

UNITED STATES ARMY
CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY

INTERVIEW OF

BG JOSEPH TALUTO
Joint Task Force 42 Commander

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CONDUCTED BY

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126 Military History Detachment

AT

Park Avenue Armory

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TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 **MAJ LANDY:** MAJ Paul Landry, 126th Military
3 History Detachment. The date is 5 October 2001 at 1210
4 hours, an oral history interview at the Park Ave.
5 Armory in New York City.

6 Sir, if I could ask you to state your name and
7 spell your last name for me, sir?

8 **BG TALUTO:** Yes. BG Joe Taluto, T-a-l-u-t-o.

9 **MAJ LANDY:** Sir, what is your current assignment?

10 **BG TALUTO:** I'm the assistant deputy and the
11 deputy commander for maneuver of the 42nd Infantry
12 Division. And I'm currently serving as a Joint Task
13 Force commander with the World Trade Center disasters.

14 **MAJ LANDY:** How long have you been on the ground
15 here now?

16 **BG TALUTO:** I've been here since the 18th of
17 September.

18 **MAJ LANDY:** Okay. When you first heard of the
19 attack on the World Trade Center where were you and
20 what were you doing?

21 **BG TALUTO:** I was with my headquarters at a Battle

1 Command Training Program seminar at Fort Leavenworth,
2 Kansas. I became aware of the attack when we were
3 called out of the seminar room and basically to watch
4 the events unfold on television.

5 At that point I returned a call to our
6 headquarters in New York at the Division of Military
7 Naval Affairs and spoke to the deputy adjutant general,
8 BG Bill Martin, and discussed with him the events of
9 what was going on.

10 He recommended that we return home at least with a
11 small detachment of people in order to be available for
12 any duties that might be associated with the disaster.

13 Once I did that I informed our commanding general
14 Tom Garrrett, of that requirement and immediately
15 started to assemble the team to come back to New York
16 state. That team consisted of myself and nine other
17 people.

18 We left Fort Leavenworth at 1:15 eastern standard
19 time and arrived back at the headquarters in Troy, New
20 York 21 hours later the next day. GEN Garrett and the
21 rest of the staff also departed the seminar

1 approximately six hours after we did.

2 During that trip we were involved in alerting and
3 mobilizing units that were going to be placed in
4 support of the unit in charge of the disaster site at
5 that time, which was the 53rd Troop Command. And we
6 did so.

7 We put together a task force out of Buffalo and we
8 coordinated their assemblage and movement to the
9 disaster area for the use of the Troop Command.

10 **MAJ LANDY:** Sir, do you know which units were
11 among the first to be called up during the 11th and the
12 12th of September?

13 **BG TALUTO:** Well, there was a combination of
14 several units in the state of New York out of the 42nd
15 Division, the 27th Brigade and the Troop Command.

16 Out of the 42nd Division we alerted the 69th
17 Infantry Battalion, the 258 Field Artillery Battalion,
18 the 101 Armor Battalion, the 152 Engineer Battalion,
19 the 642 Division Aviation Support Battalion and the 342
20 Forward Support Battalion. Those were amongst the 42nd
21 Division units that were alerted.

1 **MAJ LANDY:** Now, the higher headquarters prior to
2 your arrival was the 53rd Troop Command. When did you
3 do that battle hand-off with them?

4 **BG TALUTO:** Well, that battle hand-off began on
5 the 18th of September with leaders in reconnaissance
6 and interaction with the Troop Command and staff. And
7 subsequently we were issued orders that we would take
8 command and control of the operation on the 22nd of
9 September at noon.

10 **MAJ LANDY:** This is a Joint Task Force
11 headquarters. Can you tell me what type of units are
12 currently involved in this operation?

13 **BG TALUTO:** Yes. The orders were to form a Joint
14 Task Force headquarters. And let me just talk about
15 that, the orders I got on or about the 19th of
16 September. And the order was to conduct a relief in
17 place of the units currently in support of the disaster
18 site and to establish a sustained operation.

19 We were assigned a force list consisting of Army
20 National Guard, Air National Guard for New York and New
21 York Naval Malitia forces as well as a contingent from

1 the New York Guard, which is a state defense force, a
2 volunteer force that exists in the state of New York.
3 So we assembled a task force that was not to exceed
4 2,700 in support of the operations.

5 **MAJ LANDY:** What is your current estimated
6 operating strength now?

7 **BG TALUTO:** We are now currently operating at
8 1,730. Over the course of the past two and a half
9 weeks the Task Force has come down from its original
10 high of something approximately 2,300. These forces
11 are still consistent of Army, Air, Navy and the state
12 defense forces from the state of New York.

13 **MAJ LANDY:** Your initial mission you stated
14 earlier was conduct relief in place and to begin
15 sustainment operations. Here we are now a couple of
16 weeks into this. Has your mission changed any, and if
17 so what has that mission become?

18 **BG TALUTO:** Yes. The relief in place was
19 accomplished approximately the 24th of September. And
20 I considered the Task Force to have established a
21 sustained operation on the approximately 30th of

1 September with the establishment of an installation
2 base on Governor's Island.

3 At that time the mission statement was changed
4 from a relief in place and established sustained
5 operations to conduct missions until properly relieved
6 in support of the New York City disaster area.

7 **MAJ LANDY:** You mentioned Governor's Island. Can
8 you talk to me a bit about the operation that's going
9 on there?

10 **BG TALUTO:** Well, the basing of the force in New
11 York City was not stable when I arrived. We had troops
12 in various places sleeping. And a more permanent
13 solution was sought. When I got here the Governor's
14 Island option was on the table and being worked. So I
15 just fell in on that. It did become reality on the
16 22nd of September.

17 The Governor's Island thing was approved. And
18 then we began making our preparations for the
19 establishment of the base. And this was in order to
20 house a substantial amount of the Task Force on
21 Governor's Island so that we would have it for the

1 duration of the support exercise here in New York City.

2 We formed a task force that had exclusive
3 responsibility for establishing the base and housing
4 troops on the island. That task force accomplished
5 that. In approximately four days the island was made
6 ready by bringing the moth balled buildings, buildings
7 out of moth ball, bringing the online with hot water,
8 heat, electricity.

9 We established other facilities, messing
10 facilities, medical facilities for the communications
11 infrastructure and the like and pushed over numerous
12 amounts of supplies over the island and then moved in
13 about 750 troops someplace around the -- between the
14 28th and the 30th of September. And currently that
15 base is operating now at about that strength.

16 **MAJ LANDY:** Since you've taken over the operation,
17 have the soldiers that are on the ground been the same
18 soldiers that were here, or has there been some sort of
19 rotational plan? How is that working out?

20 **BG TALUTO:** After the initial relief in place,
21 which was relieving the initial, the first responders

1 to the force, we are currently -- it was the 5th and
2 6th of October going to conduct another turnover of
3 troops.

4 So we have basically rotated troops in about two-
5 week increments and we have changed out command control
6 headquarters on one weekend and then brought in fresh
7 troops on the next weekend alternating between sending
8 the work force home and having the C-2 remain in place
9 and then alternating one week after the other.

10 So it's been about a two-week rotation offset by
11 changing out certain people one week.

12 **MAJ LANDY:** Have there been any difficulties
13 making that transition between the different forces?

14 **BG TALUTO:** The initial relief in place was
15 difficult because there was no housing available. We
16 had to scramble around for bed space on the U.S.S.
17 Comfort, which was used as an outlet to house people
18 which was a temporary situation.

19 We had to establish our Joint Task Force
20 headquarters at the same time as conducting a relief in
21 place, which was somewhat difficult. We established an

1 intermediate staging base at Camp Smith for receptions,
2 stationing and (inaudible) integration into the area.
3 We brought forces in there, mustered them in and
4 prepared them for moving into the area to assume the
5 responsibility.

6 So that relief, the initial relief in place was
7 difficult. Since then, of course, having the Joint
8 Task Force headquarters established and fully in
9 command and in control we've been able to make proper
10 orders and plans in advance. And that has now made the
11 operation much smoother and less difficult.

12 **MAJ LANDY:** So you're basically running sort of a
13 mobilization station in essence at Camp Smith for these
14 folks?

15 **BG TALUTO:** Yes. I wouldn't say it's a
16 mobilization station. I would just say it was a
17 reception station for mustering in and making sure we
18 had the proper troop count and for moving them into the
19 area in an orderly manner when called for as compared
20 to having them report right down into the disaster
21 area, which would be very confusing, until we were

1 ready to receive them. So it serves those purposes.

2 **MAJ LANDY:** This appears to be a fairly logistics
3 intense operation. Would that be fair to say?

4 **BG TALUTO:** Well, the logistics of supporting our
5 own force is a substantial piece of work. About 16
6 percent of our force is based on supporting ourselves,
7 housing our troops, transporting our troops, feeding
8 them, caring for them, medical, et cetera. And so this
9 is a fairly substantial deployment. It's a large
10 number of troops to maintain. And therefore, there is
11 a logistical tail to it that requires from all the
12 proper command control and logistical elements to
13 sustain the force.

14 **MAJ LANDY:** How has communication been, and what
15 assets are you using to communicate throughout the
16 operation?

17 **BG TALUTO:** Well, the primary communication tool
18 is a cellular phone system. That has been our mobile
19 on the street phone communications, I should say. We
20 have had very little FM organic type communication
21 systems which has not been necessary. With the use of

1 the cell phones we have established hard-line
2 communications, telephone systems, to various command
3 posts, et cetera.

4 **MAJ LANDY:** How is the relationship going between
5 the military and the civilian authorities?

6 **BG TALUTO:** Before I go onto that just let me just
7 make one more comment about --

8 **MAJ LANDY:** Sure.

9 **BG TALUTO:** -- communications. The use of the
10 cell phones has been very effective. However, in the
11 early stages they may not have been as effective. But
12 based on the fact that several of the cellular towers
13 were taken out in the attack and communications, is at
14 least in the early stages of the exercise, is a concern
15 and we need to prepare properly for it. Okay. Onto
16 the question of --

17 **MAJ LANDY:** When it comes to dealing with -- it
18 sounds like you have a pretty tight, in-place command
19 and control organization from the military side of the
20 house. How is that working in conjunction with our
21 civilian counterparts?

1 **BG TALUTO:** The liaisoning in these types of
2 operations is extremely important. And we must
3 establish very strong liaisons with the civilian
4 agencies that you're representing.

5 In this case we are working security missions with
6 the New York Police Department so liaisoning with the
7 New York Police Department is very important from the
8 very top of the organization all the way through the
9 operating levels.

10 The city emergency management office is another
11 key place and a key customer. We have had to liaison
12 strongly with them making sure that we were in support
13 with the Office of Emergency Management of New York
14 City in the area logistics infrastructure, which we're
15 supporting, and the security infrastructure, which
16 we're supporting.

17 So liaisoning is very important. Our military
18 chain of command is in tact to control our forces. But
19 we are always in support of some civilian organization,
20 be it the -- more than one obviously can be at a time
21 as in this case with the New York Police Department,

1 New York City Office of the Emergency Management and
2 various other agencies.

3 Maybe I can talk to you a little bit about the
4 missions that we are doing.

5 **MAJ LANDY:** Sure.

6 **BG TALUTO:** In this exercise security has been the
7 main mission. That security mission has numerous tasks
8 assigned to it. We have been involved under the
9 security banner in traffic control, pedestrian control,
10 escort services, escorting people into their homes and
11 businesses, you know, in the disaster area.

12 We've been asked to look over key infrastructure
13 things like electrical cables that were put in to
14 support the operation after they had been taken out.
15 We've been asked to monitor trucks in and out of the
16 site from a security standpoint and a tracking
17 standpoint.

18 So site security has been one of our major
19 missions down here, and the bulk of our work force has
20 been assigned to doing those types of tasks. We have
21 also been involved in supporting the logistics

1 infrastructure of the emergency. We have received
2 supplies.

3 We have categorized the supplies into essential
4 and non-essential elements. We have trucked the non-
5 essential elements out of the city area. We have
6 reorganized the essential elements into another
7 warehouse and cataloged them.

8 We have supported the work site with supply points
9 bringing tools and equipment to the work site to those
10 supply points, and the personnel working on the
11 disaster site itself have been able to access.

12 We have been involved in a third area which we
13 call credentialing, which has been to actually
14 credential people and contractors to enter the site
15 area. That's been a very difficult mission. But we
16 have, we've gotten on top of that. And those are the
17 three major areas that we have supported in this
18 emergency system.

19 **MAJ LANDY:** Now, with all those different missions
20 going on, how are you finding both yourself, the staff
21 and soldiers in making the transition from that

1 atypical, you know, the war-fighter scenario that we're
2 all used to training for into now this support role
3 where we're conducting multiple missions in support of
4 civilian authorities? Has it been an easy transition,
5 has it been difficult, you know, your opinion on that,
6 sir?

7 **BG TALUTO:** Well, I think all of our military
8 training is absolutely applicable in this situation the
9 way we task organize, establish relationships in
10 command and control pieces is all what makes us a very
11 unified and responsive force.

12 The key tenets of the way we give orders and do
13 orders and do mission analysis and develop courses of
14 actions and make decisions and our military decision-
15 making process are all extremely applicable. We can
16 handle a wide range of different missions through task
17 organizing.

18 We have currently what we would consider to be a
19 brigade element in support of the site security mission
20 and a battalion element in support of the logistics
21 mission and a company team in support of the

1 credentialing mission all with a division headquarters
2 main CP and rear CP to conduct sustainment of
3 logistical operations.

4 So this has not been -- it has not been difficult
5 to accomplish the missions and using our military
6 training and doctrine. Actually, the most difficult
7 part is to integrate with the civilian agencies in a
8 chaotic situation and really define what the mission
9 requirements are and what the relationships are with
10 the civilian.

11 That is the most difficult part of the operation.

12 But we could command and control a wide variety of
13 missions that are well defined. As it is right now, I
14 would consider that we're really only using about one-
15 third of the division power on this exercise.

16 **MAJ LANDY:** Do you feel that it's the strength of
17 the Guard the fact that they have that ability to be
18 members of the community and then to be able to step in
19 having those built-in relationships already that this
20 has made this truly a mission that the Guard was really
21 kind of made to take care of?

1 **BG TALUTO:** Yes. I think these folks that stay in
2 active-duty missions, whether they be natural disaster
3 or in this case a man-made disaster and an act of war,
4 is suited for the National Guard organization, in
5 particular a combat organization like the division or
6 the brigade.

7 Our citizen soldiers can use their military
8 training as I've outlined previously to apply in this
9 situation. But then they also bring their civilian set
10 of skills to the operation.

11 We have several soldiers, air men, marines, et
12 cetera in military uniforms that are police and law
13 enforcement officers, master plumbers, electricians,
14 medical workers, EMS people.

15 These are all force multipliers for us. And it's
16 easy for us to define the community and get into the
17 community because we're part of the community. So this
18 is a battlefield that is absolutely suited for the
19 National Guard organization.

20 **MAJ LANDY:** If there was something that you as the
21 task force commander would have liked to have done

1 better or gotten a better grasp on initially, what
2 would that thing have been?

3 **BG TALUTO:** Well, I think I would say I was not in
4 charge of the operation from the September 11 timeframe
5 on. I think that we could certainly learn a lesson in
6 the initial response of we were very much in a rush to
7 support the operation, which was understandable and
8 which was necessary.

9 However, we probably weren't as prepared as an
10 organization to establish the proper command and
11 control of our own force when we first got down here.
12 We kind of hurriedly threw together a task force to be
13 down here. We can do that a lot better.

14 Although, when we entered the -- in this
15 particular situation this was such a devastating
16 attack, it caught everyone off guard and it was
17 certainly a chaotic situation. So there wasn't
18 probably anything that anybody could have done in this
19 case to have anticipated the magnitude of this. But we
20 could have probably figured out a better way to get
21 into it in the early stages.

1 To our credit, our state National Guard credit, we
2 quickly improved on that situation as the time went on.

3 So that's one thing we could have done better. I
4 think we're all now going to become better prepared as
5 far as making plans, task organizing for events, being
6 equipped and trained to get into these operations from
7 here on out.

8 **MAJ LANDY:** Is there any item you'd like to
9 address that you think is of importance to share?

10 **BG TALUTO:** Well, I'd like to just probably
11 reemphasize the fact that the National Guard Army
12 Division is an excellent choice to be a candidate to
13 conduct operations such as this because it brings that
14 vast command and control structure and ability to
15 sustain itself and sustain the operation.

16 It also has the leader infrastructure to quickly
17 learn and understand what the situation is on the
18 ground. And we use our military training and doctrine
19 that we learn in exercises like the battle command
20 training program and the brigade battle command
21 training programs to do this.

1 So that certainly is applicable doctrine and
2 applicable when applied and somewhat -- let's use the
3 word "converted" to civilian terms. We have been able
4 to conduct and learn training such as things like force
5 protection, how to do that, how to do our own internal
6 security, apply principles like unity and command,
7 doing liaisoning, doing things that we would do in a
8 peace-keeping scenario or even in a low-intensity
9 conflict. And for that matter, even in a high-
10 intensity conflict on a battlefield at some other
11 place.

12 So I just want -- as this unfolds in the future
13 and we study homeland defense, I think our leaders are
14 going to find that the National Guard combat
15 organizations like divisions and brigades and
16 battalions are key for command and control of the
17 operation while other specialist fields like
18 engineering, aviation, medical, transportation and
19 service support operations are always certainly
20 applicable in these missions but should be commanded
21 and controlled by leaders that are trained in that

1 military doctrine and in the military decision-making
2 process.

3 It is also important for us to understand that
4 when we get into these things that while we can use our
5 military training and doctrine and it certainly is
6 applicable that we need to understand the civilian
7 structure.

8 For example, in the New York Police Department
9 there is an organization, there are burroughs set up,
10 police burroughs, precincts within those burroughs.
11 There's a command structure and a leadership structure.

12 When we're in support of them that's the structure we
13 have to marry up to and we have to understand.

14 If we were in support of the sanitization
15 department or the police department or the Department
16 of Environmental Protection, we would have to
17 understand their organization early on so that we can
18 get in support of it.

19 And that is another key issue when we get into any
20 kind of support to civil authorities. So I add that
21 along with the other issue as a key point.

1 **MAJ LANDY:** All right, sir. Well, thank you very
2 much for your time.

3 **BG TALUTO:** Okay.

4 **MAJ LANDY:** MAJ Paul Landy, 126th Military History
5 Detachment. This concludes the oral history interview
6 with BG Taluto. The time is 12:47. The interview was
7 conducted at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City.

8 (The interview was concluded at 12:47 p.m.)

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