

On Tuesday, 9-11, I was awakened in the early morning by a fellow Connecticut firefighter who frantically told me to tune into CNN. He said the top floors of one of the World Trade Center towers were heavily involved in fire.

After watching for about ten minutes, I learned that a plane had crashed into the upper floors of the building. What was amazing, was that no one, including myself, even considered the possibility that this could have been the result of a terrorist attack. Then a newsperson unwittingly pointed out how strange it was to have such an accident when the weather is so clear. Duh!

As I began thinking of the possibilities, I tuned in my scanner to the NYFD Manhattan fire frequency. I listened to Manhattan Dispatch call World Trade Center Command several times to report the locations of people trapped.

"Manhattan to World Trade Center Command, be advised we have a report of 100 people trapped on the 81st floor," the dispatcher said.

"Command Received, we'll get on it," replied Command.

The next transmission: "Manhattan to Command, we also have 82 people trapped on the 101st floor," said the dispatcher.

Command again responded, "We've got crews working their way up to them."

As this was all going on I watched in horror as I both listened to the live FDNY radio transmissions and witnessed, on live TV, the second jet crashing into building #2. It made it seem like I was there as my sense were saturated with the audio and video.

Then, I heard a call that sent a chill down my spine.

"Manhattan to Command, I'm receiving a May Day call from a firefighter from the 21st floor".

As friends and family called, I found my hand shaking uncontrollably. I continued to listen as Manhattan dispatch gave the World Trade Center Command a rundown of units assigned to the two separate incidents.

"Command, you have a total of 10 alarms on building #1 and 5 alarms on building #2," said the dispatcher.

Just then, the unthinkable happened....a total collapse of the first World Trade Center building!

I was in total shock, leaving me speechless to the person on the phone. In fact, I think I hung the phone up on them without any further spoken word.

I could not get past the thoughts of all the emergency workers who I had seen on TV minutes before running into the building and just heard on the radio minutes before!

I continued to listen as Manhattan Dispatch tirelessly repeated its call to World Trade Center Command. This went on for several minutes without response from anyone from the scene.

Then, a voice, and I felt a quickly dashed glimmer of hope as I heard the message.

A Battalion Chief radioed Manhattan, "We can't breathe. We need help down here, please.. We need help," the Chief said, his voice distressed. My hopes were dashed.

"Stay calm Chief we have additional units on the way," the dispatcher said.

I listened to the radio cry for help from the Chief, while I continued to watch on TV a huge plume of smoke and dust envelope the entire World Trade Center area. Obviously the dispatcher, with no TV, had no idea of what had just happened.

I did not hear any more transmissions from the Chief. The radio was silent for what seemed an eternity.

Then several minutes later I heard the following: "Ladder 10 to Manhattan," a voice called.

The Manhattan dispatcher seemed relieved for the few seconds that followed until they learned that the person they were speaking was not Command, but an EMS worker.

"This is an EMS worker.. There has been a major collapse" said the EMS worker.

"Manhattan to Ladder 10, find someone with a white hat [a Chief] and have them contact Manhattan forthwith," said the dispatcher.

The EMS worker responded... "I don't think you understand...WE need help...there's no one around..."

As I sat in disbelief listening to the radio and absolutely horrified, the phone rang. My wife was calling from a local hospital where she was working and awakened me from my trance.

She informed me that Connecticut hospitals were preparing to take some of the bounded or transfers from other hospitals. I immediately hung up the phone and called my Fire Department, Stamford Fire & Rescue Department, where I work as a Lieutenant, to see if there was anything I could do. I was scheduled for that night anyway, but I was then ordered in to man a second rescue for our city.

Mutual aid units to FDNY were being mustered from across the state. Myself, and almost fifty other firefighters were ordered back to work.

A short time later, a "Task Force" of an Engine, Truck and Rescue Company was sent to Westchester County to stand by for possible deployment into New York. We were ready to help.

On a nice day, from Stamford, Connecticut we can easily see the two World Trade Center towers. Our landscape, our hearts and souls have now been changed forever. It is now many hours later and the images on the TV and sounds on the fire scanner continue to haunt me. And I continue to hope and pray that there are many more survivors and many more rescues.

God bless all our brothers and sisters who were killed today and those who will be spending the next weeks or months sifting through the rubble trying to recover their bodies.

There are simply no words that could ever express how we all feel.

Sincerely,
Philip L. Hayes
EMSVillage.com & Fire-RescueVillage.com, Village Manager
Lieutenant, Rescue 1, Stamford Fire & Rescue Department