

File No. 9110048

WORLD TRADE CENTER TASK FORCE INTERVIEW

EMT PATRICIA ONDROVIC

Interview Date: October 11, 2001

## P. ONDROVIC

CHRISTOPHER ECCLESTON: Today's date is October 11, 2001. The time is 6:48 AM, and this is Christopher Eccleston of the New York City Fire Department. I am conducting an interview with the following individual...please state your name, rank, title, and assigned command area of the Fire Department of the City of New York, regarding the events of September 11, 2001.

PATRICIA ONDROVIC: Patricia Ondrovic, shield 1634, EMTD, assigned to Battalion 8.

Q: Were you assigned to the World Trade Center disaster on September 11, 2001?

A: Yes.

Q: En route to the alarm, what did you see?

A: I saw the two towers burning.

Q: On arrival, did any civilians report anything to you?

A: No.

Q: Where did you park your vehicle when you arrived?

A: In the middle of Vesey Street between West and whatever is East of Vesey.

Q: On this map, can you indicate with a number 1 where you parked your vehicle?

A: Um...it was on Vesey between West and the West Side Highway so, it was, I'm not sure if it was this block or that block.

## P. ONDROVIC

Q: Okay, just approximate and put a number 1.

A: I guess it was over here.

Q: Okay, and what vehicle were you in?

A: Vehicle 90.

Q: Vehicle 90. Whom did you first report to and where?

A: On Vesey and West, in the middle of the block, there was an EMS captain.

I never got his name, I don't know who he was. I said I was 07 Charlie, he said park it over there. That was the last I saw of him.

Q: Were you given a specific assignment?

A: No. Stand by. Take the equipment out of the vehicle and stand by.

Q: Were you asked to assist any specific units?

A: No.

Q: Can you tell me what you did when you arrived at that location?

A: We took the stretcher and all the crash equipment out of the bus and we formed up alongside one of the buildings on Vesey. I don't remember which number it was. We were in a line of several other ambulances. Next to us was a St. Claire's ambulance and a Cabrini Ambulance. I think there was only one other EMS ambulance on that block at the time I was there. That was vehicle 350, 08 David. I didn't know a lot of the people there, I didn't know the EMS captain that was there. There were no patients that we could see at that point. I think they were trying to set up a triage in front of the building that the ambulances were all parked at. I guess we were supposed to be

P. ONDROVIC

the first on the wave to take patients out, and there was a Tex-Mex restaurant across the street. I went in to use the bathroom, that's where the Police were using their command center. I saw a police captain that I knew, and he came out to me. He looked absolutely terrified, he was shaking, he was pale, he was sweating. I looked at him, I said what's wrong? He said there's another plane headed our way, and they just blew up the Pentagon. I said, another plane? What are you talking about? I hadn't realized that planes had hit this, I thought they just set bombs off. I didn't realize when I got there that planes hit it. I said, what do you mean another plane? He said two planes hit the World Trade Center. So I'm thinking a little Cessena. How can a little Cessena do all that damage? He said no, 757s. I said big things? See I was there for about 25 minutes before I knew that planes had crashed into this. We just got assigned to do stand-by. We didn't know what the stand-by was. I mean, who thinks something like that? You just think they hit it again. So I said, what do you mean there's another one headed this way? He said, it's on the TV, there's a TV in there and it said that the Pentagon has been hit. Then we all went outside cause they had on the police radio that there was another plane headed in our direction, we all went outside and started looking up in the sky. Then the EMS captain said everyone grab your equipment, get to your vehicles and stay with your vehicles. My partner and I grabbed our stretcher, went to put it in the back of our vehicle, and at that time, I think it was the lobby of the building behind us blew out. Everybody started running, I didn't see him again that day. He got thrown one way, I got

## P. ONDROVIC

thrown the other way. I started running towards the West Side Highway, and there was another building on the corner, I guess it was a federal building, cause it was all the green and gray uniforms with the Smokey the Bear hats, the cops in there. I went to run in the lobby cause all of a sudden you couldn't see anything. There was smoke, there was debris, there was everything flying around. I ran into the lobby cause I had no idea what had happened and the cops that were in there were telling everybody get out, get out, get out. Where are you gonna go? Stuff's blowing up. So I ran back out and I started running west again. At that point, there was a car on the corner of I think I was here at that point, on the West Side Highway.

Q: West Side Highway and Vesey?

A: And Vesey, yeah. I was still on Vesey, cause the building that blew up on me was on Vesey, it was on the corner next to the West Side Highway. Cause I know I was running west, I didn't run that way. Thank God, I would have been dead had I run the other way. But I ran towards the West Side Highway, and I kept running up Vesey. As I was running up Vesey, the first car blew up on me on the corner of Vessey and the West Side Highway. That set my turnout coat on fire, that set my hair on fire, and that set my feet on fire. I kept running. I got news for you, those turn out coats need to be called burn out coats, cause this thing caught up in flames. They cut two inches off my hair in less that two minutes, my coat was completely engulfed, and that was the only way I could see where I was running at that point, because I had a glow from my coat.

## P. ONDROVIC

There's hundreds of cops all running up there, and I ended up running through this park, and I couldn't even see where I was running anymore. I kept running North.

Q: Through North Park?

A: I guess that's North Park. It's a big green, grassy area, and there's nothing there. As I was running up here, two or three more cars exploded on me. They weren't near any buildings at that point, they were just parked on the street. The traffic guys hadn't gotten a chance to tow anything yet, cause this was all during the first hour I guess of this thing happening. So there were still cars parked on the street that were completely independent of that. Three cars blew up on me, stuff was being thrown. I went home all bruised that day. Thank God it was only bruises. I just ran into this park along with a bunch of other people, and stuff was still blowing up, I don't think I looked back, but you couldn't see anything, everything was just black. I was running and I was falling over people, cause people were crawling on the ground cause they couldn't see anymore. I just kept on running north. I could smell water, so I just kept on running towards the water, cause I knew that my coat was on fire, and I figured well, if I can see a boat over the water, I'm just gonna jump onto the boat and take that thing to Jersey, cause no one wants to blow up Jersey. Stuff is still blowing up behind me, as I'm running. I can hear stuff exploding. I could hear rumbling, the street under me was moving like I was in an earthquake. I've been in those, so I know what they feel like. It felt like an earthquake. There was no where safe to go. As I was running north in this park, and then I could start seeing again a little bit, and I just kept looking in the sky. Cause the captain was saying

## P. ONDROVIC

there's another plane heading in our direction, I was looking for another plane. I saw something in the sky, it was a plane, but it was way out. It looked like it was over Jersey or something, then it wasn't there anymore. I saw a small fireball, and it was gone. I saw two other planes. One came in one way, and the other came in the other way, and there was a plane in the middle that was way far off in the distance. Then the plane in the middle just disappeared into a little fire ball. It looked like the size of a golf ball from where I could see it. And the other two planes veered off into opposite directions. I just kept on running north. About fifteen blocks later, I had no idea that that was just the first tower that had come down. I had no idea at that time that that's what that was, and the other buildings were being affected, of course, by that building falling. I found another ambulance, I believe it was the 08 Adam, because it was Valdivia and Jose Perez. Joseph Valdivia used to be my partner on tour 3, and when I finally caught up to them, I told them what was happening. I told them whatever you do, don't go back that way cause they just blew up triage. I thought that they blew up our triage sector, cause that's where the command was and everything. That was the only thing that I had to go by, everybody that was there was gone. Cause a couple of the police officers that are now missing are guys that I had known, and that's where they were. The paramedic from Cabrini, that's where he was. I was just talking to him 20 minutes before everything blew up. I don't know where he ran, I don't know if he ran the wrong way, cause I know I ran the right way. If you ran the opposite way, you were dead. As I got like 15, 20 blocks away, now I'm on the West Side Highway cause I came out of this park and I found the other

## P. ONDROVIC

ambulance. I saw my ex-partner, and I said get in this thing and drive it to Westchester. I told him get the hell out of the city. Get everyone who can get in this, I said shit's still blowing up down there. Whatever you do, don't go in that direction, start driving north. He was like, looking at me like I was insane. Cause I don't know if anyone saw what had happened. All you could see was black smoke and that's all I can see at that point. Now I'm in an area where all the reporters are coming up to me and asking what had happened, and I said I don't think I'm allowed to talk about it. Cause I don't know what happened, and I wasn't gonna tell anybody. You know, it was surreal, like it wasn't really happening. So then an EMS Lieutenant comes over, he sees me standing with 8 Adam, and he says okay, you guys are gonna go three blocks south. I looked at him, and I said are you out of your mind? I found another guy from 8 David, Charles Gschlecht and we found each other as we were running. He couldn't find his partner, and I couldn't find mine, so we kind of synched up together, cause at least we knew each other and it's like, okay, we're okay. He said I can't find my partner. I said I can't find mine either, I think he got blown the wrong way. This guy was telling me that his partner went back in to help somebody, and that was the last we saw of either of them for awhile. That was the last I saw my partner for six whole days, cause I didn't come back to work after that.

Q: Who was the lieutenant you saw, do you know?

A: Yeah, Bobby Deleon. Bobby Deleon comes up to me, and I know him cause he used to be a union rep up in the Bronx when I worked up there a million years

## P. ONDROVIC

ago, he tells us to take the vehicle, put me and Charles in the back of the vehicle and go three blocks south. Charles told him, are you out of your mind? We're not safe where we are, let alone three blocks south. Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, I know. Get in the ambulance and go three blocks south. At that point I got really upset. I said, do you realize they just blew up our triage sector? Everybody back there is dead, everybody back there is gone. There is no reason for us to go back there, we don't have the proper protective equipment, we don't have the proper vehicles. There's no way I'm going back there, there's no reason to go back. Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, don't be hysterical, just go back three blocks south. I'm not going three blocks south, he's not going three blocks south, this ambulance is not going three blocks south. Sean started telling him we're not safe where we are now, and we were fifteen blocks away. It was certainly not safe there. He was the whole time saying...cause at that point I was screaming at him, cause he wasn't in there. We were telling him what we saw, and he just wouldn't listen. Yeah, yeah, I know.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I still  
hadn't realized that the first tower had fallen. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

After I found out what actually

## P. ONDROVIC

happened, cause I found that out about a week ago, that that's what I ran from. So then, I think it was an EMS chief, I'm not sure who it was. Now more people were starting to come to this location, and he says okay, here's what we're gonna do...everybody's gonna go back down that way on the West Side Highway, and it's okay cause we have a police escort.

Q: Back south?

A: Back south on the West Side Highway, it's be okay cause we have a police escort. I don't want any free-lancing, we're all gonna go back in a nice orderly fashion. At that point my chest started to hurt, I couldn't breathe cause all I was breathing in was this black crap, I started coughing up all this black crap, all this stuff that looked like goo, and if I had to run another 15 blocks, I would have been dead. There was no way I could do it. I saw Lieutenant Hanlon, who is a lieutenant out of this station at that point, and I sat in the back of the ambulance. I started getting really scared, and really upset, cause people were telling me to go back in and die. There was nothing else they were telling me to do at that point, cause that was all that was gonna happen. So I sat in the back of the ambulance, I was coughing up, I was coughing up. Everyone kept asking me do you want oxygen? I was like no, I don't want it to get pushed down, I want to bring it up. I took some cold water, I put it on my face, I tried to cough up into it, and my chest really started hurting. Then my left arm started hurting, then the whole left side of my body started hurting, and I was like no, there's no way this is gonna happen. Lieutenant Hanlon came over to me and said are you okay? I said no, and I don't

## P. ONDROVIC

know where my partner is. At that point I was crying cause I had no idea where my partner was, I thought I was having a goddamn heart attack, and these people are telling me to go back in. So then when this EMS chief said what we're gonna do I said no, I have chest pain, I want to go to the hospital. So 8 Adam took me to the hospital, they took me to St. Vincent's. At the time we were setting up, getting ready to take me out, they took my blood pressure, which was a little high at the time, it's never been before in my life, but I think that's a good time for it to be high.

Q: Did you take something?

A: They put me on oxygen, put me in the stretcher. As they put me in the stretcher, somebody came over the EMS radio, said that the North Tower is leaning. As we started driving off, we saw the second tower fall. As we're driving away, debris is hitting the back of the ambulance. We were now about 20 blocks away, debris was hitting the back of the ambulance as we were watching this thing come down, it was just this huge cloud. It was me and Jose Perez in the back of the bus saying, I can't believe we're seeing this. When we saw the towers start coming, I took the oxygen off my face, me and Jose are yelling up to the front to Joe just drive. Put your foot on the floor and drive, drive as fast as you can out of here, it's coming down. Joe was like, I know I see it, and he had his foot on the floor, which meant we were going 30 miles an hour. Stuff was still hitting the back of the ambulance. All I kept thinking of is if this much crap is hitting the back of the bus and we're 20 blocks away, this lieutenant wanted us to go 3 blocks south, and I'm thinking what happened to everybody who listened to this chief

## P. ONDROVIC

and went back? I don't even know if they got a chance to go back. You know? Also, after I was running, I remember running, and I remember somebody yelling on the radio May Day, May Day, I'm trapped! Over the EMS radio. I was thinking May Day? That's not a term we use, you know 10-13 or 85 forthwith, but somebody's yelling May Day, I'm trapped. Then you heard this loud buzz, and you didn't hear anymore transmissions after that until I would venture to guess it was 20 minutes to a half our later, and the first thing I remember hearing was somebody saying the North Tower is leaning. Within five minutes of that statement, the second tower came down. I spent the rest of my day at St. Vincent's hospital.

Q: Okay, is there anything else you would like to add to this?

A: I don't know if it matters, but I took the next three days off after that. I didn't go on [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I was okay with it until the lieutenant wouldn't listen to me, and would not understand that it was dangerous to go back in. He wouldn't accept that from me or the other guy that was with me. So I took the next three days off sick. During that time I went to see two counselors, one that was set-up by the union. Cause needless to say, like everyone else in the city, I did not sleep, I was having nightmares, I think the first full meal I ate was about last week. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]. Then I went to go see an internist cause I started walking down the street

P. ONDROVIC

and all of a sudden, I couldn't breathe. I was trying to get back in the swing of things, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. His statements to two of my co-workers, as well

as a lieutenant was, it's part of the job. If I can't handle the job, I shouldn't have it. I

don't think what any of us responded to that day was part of anyone's job, let alone ours.

That was a military operation. Of course, what are you gonna do? It could have been my

day off. I could have been shopping at Border's Books. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. I don't think anyone's ever been exposed to

something like this before here. Of course not, but we all know EMS has a high rate of

suicide. Not saying that that's gonna be my case cause no, I refuse, I wouldn't let

anybody push me to that corner.

Q: I'm glad to hear that.

## P. ONDROVIC

A: But, this is what happens. This is one of the reasons that I pushed up my resignation date a lot quicker. Cause I was trying to hold out for another 8 months, as soon I can get another job I'm the hell outta here. It's not because of this event, cause other events like this will happen whether I'm on duty or off, it's the way I've been treated since.

Q: I thank you very much for speaking to me, the time is 7:08 and this concludes the interview.