

DOC IT's MIKE MORENO MEMORIES OF 9/11



On the morning of 9/11/2001, I was on my way to my field office on Rikers Island when the officer at the security booth told me that a plane had just crashed into one of the World Trade Center towers.

I looked over to my left as I drove over the bridge that links Rikers Island to the Borough of Queens. I saw a large flume of smoke rising above the north tower and flames spewing from the upper floors. As I reached the second security booth at the other end of the bridge, I made the decision not to go to my office but instead to go directly to the main telecommunication building and gather my staff to activate our emergency command center.

We had a number of offices and inmate facilities near WTC. As soon as I arrived, we were barraged with calls that our offices in lower Manhattan were without power and everyone was evacuating the buildings.

We installed extra phones, laptops, and two-way radios in our conference room to communicate with our field personnel. As we were installing our equipment, we kept an eye on one of the televisions and saw the second plane hit the south tower.

A captain I was working with turned to me and we both simultaneously said “This is not an accident.” We were being attacked.

We spent the rest of the morning through the early evening coordinating the transportation of hundreds of inmates out of the downtown court pens and the Manhattan Detention Complex safely back to the Rikers Island jails. We put the

jails on lockdown and secured the entire island: no one in or out without a security clearance.

Our Emergency Response Units were dispatched, along with our K9 unit, to the Ground Zero within the hour of the first plane hitting the north tower to help in the rescue efforts. We have very well trained and experienced emergency service units. Very few people know that these units are in charge of setting up and operating an onsite morgue during a major disaster.

We, the telecommunications unit, were dispatched that evening to provide the necessary equipment to set up a field command center in a nearby high school south of Ground Zero. We needed to provide generators, computers, printers, fax machines, and more radios. There was no telephone service at Ground Zero since the central office which provides telephone service to the World Trade Center and all of Wall Street was damaged and without power.

But, there was phone service from another phone company nearby across the West Side Highway in the American Express Complex. So we did what any resourceful New Yorker would do, we stole it. We ran a few thousand-foot telephone cables on a pedestrian bridge that goes over the highway near our field command center to the Amex Center, busted a hole through a wall and into the building's main telephone room, cut their wires and installed our cables. Within a few hours, our field command center was up and running.

I remember vividly my first trip to Ground Zero. We left Rikers Island around 9 p.m. on September 11 in a convoy driving all the way with lights and sirens. Since all the downtown bridges and tunnels were shut down, we had to go north to the Triborough Bridge, the only bridge into and out of the city. We raced west across Harlem, then south down the Westside Highway sirens blasting.

As we entered the cordoned off and heavily guarded area around Ground Zero, I noticed a long line of ambulances and emergency vehicles. There had to be over a hundred. But, they weren't ours. They were from all over the East Coast; from New Jersey, Long Island, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania; from big cities and small towns. They sent their best people and best equipment. There were ambulances in a rainbow of bright colors, polished chrome, all with their lights flashing, and engines running. They were all waiting to give aid and to transport the injured to the area hospitals whose emergency rooms were fully staffed and waiting.

When we left the next morning, we passed those same ambulances. They were in the same place. Their engines were not running, their lights not flashing, and it was very quiet. There was no life to save. There was no one to rescue. There was no one to give aid to. There was no one to transport.

They were all dead.

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