NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

'THE LOST SON': BERNARD KERIK'S STORY

UNDER ATTACK

rather than endure the 2000-degree inferno.

"Then let's get a command post. Right now!"

We were on Barclay Street, a block from where we'd just been standing.

The mayor's car was racing down West Broadway toward the scene. I flagged him down.

"They're driving planes into the buildings! We gotta get everyone out of City Hall," he said.

There was so much going on, so many people yelling and asking questions that everything runs together. And still the bodies were falling.

The mayor and I talked about setting up a command post, and someone suggested again that we go back to the bunker at the Office of Emergency Management in 7 World Trade Center.

The mayor and I agreed that it wasn't safe, so we walked toward the West Side Highway, where firefighters and cops from the Emergency Service Unit had set up a deployment area and were suiting up to go into the buildings. A steady line of them was moving toward the burning towers.

We saw Pete Ganci, the Fire Department's chief of department, the first deputy commissioner of the Fire Department, William Feehan, and Father Mychal Judge, the beloved 68-year-old Fire Department chaplain. We spoke to them briefly about the rescue.

All around us, brave firefighters were pulling on their masks and marching off toward the building.

I passed Sgt. John Coughlan and some other ESU cops. "Be careful," I said. All around the buildings, police officers — like their brothers in the Fire Department — were ignoring the danger and leading evacuations, helping people from buildings and out of the area.

We walked north on West Street as the ESU teams started off toward the building or the Office of Emergency Management across from the North Tower.

In 10 minutes, those courageous men and women would all be lost, along with so many more.

The fires were burning up the buildings and smoke and debris were getting worse. I knew the mayor shouldn't stay there any longer.

"Mayor," I said, "we've got to get you out of here and set up a command post."

There was a rumbling. Another jet? "We got a third plane coming in!" someone yelled. There wasn't another jet, but by then Hector had grabbed me by the collar and was pulling me north, away from the burning buildings.

The mayor was running next to me.

I was thinking about the cops down there and wondering how a city police commissioner goes about getting military air support.

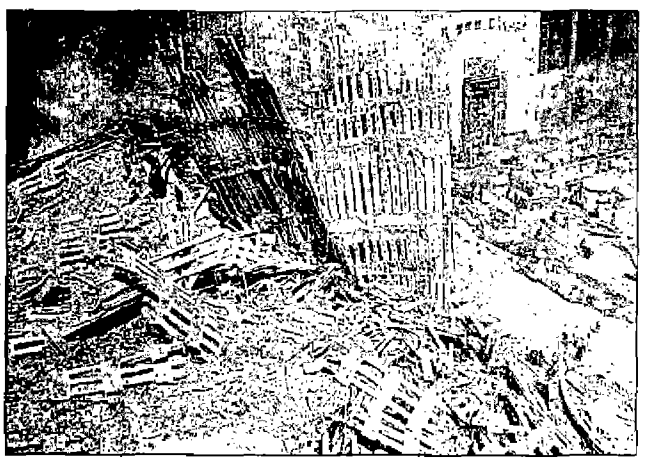
I told Hector to call aviation and have them notify the military. I wondered how many planes the other side had.

And I wondered who the hell the other side was.

We moved into an internal Merrill Lynch office at 75 Barclay, two blocks from the World Trade Center, where I huddled with the mayor, Joe Lhota, the deputy mayor for operations, Tony Carbonetti and Denny Young, the mayor's counsel, in a small office.

"We need to get the president on the phone," Mayor Giuliani said. "We've got to get the Department of Defense."

Then Joe Dunne, my first deputy commissioner, limped in. I thought of his courage and dedication. He was on crutches because of a severed Achilles tendon and still he had to come in to work.



Reuters



N.Y. Post: Tamara Beckwith

SKELETON OF DESTRUCTION: The World Trade Center was reduced to rubble (above) after terrorists slammed two hijacked airliners into the Twin Towers.

BUT, while we had a number of top officials, we didn't have any phone numbers and we weren't sure we had any phones that would work anyway.

Then in the background someone yelled, "They hit the Pentagon!" I thought these people had lost it. There was no way.

I walked into the office where the mayor was on the telephone and Joe Lhota and Tony Carbonetti signaled for me to be quiet. "The mayor's on with the White House," they said.

He was talking with Chris Henick, the president's assistant and deputy to the special adviser. As the mayor hung up, he had a puzzled look on his face.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"The Pentagon has been hit and they're evacuating the White House," he said.

I didn't have time to get my mind around what he was saying because a few moments later there was a low rumbling that sounded like it came from everywhere at once.

"What's that?" someone asked. The building shook. It was 9:55 a.m.

Outside, World Trade Center Two leaned slightly to the side and then began coming down, floor by floor.

There was screaming outside. The windows around us began popping like popcorn. Boom! Boom! Boom!

"Everybody, hit the deck!" someone yelled.

And then there was a great whooshing explosion — "FWOOM!" as the North Tower pulled into itself and then blasted smoke and debris out in every direction, as if it had taken a deep breath and then blown it out.

In 75 Barclay, people dove under desks and tables.

"Move!" someone yelled and again Hector was pulling me, through the hallways toward the back of the building. I could hear the rumbling and smell the smoke. People screamed.

We ran toward the back of the building. Hector calling in to the radio the signal that I was in danger: "Code black! Code black!"

At the same time, Mayor Giuliani, his top aides, Joe Dunner and I were moving through the lower level of the building on Barclay Street, being led by staffs through narrow corridors.

In one dark hallway, we looked down to see smoke coming at us and we moved another way.

We went down one corridor that was a dead end and then another, until finally a door opened and two janitors appeared almost from out of nowhere.

They led us out of the building through a maze of hallways beneath the streets and up into the lobby of a building on Church Street. In the lobby we checked to make sure our people were okay and to figure out what to do next.

We came out on Church Street and found ourselves in a gray fog of ash and smoke. Paper was coming down from everywhere, like some horrible ticker-tape parade.

We began walking north and east, joining thousands of people, a ragtag parade of people covered in ash and soot, looks of sheer disbelief on their faces, the cloud at our backs.

As we continued up Church Street, we called to the people around us to "keep moving, keep going north. Get as far from the buildings as you can," I said.

> **'I was thinking about the cops down there and wondering how a city police commissioner goes about getting military air support.'**

Someone else suggested a hotel — the Tribeca Grand. We walked into the lobby. The mayor and I both looked up at the same time. The whole top of the building was made of glass. We imagined that glass flying in an explosion, and shook our heads. We went back out in the street and continued our march north.

Finally, we came to a firehouse at the corner of Houston Street and Sixth Avenue. It would work, but we couldn't get in. The firefighters had gone all the way down to the World Trade Center and had locked the building behind them. Hector broke his knife trying to get us in. But finally, we jimmied the lock, got the door open and burst in. There were 13 of us, a dusty, tired group of people trying to get the city back on its feet.

For about an hour, this was what the top echelon of city government was reduced to, a dozen people covered in soot, standing behind a guy as he tried to break into a firehouse.

Still, I was amazed at the focus and strength of these people.

With the city literally under attack, Rudolph Giuliani was the mayor he's always been, solving problems, inspiring and comforting not just New Yorkers, but Americans everywhere. It made me proud to serve next to him.

The firehouse had been a good emergency command center, but we needed something bigger and more secure. I suggested the Police Academy. It was a low building, centrally located, unassuming and certainly not a target in case the terrorists tried to strike again. Yet it had phones and meeting rooms and could be secured easily.

So our little emergency government piled in cars and moved over to the academy to begin the work of responding to the greatest crisis in U.S. history.

We worked all afternoon and evening getting a handle on things, shutting off the southern part of the city, getting rescue workers in as close as possible, coordinating with the federal government.

At 11:15 p.m., the mayor and I went to Bellevue Hospital to visit the first victims.

But there simply weren't as many injuries as there should have been.

Next, we went to St. Vincent's, the hospital nearest the Twin Towers. It was the same story. Dozens of doctors and nurses stood around in scrubs and waited outside the hospital doors for injured people to treat.

All day, triage stations, clinics, ambulances and hospitals had waited.

Boats had really stood ready to ferry the wounded to New Jersey.

But the people never came.

That was really the hard part.

CORRECTION A photo on Page 24 in yesterday's New York Post incorrectly identified New York Police Deputy Inspector John Cutter. We regret the error.

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