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September 11, 2001 Oral History Project, 2001-2004



Dennis Burnett
January 29, 2002

Interview conducted by Janet McDonnell
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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
SEPTEMBER 11TH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

DENNIS BURNETT

Acting Chief of Ranger Activities

Conducted by

JANET MCDONNELL, Ph.D.

January 29, 2002

Washington, D.C.

START OF TAPE

- Janet McDonnell: It's January 29th and I am here with Dennis Burnett, the acting chief of Ranger Activities for the National Park Service.
- Dennis Burnett: And agency law enforcement administrator, normally.
- Janet McDonnell: Well we'll start chronologically. We'll start with September 11th. And if you can tell me where you were, how you first learned about the attacks?
- Dennis Burnett: I was sitting right here in the office working on something on the computer when somebody from the branch of Law Enforcement Security for the department came running down the hallway and said a plane just flew into the World Trade Center towers. We looked around and thought, my god, that seems a little peculiar. And we have a small TV that's set up in the chief's office and we went in there and tried to get it working. It doesn't get very good reception, but I think we were able to get at least one channel, saw some of the footage that was going over the airways from the news media, and then came back in here and started working again.
- Dennis Burnett: And then these folks came back down the hallway and said the second tower has been hit. This was really quite bizarre. And so, we sort of marshaled our folks. There's really only two of us. I think there may have been two or three of here in the hallway dealing with emergency operations, which would be myself, Major Gary Van Horn, U.S. Park Police who works with us, and then my search and rescue and emergency medical services coordinator, Randy Coffman. We ventured down to the Department of Interior hallway, Law Enforcement Security, where they have a fairly large TV. Ours is kind of small. We were watching that when the reports started coming in of possible additional aircraft were in the air and heading for places unknown, but not where they were supposed to be going. In other words, they had been taken over, hijacked, if you will.
- Dennis Burnett: Eventually, we made our way down to the director's office. The director was in, as were several of her staff. I couldn't remember exactly how many. I know Deny Galvin was gone. He's the deputy, but Sue Masica was there, Dick Ring was there. There was a handful of us. That was about the time the third plane went into the Pentagon. We were hearing reports that they had ordered the evacuation of the White House. And it wasn't too long after that that basically they said that the District of Columbia was shut down and to evacuate everybody and send them home. Which in

hindsight you will notice, I don't know how many people work in the District, but I think the Metro probably transports somewhere between 650,000 people daily into the District, and so you push a button to release those 650,000 people plus everybody else that drives, walks, or otherwise gets here, I would imagine just guessing maybe close to a million people trying to get out of the District at one time. With the communications that Major Van Horn had with U.S. Park Police, we found out that some of the roadways leaving the District were shut down because there were suspicious packages. For example, I think it may have been the 14th Street Bridge was shut down, so you had traffic backed up there.

Dennis Burnett:

About the time they made the call to evacuate all facilities in the District, all you had to do was try to pick up the phone and know that wasn't going to happen. Landlines were dead. Cell phones were dead. So, we were basically without any communication. Initially, while all of this was going on, we were down in the director's office so the Secretary or her staff gave the order to evacuate the building, send everybody home. But obviously Ranger Activities being of an emergency nature and mind that this is what we are trained for, and so we stayed with the director and basically started putting together a planner, where do we go from here? What do we do?

Dennis Burnett:

And that's what we started doing and trying to establish communications. I was able to get email messages out to my contacts in the region, which would be the regional chief rangers. The phone lines were still dead. It was probably about 30 minutes after the plane went into the Pentagon and running back and forth between my office and the director's office, that bless her heart my daughter, who was away at college, called. And incoming calls were coming in. And I picked up, I just happened to be in the office when she called. I said, "Lindsey, bless your heart. You called. There are no landlines out of the District, basically. Would you please call Shenandoah Dispatch," which is the 24-hour dispatch at Shenandoah National Park that we use for all critical incident reportings. In other words, if I have to make contact with anybody in the service, that's who I go to. "Call the dispatch operation. Tell them to call me because I can't get out."

Dennis Burnett:

So, she did that, and basically, we set up a landline with my phone and Shenandoah Dispatch. Initially, we thought about just leaving the line open, so we knew we would always have it. In lieu of that, since I was running back and forth between the director's office and here, I asked them to call back on my number every 12

minutes, because there was no way we were getting out downstairs, so we were shuttling messages out from my office because Shenandoah was calling in.

Janet McDonnell: That's what you meant by establishing a landline. They would call in on a regular basis.

Dennis Burnett: Major Van Horn was able to get out to U.S. Park Police dispatch, so we were getting pretty good updates from them as far as what was going on early on. In emergency operations, I mean we train people, and this goes back probably 20 years, that when 10 percent of the population picks up the telephones, the system crashes. It just can't handle it. It's not made for that and so we proved it.

Dennis Burnett: Several of us in the building carry government emergency telephone cards. It's an access into the phone systems, which we all thought about, about 30 minutes or an hour later. By dialing the access code, we were able to get priority lines, so we were then able to start communicating from whatever phone we wanted to use in the building. So, we were using that down in the director's office.

Janet McDonnell: Did that work well?

Dennis Burnett: It worked throughout the day, yes.

Janet McDonnell: Is there an activation process for the dispatch center because I read somewhere that at 8:36 you sent a message asking the center to become the Park Service's "eyes and ears."

Dennis Burnett: When I made the contact with the regional chiefs, I sent the same message to Shenandoah Dispatch. Letting them know we had no contact. We're fine in this building, but they're evacuating the District. I made it a habit here, I was coming up here every 20 minutes and looking out my window to the traffic, which was at a standstill. And every 20 minutes I would see the same car in the same location in traffic. It had not moved. And this went on for probably an hour and a half, maybe two hours.

Dennis Burnett: We eventually worked our way into the basement, which seemed to be the safest place in the building, and people started coming back into the building because they'd given up trying to leave, which I would probably have done the same thing. Evacuating everyone in the District at one time, they're not going to be able to get out. We were hearing unconfirmed messages that because of a possibility of a threat on the Metro lines they were going to shut

them down. Thank god that wasn't true, but had they shut down the Metro and then evacuated everybody in the city, then you've got, traffic wasn't moving so you've got a million people milling around in the streets throughout the District, so it was quite interesting.

Janet McDonnell: Can you tell me a little bit more about what some of that discussion was like in the director's office? The discussion about what needed to be done.

Dennis Burnett: Basically, we needed to establish communications anyway that we could and Shenandoah Dispatch, that's what they're trained to do, and so they were able to help us to a great degree. We have what they refer to as a Continuity of Operations plan, what do you do when something goes awry? And these are plans that were put together in preparation for the Y2K. Should the computers malfunction like they had anticipated or thought there was a possibility, we would have something in place. They're not quite emergency operations plans, which most rangers and law enforcement folks are used to dealing with. You have a plan in place.

Dennis Burnett: If something goes wrong, you have step by step procedures of what you should do. And obviously, life and safety are a number one priority. Take care of your employees, your people, your family, whatever is necessary.

Dennis Burnett: It appeared at least outside the District with the Park Service, other than New York City, they were not as heavily impacted obviously because it was not close to home there. Here, it was right here. You could walk to the roof or some of the windows out of the building; you could see the smoke coming up from the Pentagon. And so, trying to keep your wits about yourself and do what had to be done. As far as I was concerned, there was no rush for us to leave the building. I think it's a well-built building. It's very safe, unless they stick a bomb right in the basement it's probably going to be here. I felt safer in the building than I did out in traffic, stuck moving nowhere.

Dennis Burnett: I think as the day progressed, the traffic finally started letting up and what I thought was interesting is when I come to work, I live halfway to Shenandoah National Park and come in Route 66 to Vienna. And I rode the Metro out. It was virtually empty. And when I leave Vienna around 5:30 or 6:00, it's usually bumper to bumper traffic, and it was almost like you could roller skate out. It had shut down that much. It almost reminded you of the blizzards

we had in I think it was '96, where basically everything came to a standstill.

Janet McDonnell:

Now in the Continuity of Operations plan, is there a [Interior] Department Continuity of Operations plan that the Park Service has a piece of, or is there a separate NPS Continuity of Operations plan?

Dennis Burnett:

It's both. Our headquarters building here has a plan, as does each regional office. And they're melded together, and they also coincide with what the department has and there are, in this plan, you have spelled out the succession of authority. In other words, if the director was not here, who's next in charge? That's already been laid out. Since she was here, if you're going to initiate the plan, then one of the first things we do in the plan is to remove the governing body or the director, or director level within the department, including the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, to a remote location which from here would be outside the District.

Dennis Burnett:

Of course, part of the problem was that everything was at a standstill traffic-wise, so it was difficult to get these folks out of the District. We eventually did. It was about an hour discussing what needed to be done with her prior to her leaving and then evacuated her to the remote location, along with the other agency heads, and the Secretary and her immediate staff. And then we had a separate location for the rest of the management of the National Park Service from this building and where they would go. And it's far enough removed to where, at least according to plan, they should be able to maintain communications and have everything they would need to manage the National Park Service.

Dennis Burnett:

I got a group together I get it was last week to do an update of the plan. We've been going through and making notes, those sorts of things, and so it's out for review right now from the work group and then will be distributed amongst the management folks of the Park Service for input, to update it, get the new names in there if that's necessary, and make sure it's up to date. One of the things we have added is a, we had two new alternate work sites in the existing plan coming from Y2K. With the incidents of September 11th, we decided to go ahead and identify a third more remote site, should for whatever reason Washington, D.C. cease to exist, the management of the National Park Service will have to occur somewhere so we've got it located, if they approve the plan, far enough removed from here where that wouldn't be an issue and somebody that would be in charge of the Park Service from that location.

Janet McDonnell: There's some, I understand that a lot of this is pretty sensitive, but just in general, are there some other major issues drawing out of the September 11th experience that you're addressing in the revisions of the plan, other than the site that you just mentioned?

Dennis Burnett: Yes, there's quite a bit of things that are in there, but to go back to 9/11, even pre 9/11, prior to 9/11 there was a major demonstration scheduled for the World Bank. And the [World Trade Organization] WTO that was due to occur, I think two weekends after 9/11. So we had been using the preparation for that demonstration one of our incident management teams to help us plan, because the District and the U.S. Park Police were asking for additional resources and Park Rangers for law enforcement, for fire, and for [Emergency Medical Services] EMS assistance. So, we already had sort of a working plan in place dealing with that. And because of that it made it easy to contact that emergency management team, an overhead team, and get them moving here because obviously when you have a situation like this you need to manage it correctly, and the best way that we have found as an agency to do that is take the best and the brightest that we have from around the country that are already in pre-established teams. They're trained and they have worked together in some cases for a number of years. So, they know how to deal with emergencies. That's what they're in place for, that's what we use them for. So, we got them rolling. They were here within a day, I'm sure.

Janet McDonnell: Is there anything, can you give me any more details about how and when that Type 1 team was activated? Were you involved?

Dennis Burnett: We called them here through Shenandoah Dispatch. We said activate the national team. We have teams that are called Type 2 teams that are more at the regional levels and they're trained. And we have some that are a little more trained, a little more experienced, that we call national Type 1 teams and we notified them.

Janet McDonnell: Were there any particular challenges in mobilizing that team?

Dennis Burnett: No, they were outside the District. They didn't seem to have much of a problem getting up and moving. Obviously, they couldn't fly because they shut down all of the commercial air traffic.

Janet McDonnell: That's what I was thinking of. And overall, how effective was that incident response system?

- Dennis Burnett: I think they were very effective. They do a very good job everywhere we take them. They do major fires. They do earthquakes. They did 9/11, Hurricane Andrew, you name it, whatever the incident is, they are trained to deal with it.
- Janet McDonnell: Just to finish up with communications. At one point you mentioned the challenges in those first hours because of the landlines down and cell phones that weren't operational. At what point did you begin to see things really improve in that sense, by the next day, or that night, that evening?
- Dennis Burnett: I think by the next day, yes.
- Janet McDonnell: And what about communications, not the technical aspect, but in the broader sense, communications within this building between senior NPS staff and senior departmental staff and that kind of thing. Was that working smoothly?
- Dennis Burnett: Well, for the agency it was working smoothly, because everyone was gone except for those of us who basically gathered together down on the third floor with the director in the director's wing. And then when she was removed to our remote location, those of us that were left were still working to maintain communications with the rest of the National Park Service through Shenandoah Dispatch or anyway that we could. We were able to establish communications with the director and the senior staff for the department from their location. They called back once they were there.
- Dennis Burnett: And they were set up to stay; it was probably going to be indefinite. If you remember, the President went on the air that night, perhaps 9:00 or something, and tried to express the feeling that, to try to get back to things as being normal. I think he even made the statement "Washington, D.C. will be up and running tomorrow morning," and so everybody that we evacuated to this remote location, instead of spending the night as they had all planned on, working out of there, they turned around and drove back in. So, it was sort of business as usual, at least that's what we were trying to do and get across to folks. I think they set up the liberal leave policy. If an employee didn't feel comfortable coming in, if you had family concerns, deal with that. We understand. That's not a problem. If you can make it in, we're going to try and get the system up and running and we'll be in business as usual.
- Dennis Burnett: And it was that morning of the 12th when the call came in from the Secretary that there was a report of unidentified aircraft heading

for the continental United States from Canada. And evacuation of those people who were in the building who were trying to do business as usual were told to evacuate to the basement until we figured out what was going on. It was about 20 or 30 minutes later or something like that that they were able to identify that as either being a false alarm or it was not what they thought it was. And then, of course, a number of folks decided that I gave it the effort to come in, but I can't deal with this so I'm going home. So again, that wasn't a problem. If they weren't comfortable with it, we would encourage them to do so just to be safe in their travels and we tried to get back to work.

Dennis Burnett: But at least the communications were up and running. The Type-1 team was in. We were trying to keep up to speed with what was going on in New York City because the Statue of Liberty is right there, Gateway National Recreation area is right there. We have a number of park units in the harbor of New York City, as well as monuments within a couple of blocks of the Trade Center towers, and so trying to help out the Northeast Regional Office in Philadelphia, as well as our staffs in New York City.

Janet McDonnell: What were your regional chief rangers telling you either the afternoon of the 11th or on the 12th? I mean was it just basic information about park status, closures, and such?

Dennis Burnett: Basically, yes. Other than New York City and the Philadelphia Regional Office which New York City falls under; we were trying to get information from them so that we could brief the director on what was going on up there. The rest of the regions and the rest of the country seemed to be doing just fine. And so, we were trying to put out information to them that we were fine. We were not impacted whatsoever. The Pentagon is 3 or 4 miles away and trying to work as effectively as we could with Philadelphia with what they might need.

Janet McDonnell: Were you involved in discussions about park closures outside of the Northeast Region. I mean it was obvious which ones in Manhattan needed to remain closed maybe related to that, the determination of which parks were at greatest risk. And if you were involved in those discussions, can you tell me a little bit about how some of those decisions were made?

Dennis Burnett: Well, again, going back to 9/11 the only communications I had with the regions was through email. And my first communication went to them, as well as Shenandoah Dispatch, was obviously the heightened sense of security for those parks in those regions that

needed to either beef up or take whatever precautionary measures were required to ensure that they would be safe. We do have a number of what we call icon parks. Boston Navy Yard is one. Independence Hall in Philadelphia is one. The Arch in St. Louis is one. Mount Rushmore in the Dakotas is one, and so just off of the top of our head. And, of course, all of the regional chiefs are thinking along the same lines. Those park chief rangers and superintendents are thinking along the same lines. If they felt that until they had a good understanding of what was really going on, because two hours after everything went down nobody really knew what was really going on, if they had to shut down the parks that was fine. They did what they had to do with their emergency operation plans that they had in place.

Janet McDonnell: So, there is no master list of icon parks? It sounds like these are things that people just sort of have.

Dennis Burnett: Well, they list them as icons and that's where we're putting our emphasis and have put our emphasis since 9/11. We've increased 24-hour coverage and staffing at the Navy Yard in Boston. We've had 24-hour coverage in Philadelphia, the same in St. Louis, and the same at Mount Rushmore.

Janet McDonnell: So, there is an actual list of these?

Dennis Burnett: Yes.

Janet McDonnell: And how is that determination made?

Dennis Burnett: As an agency, that determination was made, I couldn't tell you when, but it's been in place. The only problem trying to staff our icons is that the department has a tell with list of icons that are of a higher priority than the National Park Service icons, and so instead of being able to send necessary manpower to our icons, we were in a position where we had to pull folks from them to staff the department's icons, which are also national icons, if you will. The ones that come to mind, the Bureau of Reclamation dams in the western part of the country, Hoover Dam, Grand Canyon.

Janet McDonnell: Which I also wanted to ask you a little bit about. How did that request come in? Did it come through the department?

Dennis Burnett: Yes, from the Secretary. And we were asked to assist the department, along with Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, all of the agencies in the

department with law enforcement authorities, to help staff the departmental icons, if you will.

Janet McDonnell: I'm talking specifically about the dams, Coulee and Shasta. That was in that same category of icon units?

Dennis Burnett: Yes, and we're in the situation in the National Park Service, along with having these incident management teams, each region has well trained, what we refer to as special event teams. They're specially trained law enforcement rangers that can respond to any type of incident, just like the management teams can, so many of those were mobilized once we got the call that we had to be on the certain dams in a short amount of time. So, we have the authority through the regional chief rangers to mobilize these special event teams, and they're teams that consist of 10-12 rangers with supervision, common communications. They train together. They work together. And that's what they do. So, we would send one team to one dam, another team to another dam, at least to get the folks in place and take care of the initial protection and security of those installations.

Janet McDonnell: So that was the authority and the jurisdiction that the Park Service used to be able to send rangers to do that?

Dennis Burnett: Well, to get to those locations. We have the authority to send them. The problem is we don't have any jurisdiction on many of these Bureau of Reclamation dams because our authority is broad and all encompassing, but it's restricted to those lands within the boundaries of the National Park Service unit.

Dennis Burnett: Anytime we venture outside those boundaries then we're restricted in what we can do. And many of those dams are outside park boundaries. And so, we're put into a situation where to get around that what we normally do, what we have to do, is become deputy U.S. marshals. We have to be sworn in by the U.S. Marshal Service and that's a fairly long process. You can't do it immediately. It does take a while. We were aware of that. We've done it in the past and we just started the ball rolling in that direction to get that accomplished.

Janet McDonnell: And what impact did that have on your law enforcement ranger resources?

Dennis Burnett: Diminished it considerably from an already diminished state, I would think.

Janet McDonnell: How easy or difficult was it to shift resources among park units? In your case, probably ranger resources more specifically. Maybe also equipment and whatever other kind of resources?

Dennis Burnett: Again, going back to the initial SET team deployment, they're fully equipped and ready to roll at a moment's notice, so they're expected to be able to roll within an hour. Again, depending on where they were going, with no air travel, they had to drive, and so we were trying to assign those SET teams within proximity of those installations where they ended up having to go to, and that's what we did.

Dennis Burnett: Then you start planning out for the duration, and we're still on these facilities here four months after the fact, almost to the same number of folks who were there initially. Now, it's not SET [special event] teams. It's individual resources, although we've been in the position because of the authority question and the difficulty in getting marshalization for our rangers, our SET teams have really been used to exhaustion, if you will. Some of them have been on three and four rotations on different dams in the west because they were the first ones there. They were the first to get marshalized. If we couldn't replace them with single resource rangers that also had U.S. Marshal deputization, then they had to stay there. And when we were able to pull them off and give them a break say after 21 days, we were forced to put them back on either the same facility or another facility.

Dennis Burnett: We still have that problem to a degree. In other words, we have enough rangers to help the department in protecting these sites, but without the deputization we can't put them there because of the liability. Four months after 9/11 and we still only have, I'm trying to think of what the number is, maybe 200 to 300 rangers out of 1,500 that have been marshalized. Initially, historically, and initially what the Marshal Service does in marshalize our rangers for a specific site for a specific duration of time. We found out pretty quickly that wasn't going to work because you would marshalize somebody for Hoover Dam, then pull them off to rest them and then when they're back up for rotation, we would sent them to another dam where the marshalization wasn't any good. So, we went from single site, single timeframe to say multiple sites for say 30 days, initially, and we're to the point now that it's for all Department of Interior facilities, including this building, and the marshalization is good through December 31, 2003. But we still have probably 500 to 800 applications, ready to get marshaled, but it's a small office and they can only handle so many applications

and we're just one agency of a lot of folks that have been doing the same thing.

END OF SIDE A

START OF SIDE B

Janet McDonnell: Did you encounter any reluctance on the part of some parks to release ranger resources? It seems to me that some parks, especially in those first days when they were uncertain as to what the threats to their own unit might be, might be hesitant.

Dennis Burnett: It would be on a park-by-park basis. If a park was understaffed to start with, they would be hard pressed to be able to release somebody for another park unit if they felt that they weren't providing sufficient coverage for their park. As we got farther along in doing this, it seemed to become a little easier in some respects, and harder and other respects, in that some parks were doing a little more than others perhaps. And other parks would see this and why should I release somebody when somebody else is not? In other words, everybody needs to participate. We tried to set it up where if each region would provide 10 percent of their total commissioned ranger force, that would probably give us sufficient numbers that we would need to staff what the department was asking us to do, as well as take care of those icon parks that the National Park Service has.

Janet McDonnell: I understand that you were involved in establishing a multi-region coordinating group. Did that sort of grow out of that?

Dennis Burnett: Right.

Janet McDonnell: Tell me a little bit about how that started out.

Dennis Burnett: Well, it's based on the fire concept of a multi-agency group where you draw on the resources from all of the different agencies in wild land fire, which would be Park Service, BLM [Bureau of Land Management], Forest Service, BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs]. We took the same approach in that we, on a region-by-region basis we were not able to accomplish this because it was just too much of an undertaking, and obviously, ranger activities in Washington couldn't do it.

Dennis Burnett: So, we made the determination that we needed to pull together a group, and the regional chief rangers who meet as a group anyway with my office decided this is something we needed to do. We

needed to get something in place along the lines of what wildland fire has successfully done for years, to be able to identify resources and where these resources need to go for deployment, and to manage those numbers for us. And we're talking probably at any given time 200 rangers that are out of park, the normal park area, as well as another 100 that are working extended shifts in their own park. And this would include the Bureau of Reclamation facilities, this building, and the icon parks.

Janet McDonnell: So, this group is made up of the regional chief rangers, you as the chief of Rangers Activities, and—

Dennis Burnett: And then we brought in some personnel to manage the program for us. We have a coordinator. We have an intelligence gathering special agent, those people that are necessary to make the contacts. And we utilize the fire mobilization system, which they have regional locations throughout the country, to where when parks release resources, they notify that fire service center who then bumps it up to the national center. And then our folks that are helping us with this mobilization then get those names and make the assignments back through the fire operation.

Janet McDonnell: Were there any unique missions for rangers in this event? I heard that maybe it wasn't totally unique, but that rangers, at least in the National Capital Area, provided more support to U.S. Park Police than they ever had in the past. And I'm just wondering if there were some other unique roles and responsibilities for the law enforcement?

Dennis Burnett: My guess is they probably did the same thing in New York City and also in San Francisco. I know that those parks in the New York area all basically pulled together, from actually as far south as Assateague Island in Maryland, sending up boats to the Statue of Liberty area to help patrol around the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor, at least for the initial few days or a week or more. Fire Island did the same thing.

Janet McDonnell: Let's talk about funding for a minute. Is there emergency funding authority or is there a line item in the budget that you could go to? The woman out at the Shenandoah Dispatch Center said something about actually establishing a particular account number that they could use. Were you involved?

Dennis Burnett: Basically, I gave everybody my account number that morning. In other words, do what you had to do. This is an emergency of something we've never faced before, at least in my lifetime.

Obviously, the first question most parks asked was, who is going to pay for it? I gave them my account number from my operation here until we could get this worked out. A couple of regions also did the same thing until we could get some feel or a grasp on what kind of numbers we're talking about, how long it's going to go on, and how we're going to try and cover the expenses. Congress has provided some money to the Park Service, the rangers as well as Park Police, for some of that, but there's still going to be a huge expense that's not going to be covered.

Dennis Burnett:

We're staffing this building 24-hours a day, a minimum of 12 rangers coming in on 21-day rotations. There is no money for that. We have established through the budget office an account number for that, but it's what you might call a blind account or dummy account in that there's no money in there, so at some point in time as we get the close out for this fiscal year, we're going to have to find the money and the funding source to cover these expenses. I think the figures we're looking at, at least for the first quarter, would probably exceed 10 million dollars. And the department is going to have like expenses, you know, Fish and Wildlife agents have been in this building and elsewhere. BLM rangers have been in this building and elsewhere. I think at one time we were staffing 24-hours a day, eight Bureau of Reclamation dams, this building in 24-hour coverage, extended coverage for Independence, the Arch in St. Louis, Mount Rushmore, and all sorts of things, so it adds up in a hurry.

Janet McDonnell:

And you mentioned before we turned the recorder on that you brought in help, regional chief rangers on a rotating basis.

Dennis Burnett:

We've been rotating people through this building, or at least my office, for over a month now. In fact, it probably goes back to October. We started out, we realized the workload, working with the department and trying to staff all of these dam facilities is more than one office could do, so we set up what we're just calling a liaison with my office and the Department of the Interior branch of law enforcement and security. They have brought in a number of Park Rangers to help them with their operation. They've gone to 24-hours. It's just an enormous workload.

Dennis Burnett:

And trying to get our rangers marshaled was a tremendous workload that we're still dealing with, trying to wind down, but it's still there. Going through the applications that are submitted, taking them over to the U.S. Marshal Service, making sure everything is in place, according to their requirements, and then

getting the folks marshaled so they can go outside park boundaries and provide protection.

Janet McDonnell:

Were you involved in the draw down plan that was developed last fall?

Dennis Burnett:

We came up with the criteria with the multi-regional coordinating group. We developed an emergency operation plan and set up threat levels. And it is part of that, the draw down plans and requesting the parks to go through the exercise that we had worked out over a couple of weeks on how best to do this, to be able to identify resources that might be able to be made available to other park areas without stripping your park. There were a lot of criteria that would be involved in that. And then each park on a park-by-park basis would go through the draw down plan and see if and where they could identify ranger resources that they would be able to release for, let's say a 21-day period, to go to another park or Bureau of Reclamation facility to provide the necessary protection, and then rotate folks through on a regular basis.

Janet McDonnell:

A senior ranger told me that he thought part of the problem was that in the past the Park Service has not been viewed as a law enforcement agency. Congress has not viewed it that way and therefore the budget hasn't adequately reflected that mission or that responsibility. And I wonder, first of all, whether you agree with that or whether you maybe see things changing in the way the law enforcement ranger role, ranger activity role, is changing?

Dennis Burnett:

I think everything has changed. I think we're going to see a change to look at just two recent studies of law enforcement in the National Park Service, one which was requested by Senator Thomas. The Thomas Report came up with a figure of 1,295 additional rangers that would be needed two years ago when the report was done. More recently, an external view of the law enforcement program by the International Association of Chiefs of Police identified a minimum level of 690 new positions. We haven't gotten any of those positions and basically, we're overworking an already overstressed workforce, if you will. The numbers are down from everything that I've seen that I've read. And this additional workload, which it's actually an extreme workload, it's not something you would normally do in your daily operations in a park, in trying to meet those needs, as well as the day-to-day protection of the resources in the national park that we're charged with protecting according to Congress.

Janet McDonnell: Do you think the Park Service was adequately prepared for what happened on September 11th and the aftermath?

Dennis Burnett: I think we were. I think we do deal with emergency operations on a regular basis. And I think as an agency, and I can only speak for this building, we were up and running in 24 hours with an overhead team in place helping us do what needed to be done. And I think the other agencies in the building were struggling. I feel confident that yes, we didn't have the numbers that we needed, and we couldn't provide as much assistance as maybe we would like to or maybe that the department would have liked us to provide, but I think that we were in place and ready to respond with a phone call.

Janet McDonnell: Is there something that you're particularly proud of, something about the ranger response?

Dennis Burnett: I don't think anybody yelled at us and I don't think we yelled at anybody else. It's the old thing, we did what had to be done and I think we got it accomplished. There have been several former directors who have often said, and you can read it in some of the texts, if you've got a problem and you need to get it accomplished, give it to the rangers. And that's what we're proud of.

Janet McDonnell: Is there anything you would have done differently?

Dennis Burnett: If I could have figured out my GETS card, it would have gotten me out of the building an hour sooner than it did as far as communications.

Janet McDonnell: Well, I'm not going to ask any more about lessons learned. It sounds like you've already taken those and are incorporating them.

Dennis Burnett: Well, we're trying to and again, I'm a strong proponent of Incident Management Teams. And we have people that are trained to do that and so it behooves us to utilize them. That's why they're there. They help us do our job.

Janet McDonnell: Well, is there anything that I haven't asked about that you think is important to get into the record?

Dennis Burnett: Well, we'd like to see an exit strategy. That's what we've been working on the last several weeks with the department. We need to come up with an exit strategy. It's our feeling the emergency is over. It's not the day after September 11th, it's four months down the road, yet we're still on some of these facilities in an emergency mode with the same numbers we had on them four months ago.

We can't continue doing this indefinitely, and we've just added to our concern that we're sending 115 rangers to the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics. They're moving out this weekend, which is going to additionally impact our people and our resources. So, if we had enough people to go around prior to this, we're going to be real hard pressed to be able to do what we've been doing with this additional workload.

Janet McDonnell:

Well, thank you.

END OF TAPE