

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001 Windsor Kinney, a volunteer firefighter and emergency medical technician with Protection Engine Company No. 1 of the Port Washington Fire Department, responded with hundreds of other volunteers from Nassau and Suffolk Counties to assist in the rescue efforts at the World Trade Center.

The following evening, upon his return to Port Washington, he sent the following e-mail to his friends describing his thoughts and experiences.

At 9:00 a.m. on September 11th I drove into the main garage at work and was greeted with news that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center.

I went into the lunch room to view it on the television only to find out that two planes had made Kamikaze dives into both towers. Then moments later the first tower collapsed from structural failure, obviously due to extreme heat and weakened or severed steel. The first thing I said to all present was that all of those firefighters in the rescue companies, cops and EMT's were gone. God's speed and God bless.

Then the second tower fell and I knew I was going to help.

I was excused from work to report to the Port Washington Fire Department for possible assignment. When I got there 9:45 a.m. there were a few guys watching the disaster on the big screen television. Then Captain Tom McDonough arrived and began making a roster of available manpower. Nassau County FireCom was quiet for quite a while, maybe an hour or more, before the county wide notification came over about 10:50 a.m. requesting that manpower respond to all stations and that no vehicle was to cross county lines unless it was requested.

My first assignment was to the Heavy Rescue Unit 8522. Then I was sent to Tower Ladder Unit 8517 because that was going to be the first ladder truck to go into the city and I was the only one in station at that time trained in tactical rescue and confined space rescue. At that time I knew if we got an assignment we were going to Queens or Brooklyn to cover FDNY territory while they departed for Manhattan to rescue their brothers.

We were dispatched to a staging area at Belmont Park on the border of the Borough of Queens and Nassau County. It was a long trek especially with traffic because the LIE was closed, as was the city border, all bridges and tunnels along with all airports and air space. I heard it called "sterilized" on the high band radio.

When we got to the staging area at about 1:00 p.m. little did we know what a wait we were in for, although I had an inkling because I knew it would take hours before the city knew what resources it had and what it would need. At 5:00 p.m. (yes 5:00 p.m.) we were assigned to a Task Force of 1 Truck (us), 2 Engines and a fly car. We moved to a different parking lot and stood fast, again, and waited for assignment.

They slowly assigned task forces to sections of Queens and Brooklyn but we never got called. Then at 8:00 p.m. they made a call for EMT's and Paramedics and I got drafted to roll in the fly car. It was going to be the only way we would get anyone into the mix so I went with our Fire Marshal, Walter Clark, and another Firefighter/EMT, Louis Castro

We responded to EMS Command located at Shea Stadium and found one of Port's ambulances on stand-by and joined its crew. At that time our department chaplain, Tom Tobin, showed up and gave us a rundown on casualties we might know who were volunteer firefighters and worked for the city fire or police departments. By the end of the night all Port Washington Fire Department members who were FDNY or NYPD or EMS were accounted for. However, 3 Nassau County fire chiefs were known lost - 1 from Roslyn, 4 firefighters from Hempstead and 1 from Levittown. One of our fire training academy instructors was gone also.

At 10:30 p.m. we were directed to Pier 17 and the FDR Drive in Manhattan. At this area we were assigned to One Liberty Plaza, the southeast triage center and morgue. It was here I parted with Walter and Louis who went to the scene to assist Port's Light Truck Unit 8518 that was operating on the Northwest side of the collapse zone.

The ride to the scene was something that will stay with me forever. As we pulled out with four other rigs we passed de-contamination points for vehicles and rescue workers to remove the dust, which at this point was not too bad. As we drove closer civilian activity ceased and the streets were dark, the power was out and the only lights were the emergency lights from the ambulances. As we passed small intersections there where barricades and cones up, an occasional police car, but eerily no one around. Sometimes I would glimpse police officers with flashlights but nothing else. The closer we got to the disaster site the more dust and paper were kicked up by the slipstream of the vehicles and it quickly escalated to a dust storm. As we approached the disaster parked cars were covered with this "snow" and endless sheets of office documents.

The operation area became more visible as we got closer due to the tremendous amount of flood lights and activity, not to forget the destruction. The debris zone started about five blocks away from our destination and it got worse the closer we got. There was no one around due to an evacuation of the surrounding area and the buildings were all the same color - grayish beige. All the windows were covered (except the broken ones), as were the facades and the sidewalks. Papers and fabric hung from small trees, car windows were blown out, the sky was dark but for the light showing from around buildings and down alleyways.

We passed some completely dust cloaked NYPD cars, then silent FDNY trucks. As we got onto Broadway we hit the activity; loud radio traffic, emergency lights, backup alarms, shouts, diesel motors, occasional running workers, all in a haze of dust and exhaust fumes. After the ambulance was out of traffic my EMS Lieutenant, Tammy Akam, went to the triage area to register our team as ALS (Advanced Life Support) capable, she being an EMT-CC (Critical Care).

While she was out I took a quick tour of our area with Joann Zimbardi and Rob Dankner my EMT partners. We walked down to Trinity Place and the site was not a movie set as described by news media. At the corner to my left was a ramp to a subway, what line I don't know but it was probably the 1/9 Cortlandt Station. On top of the ramp lay a 15 foot piece of aluminum facade and what appeared to be a cubicle or security booth, bent and twisted and coated with paper and dust. To my right was a wrecked police car, windows blown out and filled with dust and debris and another vehicle squashed by another piece of facade with steel and concrete. The ground was coated with what truly resembled watery joint compound, no doubt the dust mixed with water from the fire hoses.

Now in front of me was what once was the South Plaza and Tower 2. Flood lights lit the entire area, not like daylight but more like a well lit yard party. Only this was no party. Directly in front of me was a 2, maybe 3 story tall piece of a Tower 2 wall that was aluminum facade still attached to steel and concrete, windows gone and draped in wire and re-bar. It obviously landed on the ground and stuck into it like a knife blade. Behind it were piles of concrete and structural steel rubble, smoking from underground flames consuming flammable materials, no doubt consuming other things as well. To the right was the half collapsed and burnt shell of the South Plaza

Building, and the North Plaza Building next to that was damaged almost as bad.

Behind these buildings was the court yard which separated the two towers. It was covered in smoldering debris also. On the left of the slab was a crew of demolition contractors with a 4 story crane cutting and lifting structural steel with oxy-acetylene torches. As the night went on more heavy equipment moved in to assist in the rescue efforts. Behind all this was the remains of Tower 1 which was intermingled with Tower 2 wreckage. All buildings surrounding the plaza were damaged. They were coated with dust, windows broken, faces torn, some with large gaping holes that may warrant their demolition. Hidden by the smoke was a large 6 or 7 story wall section of Tower 2, still standing although barely. We were told by police that the west side of the area was blanketed in human remains from the second plane. The odors I sensed were a mixture of stinging dust, diesel fumes and light smoke, occasionally excrement and flesh. My eyes stung from the dust and smoke and it got so bad that I occasionally removed myself to the triage center or the rear of the ambulance. I felt the grit in my mouth, on my skin and weighing on my hair.

We relocated the ambulance to the main entrance of the trauma center with groups from East Rockaway and Syosset as neighbors. The night would be a long one as we waited for a transport, but none would come to our triage center/morgue. Only small and large plastic bags with triage tags came to our morgue.

During the night at about 3:00 a.m. we met two police officers from Port Washington who drove in after their tours to help dig. They rested in our rig and we checked them out and gave them fluids so they could return to the effort.

As night gave way to day, I slept for two hours on the rear bench of the ambulance. When I woke I was told that a Port Authority Policeman was removed in critical condition. The claim was that he was on the 82nd floor during the collapse which was believable when you think that he was close to the top of the rubble and he was most likely up there helping get people down when it gave way.

Since we were on duty we could not wonder far from the rig. Nothing is more frustrating than not being able to do what you train for, although I have been trained to transport injured. That was my duty for this tour. I plan go for another tour possibly Thursday (9/13), as this one ended at 12:00 p.m. today.

Going home was nice but frustrating at the same time. Duty called but my eyes were sore and my mind numb. As I watch the news coverage I get antsy, and I look at the locations where I was assigned and get quick flashbacks - sounds and smells included. I heard that Liberty Plaza has a collapse possibility due to some shifting in the foundation. I had spent my whole 13 hour tour there on Tuesday. Supposedly a few people were hurt when the building shifted this afternoon.

When I was in the basement of 1 Liberty Plaza searching for the restrooms, the exit to the subway ramp was there. The security gate was torn, debris was thrown through the doors and part of the ceiling was collapsed, a result of the collapse force above.

One final memory: As a friend and I drove over the Whitestone Bridge on Monday afternoon (before the disaster) from Boston, I glanced across the East River to view my favorite sight, the New York City skyline with

thunderheads over it. Little did I know that would be the last time I would see it that way.

Good night and remember the brothers and sisters who didn't make it home last night.

FF/EMT Windsor Kinney
September 12, 2001