would you just assess how effective or how smooth the evacuation process was from the Park Service sites, both the evacuation of Park Service employees and as well as the public? Do you feel that went fairly smoothly?

Thomas Wilkins: As far as I know, I wasn't there to see it actually take place, but I know it was accomplished fairly quickly as far as Statue of Liberty, they took everybody off the island. There was nobody left on the island and then we just maintained a secure perimeter with boats. We sent all our boats up from Rockaway where the Marine unit is located that controls Gateway and sent them all up to the Statue of Liberty. The Statue of Liberty went well as far as I know. The Ellis Island operation, from what Captain Lauro was telling me, was going smoothly. There were time they needed certain equipment and I would pass that along to the representatives of the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management that were there at the command post but really that was about it.

Janet McDonnell: Where you involved in the decision to use Ellis Island as a triage site?

Thomas Wilkins: No, the decisions were being made there between Captain Lauro and the superintendent. They would inform me that was the case so I could pass that information along that they were prepared to use it as a temporary morgue and transmissions were being passed back and forth. There were a lot of different channels of communication going on and there wasn't always a good overlap. So, things that were being decided - it really wasn't necessary for me to be part of the decision-making process - but things were being decided that I was finding out about which was fine, it worked out that way.

END OF SIDE A

START OF SIDE B

Janet McDonnell: I'm interested in learning about any historically new missions. It sounds like there were a number of them, including Park Police involvement in Manhattan Sites, maybe some unique activities/roles for the Marine units. Would you just talk about that for a little bit?

Thomas Wilkins: Well, prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>, our role at the Statue was limited. There were some initiatives but really were somewhat limited, particularly in the role of the Marine unit there. We had received authorization and funding to buy a boat for law enforcement purposes at the Statue. We did have the boat, but it was not manned by a dedicated crew. It was manned by what

we call "incidental operators," people who were trained and could be pulled to do that. Since September 11<sup>th</sup> the Marine patrol has become very significant at the Statue of Liberty in order to maintain a security zone around it. Of course, things that we had been trying to do in the past to enhance security at the statue, such as moving the screening off site, prior September 11<sup>th</sup>, we have not been able to do because of the obstacles in accomplishing that. Of course, after September 11<sup>th</sup> those obstacles were very easily overcome or at least were ignored. So, we have pushed the perimeter out, we do the screening before the people get on the Circle Line boats.

Thomas Wilkins: We had supported the Federal Hall site in the past on special occasions when they needed additional law enforcement presence. Now that they need a continual presence, we have been there since September 11<sup>th</sup> and sent people down on September 11<sup>th</sup> to assist there. It has expanded our role here in New York. The number of posts that need to be filled on a daily basis has increased significantly. So, it's put a strain because we haven't gotten any additional personnel.

Thomas Wilkins: We have, I think, followed a very carefully thought-out plan for the Statue. Certainly the basis for that plan was known before September 11<sup>th</sup> - we knew what we'd have to do to provide enhanced security - and then September 11<sup>th</sup> being the catalyst for moving on with those plans - so it wasn't something that we had to just create from nothing. We had the general ideas in mind, so it was just a matter of filling them out more specifically.

Janet McDonnell: How have these expanded responsibilities affected the other missions, the day to day operations of your police force - investigating crimes and other security measures?

Thomas Wilkins: Up until this point it has had a minimal effect because the fall and winter seasons are very slow in Gateway, there's not a lot of action activity. But starting in the spring and through summer we get a lot more activity, outdoor recreation being a major part of the activities in Gateway. So, it's really hindered our ability to provide the level of service that we have historically for those events. We're hoping that with additional people that we're getting that we'll be able to maintain at least the level of service that we provided last year. We probably won't be able to increase that level of service. It will still be a bit of a stretch to provide the same level as last year.

Janet McDonnell: I understand that you're still running extended hours?

Thomas Wilkins: Extended hours. Officers are working 12-hour shifts, they're working 5-6 days a week. Right now, we have a temporary detail from DC for this

month that will allow us to grant some leave and to cut back the number hours people are working. And then next month when this detail leaves, we'll have some new bodies on board, people who have been transferred in who will hopefully help us to reduce the number of hours people have been working.

Janet McDonnell: So, what impact has the sky marshal program had on your—

Thomas Wilkins: Significant. I've lost about 14 people in the past two, two and a half months. Starting in March is when they started hiring, and because our officers have all been through Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) they can move on to the second level. Any federal law enforcement officer has to go through there for their basic training. And because our officers have already had that training, they can lateral into sky marshal jobs and just get one week of additional training when they're out on the job, working in the airplanes. So that's had a significant effect on us.

Janet McDonnell: You mentioned new security measures at Statue of Liberty. Are there new security measures at the Manhattan sites as well?

Thomas Wilkins: We have instituted screening with magnetometers for visitors coming into Federal Hall and providing security there 24 hours a day.

Janet McDonnell: Did you feel, both in the immediate aftermath and in the past six months or so - well, we've talked about staff shortage, and but I'm not talking about that - but that you were adequately resourced in other ways? Equipment, budget - I don't know all the things you need to support your operations.

Thomas Wilkins: Certainly, I think we were in a fairly decent position prior to September 11<sup>th</sup> as far as our equipment and supplies. What's really changed is the degree of security that we need provide for the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island and so that's driven the demand for more sophisticated equipment. We gotten supplemental funding for those things and that has helped. Not all those things come online yet, but they are coming online. The difficult thing - and this was difficult before September 11<sup>th</sup>, but it's been made much more difficult since September 11<sup>th</sup> - is that my staff up here is very operations oriented in that I don't have a very large administrative staff. I have three civilians that work for me, supporting 115 officers. One's my secretary, one's our records clerk, and I have a temporary administrative officer that we brought on the first of this year. And I have a couple civilian dispatchers, but they're supporting operations.

Thomas Wilkins: But everything else has to be done by people that have other jobs, that have operational jobs, but they all have collaborative duties. So, one of my

lieutenants who is supposed to be a shift supervisor, supposed to be out supervising the operations on the street, is also responsible for radio communications. He's also responsible for fleet maintenance and fleet management, including ordering the emergency equipment, getting the vehicles to and from where the equipment has to be installed, and he's also in charge of training. So, he's got three full time jobs in addition to his regular job. And that applies to almost everybody that works for me. They have a tremendous amount of responsibility and really not very much support in order to accomplish what they need to accomplish.

Thomas Wilkins: So it's been quite a challenge for them and they've all done an excellent job but it's very difficult and we've had to back off on some things that we would normally do, such as in-service training, and even our semi-annual firearms qualifications have fallen behind and these are all things we need to catch up on but we're going into our busy season so it's not going to be any easier. But the workload has increased quite a bit. Developing the security plan at the Statue of Liberty I had to bring over an additional lieutenant to assist the station commander and that took somebody off the street. That lieutenant also had other collaborative duty responsibilities, so something is always suffering. You turn your attention to one thing, and something is being neglected, being ignored until that reaches a crisis point that you have to turn your attention back to it.

Janet McDonnell: I was going to ask you what the greatest challenge has been in not only the immediate response but in the whole heightened security response that came after and it sounds like maybe you've just described that to me.

Thomas Wilkins: For the most part its people trying very hard to do their job, but having a lot of jobs to do, and sometimes not feeling that we're not getting support from our own organization. I think we've gotten pretty good support from the Park Service but prior to September 11<sup>th</sup> the relationship between us and the rest of the Park Service wasn't particularly good. The NAPA study had come out, the superintendents at recommended either doing away with the Park Police up here and replacing us with law enforcement rangers, or integrate us into the Park Service structure which is a very decentralized structure as opposed to our centralized structure. So, there was a lot of friction going on and I think that September 11<sup>th</sup> hasn't eliminated that, but it has certainly pushed it very deep into the background.

Janet McDonnell: Has the visibility of the park police or awareness of the role of the Park Police increased within the Park Service? Is that part of what you're saying?

Thomas Wilkins: Not necessarily as a result of September 11<sup>th</sup>. I think certainly we've had a more direct, a more visible role certainly within the Park Service here in the Northeast Region, working with Dale Ditmanson and Marie Rust and

also directly with the Director and the Secretary of the Interior. They've all had very direct interest in the Statue of Liberty and the security plan and what's going on there. Certainly, an awareness, but at the same time the Director was brand new to the job when she came in. She came in in the middle of the summer, so she barely had her feet on the ground. And Park Police didn't have a chief at the time, so we didn't have a lead point of contact there. There were some real problems at least in focusing on what was going on.

Janet McDonnell: Focusing—

Thomas Wilkins: Well, because of the way that things operate - just from a budgetary standpoint if nothing else - there was some specific language that come out of Congress a year or two ago that said that the Park Police and the Park Service would have separate budgets. And, when we developed the security plan for Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island there's the Park Police component and then there's the Park component of that plan. The Park component goes right up through the regional director. My component has to go up through the Park Police and if I can't convince the Park Police that—

(Phone rings – break in recording)

Janet McDonnell: What impact did the fact that the chief position had been vacant for some time have on this response?

Thomas Wilkins: I don't think it had an impact on the response in New York on September 11<sup>th</sup>. I'm not sure what impact it had on the response in D.C. on September 11<sup>th</sup>, but I think that in the aftermath, in the planning for how we are going to do business after that, that it had a fairly significant impact. The lack of continuity of leadership that they were going through, 60 day rotations with an acting chief, and there were some of those that were acting were also candidates for the position - I don't know whether that affected how they operated - but certainly the lack of continuity I think was a problem. I don't think it was a fatal problem, but I feel it created additional friction and difficulty in getting things done, getting things accomplished.

Thomas Wilkins: I ended up going to a briefing for the Secretary of the Interior on the Statue of Liberty security plan. At that point I had been working directly with the park up here with the superintendent, with the associate regional director, the director of the Park Service, without ever having anybody above my rank in the park police have any interest in what we were doing, other than the fact I would tell D.C. "I need these things." I got the budgetary side of it but I needed more a commitment in personnel that I didn't get until this last month, when finally it got to the point when after I lost almost 15 people - a significant percentage of my existing staff - and

what was difficult to convey to them is it's not that I'm losing from my existing staff, it's that my workload up here for my officers is significantly higher now than it was on September 11<sup>th</sup>. We have to provide a lot more service than we had to provide September 10<sup>th</sup> and we only had enough people on September 10<sup>th</sup> to provide the level of service we were providing.

Thomas Wilkins: Somehow that message wasn't getting through until finally two weeks ago I told them I was unable to support any of the special events that were scheduled for this month. We have a five-borough bike tour through Staten Island that ends on Fort Wadsworth on Staten Island. Thousands of bicyclists and it takes a detail of about 20 to 25 officers and I said, "I can't support that." We have an event at Ellis Island this Saturday night that doesn't take a lot more people, but it takes more people and when your people are already working 12-hour shifts they can't work anymore. I told them "We cannot do anymore. I cannot support reopening the Statue, I cannot support special events that are coming up, we can't do it." And until I sent that to the chief, I'd ask for people, they'd say no, I'd ask for people, they'd say no. My officers were working five or six days a week. I think that it was sort of a problem due in part to the lack of continuity of leadership.

Janet McDonnell: As I understand, Director Mainella has tasked Deputy Director Murphy with focusing in on some of these law enforcement issues. Have you seen some sort of improvements as a result of that? I mean, you're sort of talking about an education process, educating the leadership to what the needs are. I just wondered if you had started to see any results.

Thomas Wilkins: I haven't seen any on our side from that. I know that we have people that sit on that committee, that task force. I know that the park, the superintendents have sent in comments and such, but I don't know that that's going to have any direct impact any time soon, that's at such a high level. I'm not even sure of all of the things that they're looking at. I've seen some comments but—

Janet McDonnell: I think we've been focusing on the challenges in responding. Let's turn it around and talk about what worked really well. What are you particularly proud of in looking at your staff and your operation or maybe personally, what did you find most gratifying about this?

Thomas Wilkins: Well, I think what worked well was our ability to pool our resources. I could reach out and take all my extra people from Gateway and direct them to the Statue of Liberty, that our structure was such that it wasn't one superintendent asking another superintendent - I have control over my personnel. I could do that, the officers responded tremendously, we had resources on what I used to call it the Gateway side of the house that I was

able to pull. My Marine unit was stationed down there - and that the officers, when asked to perform, stepped up to the plate and did a tremendous job. There are things that they did that I'm still fully not aware of until I see the commendations that come in that people have written and with any organization, particularly the Park Service and the Park Police, your human resources, your people, are your strength. They are what make the organization. The rest is not of as much significant. Anybody can drive a truck or a backhoe or a frontend loader, but you get the person that can step up and do the job under difficult circumstances. That's how I think my officers responded and continue to respond for a significant period of time.

Janet McDonnell: It sounds like you're saying the centralized structure of the Park Police made it easier for you to allocate resources.

Thomas Wilkins: Absolutely. Because I'm sure that, on September 11<sup>th</sup> and the days immediately following it, if we had a structure similar to the rest of the Park Service - three or four co-equal superintendents that at that time there wouldn't be any problems. We're now 6-7 months later and I know that there are problems trying to allocate law enforcement rangers throughout the Park Service and the superintendents rightfully are questioning that. I think that in the short term, maybe it didn't make a difference - I had rangers from Fire Island that responded on September 11<sup>th</sup> - but that's only good for the immediate emergency. Within two or three days one of the crews wanted to go back. That's understandable. But our structure is such that we have to use our critical mass of people and move it around and adjust it as necessary and because of our structure we can do that.

Janet McDonnell: How, if at all, has the way you view your job changed as a result of this?

Thomas Wilkins: Well, I think because of the increased importance of security I have a little more prestige - I don't know if prestige is the right word - a little better sense of importance perhaps than in the past. There are a lot of different things that have gone on in the past year or so with our independence from the Park Service budget. Whereas in the past I could be held under the thumb of the administrative officer for Gateway, it was difficult because the superintendent at the Statue controlled my budget there I didn't control it, it was always a difficult time trying to control, allocate money for training and things that may have crossed park boundaries. It's helping. The change in the budget has helped. I think that hopefully law enforcement as a program has gotten some attention that perhaps it has needed. It's certainly unfortunate it come at the expense that it did, and I think I'm looked at as of a little more of an equal of the superintendents.



Janet McDonnell: Is there anything in the area of training that you're looking at or did you feel that your officers' response indicates that they had all the appropriate training? Are there some gaps that you're looking at now?

Thomas Wilkins: I think the training they had was adequate for the immediate events. The bigger problem as far as training was the anthrax scare afterwards. They had some anthrax here in New York City, of course Washington, D.C., so there might have been a little of a gap. Though they had some basic training, I don't think anybody in the country was really prepared to deal with anthrax on the level that we've had to. My biggest problem now is that I can't send anybody to training because everybody's working. And there may be some adjustments in training, but I don't see that we're going to need a significant amount. We've already done counterterrorism training. We hosted last April a seminar at Ellis Island to talk about terrorism and tourism and things of that nature and had people from throughout the New York metropolitan area there. One thing is that I think I do have a little better relationship with the city police department. I do sit on some subcommittees that have been established since then, counterterrorism in the New York metropolitan area, so I think we're getting a little more recognition from the city.

Janet McDonnell: Do you have an actual counter-terrorism unit in your field office or just that your officers have some counter-terrorism training?

Thomas Wilkins: Well, we did have a SWAT team. Unfortunately, almost all of them have gone to the air marshals. Beyond that we are looking at providing a higher level of training to the officers, as far as giving them some rifle training which normally we don't. But other than that I don't have a specific counter-terrorism unit because I think it's something that everyone has to be aware of, certainly those places that are more of a target than others, probably concentrate that at the Statue and Ellis Island.

Janet McDonnell: I realize that in your position you probably don't interact with the public very much. So, this would be based primarily on what you're hearing anecdotally from your officers, but based on that I wonder if the public view of the Park Police has changed at all since September 11<sup>th</sup>?

Thomas Wilkins: I don't think in New York there's a wide recognition of the Park Police. The Park Service usually has a problem getting their message out in New York. I think that in general we enjoy the same appreciation that the rest of law enforcement and fire fighters have enjoyed since September 11<sup>th</sup> after seeing what we have done. And it sort of raised the importance of the job but specifically for the Park Police, no I don't think there has been any significant change. I think professionally a little more recognition within the city and we're trying to get more recognition and be more of a player in the things that go on but our role here—

END OF TAPE