

UNITED STATES ARMY
CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY

INTERVIEW OF
BG THOMAS BARRAGA

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CONDUCTED BY

MAJ PAUL LANDRY

The Center of Military History

AT

Park Avenue Armory
New York City, New York

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TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

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

2 **MAJ LANDRY:** MAJ Paul Landry, 126th Military
3 History Detachments. Oral history interview conducted
4 on Friday, the 6th of October 2001 at 1105 hours at the
5 Park Avenue Armory in New York City.

6 Sir, if you wouldn't mind, would you state
7 your name for the record?

8 **BG BARRAGA:** I'm BG Thomas F. Barraga.

9 **MAJ LANDRY:** All right. Could you spell your last
10 name, sir?

11 **BG BARRAGA:** B as in boy-a-r-r-a-g-a.

12 **MAJ LANDRY:** Sir, what's your current assignment?

13 **BG BARRAGA:** Well, I, I am really the
14 representative of the New York Guard in the Joint Task
15 Force -- in the 42nd Joint Task Force.

16 As, as some of you may be aware, the New York
17 Guard is part of the Division of Military and Naval
18 Affairs. There are four individual units. The Army,
19 the Air, the Naval, and the New York Guard.

20 The New York Guard, at this point, approximately
21 300 of us have been activated for the 42nd Joint Task

1 Force currently in effect. And our function here,
2 primarily, is a very specified type of mission.

3 We are doing warehouse duty with reference to some
4 of the donations that have been given by people,
5 because of this tragedy, that have to be shipped to
6 different locations. Our people are at those
7 warehouses unloading these trucks, pelletizing, and re-
8 shipping the material to people in need. That is one
9 of our primary missions.

10 The other mission is, is the question of security.
11 Our people are providing security at different
12 Armories, for example, in the City of New York. That's
13 the 88th Brigade doing that. And we also have a
14 contingent up at Camp Smith. A Headquarters group. A
15 medical group.

16 So right now, as, as we speak, effective October
17 5th, we are at maximum strength of 200. Formerly at
18 310 strength. Now at 200. And we work in conjunction
19 with other members of the Task Force.

20 So, for example, in the evening I meeting with GEN
21 Taluto and the overall staff people. And we give him

1 daily updates in terms of, of what we do.

2 But ours is a volunteer organization until we're
3 activated. (Inaudible) people with a great deal of
4 experience. Many of them are military -- past military
5 background. They're fireman. They're policeman.
6 These are people who come from all walks of life
7 because they want to participate.

8 And the great thing that, that's happened, as far
9 as the New York Guard is concerned, when the time came
10 to activate us and we were given a maximum strength of,
11 at that time, of 310, we had people in place
12 immediately. People just came forth right away. And
13 they received their individual assignments.

14 And as the general representing the Guard on the
15 Task Force, my job got a lot easier knowing that we had
16 the people in place. It wasn't a question of saying,
17 "Look, you know, we have to get 300 people. Where are
18 we going to get them from?" Have a hard time raising
19 personnel. That has not been the case with the Guard.

20 While other elements, like the Army or the Air, go
21 through a rotation system every couple of weeks, ours

1 was not the question of rotation, ours was the question
2 of attrition. We went from 310 to 200. We had to send
3 people home who didn't want to go home. All right?

4 So the 200 people, our maximum strength, they're
5 in place and they are still performing the mission.

6 **MAJ LANDRY:** About how many personnel -- you say
7 that the New York Guard is a volunteer organization.
8 What are you looking at for general numbers that are,
9 are actual members of the New York Guard?

10 **BG BARRAGA:** In terms of our total number as far
11 number of people in the New York Guard, I'd say we're
12 up around 1500 to 1700. If we had to, depending upon
13 the needs of the State, we could probably put together
14 upwards of 500 or 600 people immediately. Because a
15 pretty good gauge of that is that we have monthly
16 meetings and we do annual training.

17 We go up to Camp Smith. And we have an annual
18 training program that lasts for a week. Those people
19 who are actively involved in the Guard are the ones who
20 commit the time to annual training. So up there we
21 usually have anywhere from 450 to 550 people.

1 So that's a main core group. If we had to go even
2 beyond, beyond that, we probably could.

3 **MAJ LANDRY:** All right.

4 **BG BARRAGA:** But some people join because they
5 want to participate, but they're -- you know, they --
6 they're business people. They have other
7 responsibilities. But I'd say a core group of probably
8 around 500 or 600 that we would be able to put in the
9 field at any one time and to fulfill missions.

10 **MAJ LANDRY:** Your soldiers that are currently
11 working this mission with the Joint Task Force, you say
12 they are volunteers. Are they in, in some sort of paid
13 status? Or are they just coming in?

14 **BG BARRAGA:** They're on pay status now because
15 they've been activated. All right? Normally, that is
16 not the case. I mean, for example, when we do annual
17 training. Or go monthly meetings. It's all volunteer.

18 But the soldiers that have been activated now, they're
19 -- they are in a pay status like any other. They are
20 working 12-hour shifts. They are on board, you know,
21 for days at a time.

1 I mean, the commitment was originally for two
2 weeks. Obviously, that's going to be extended. And it
3 may even be extended further. So these people are
4 sacrificing in the private sector to become involved in
5 their New York Guard responsibilities. And certainly
6 the M&A has a responsibility to pay those people. Just
7 as they pay the Army or the (inaudible).

8 **MAJ LANDRY:** Oh. Well, when did the New York
9 Guard first become involved in this operation?

10 **BG BARRAGA:** Well, the New York Guard became
11 involved, I guess, you might say on the 11th of
12 September. Because I received a phone call, for
13 example, from the Commanding General activating me. I
14 reported to Camp Smith.

15 So our people were in place and reporting for
16 active duty immediately because there was a recognition
17 that a crisis had developed and, and our people would
18 be needed.

19 So the Guard was right in it from the beginning.
20 As far as this Joint Task Force with t he 42nd, I
21 showed up here on the 21st. Before that, from the 11th

1 to the 20th we were working with the 53rd Troop Command
2 up at Camp Smith.

3 **MAJ LANDRY:** Okay. How were you finding, because
4 you're a volunteer organization, that the other members
5 of the Services -- the --

6 **BG BARRAGA:** The Army, the Air --

7 **MAJ LANDRY:** -- that the traditional Guard --
8 traditional Guardsmen, National Guardsmen, the Air
9 Guard -- how were your people interacting with them?
10 Has -- do you feel like there's any sort of difference?
11 Or do you -- do they make you feel right at home?

12 **BG BARRAGA:** I have not felt there's, there's any
13 problem whatsoever. I mean, this is a team effort.
14 And, in this building I can, I can assure you, because
15 I'm operating out of here, this is a complete team
16 effort. All right? Between the various elements of
17 the Task Force. Everybody is respectfully treated the
18 way they should be based on rank. Everybody has
19 responsibility.

20 I mean, I'm not sitting here, nor is anybody else,
21 looking out the window. We're all trying to do a job.

1 And we're all trying to help each other to do the job
2 most effectively. Because we have never -- and this
3 country -- has never gone through anything like this
4 before.

5 And that's one of the reasons you're sitting here.
6 Because you want to document this. Because people
7 will read and listen to what I'm saying, and others, so
8 that in the future we can lay down specific plans to
9 deal with these tragedies if they ever happen again.
10 It's a learning experience for all of us. So.

11 **MAJ LANDRY:** What is it that you do in the
12 civilian world, sir?

13 **BG BARRAGA:** I am the Assistant Republican Leader
14 of the New York State Assembly. I'm a State
15 assemblyman here in New York. And I have been an
16 assemblyman for 20 years.

17 **MAJ LANDRY:** Are, are you finding that you -- that
18 the -- that your -- that your employer -- that the --
19 as, as a politician in New York, that, that you've been
20 able to break away and spend as much time as you have
21 down there with much ease?

1 **BG BARRAGA:** Well, you have to understand. I am
2 an elected official. My anthill isn't a big anthill,
3 but I'm the top ant. And the reality is that the
4 people fully understand that when they call my office,
5 my district office, and say I am not there -- but I do
6 have a couple of staff people -- and they are told the
7 truth, that I am on active duty with the New York
8 Guard, people fully understand.

9 And, in fact, we have not publicized that. I am
10 not in the Guard for that. I never put a press release
11 out on it. But they certainly understand and, and
12 appreciate the fact that we're making the extra effort.

13 In fact, what happens in my business -- in, in, in
14 being an assembly person, and even being a general in
15 the Guard, I can't tell you, Major, how many times
16 people have phoned me because they can't get involved
17 other than giving blood. You know, they can't -- they
18 don't a New York Guard. They don't have the National
19 Guard. They, they're very patriotic and it's
20 frustrating to them.

21 Thank God I had the New York Guard. I was able to

1 come forward as others and yourself for participating.

2 You know, this is something that is, is history in the
3 making. But at least we can look back years from now
4 and say, "You know, I could have put out a press
5 release. I could have -- I, I could have given blood,
6 but I had the opportunity to do more and I did it."
7 But.

8 **MAJ LANDRY:** Is there anything else that you would
9 like to, to share with, with the History or with people
10 that would (inaudible) to this?

11 **BG BARRAGA:** The only, the only, the only thing I
12 would say is that I -- it's important as people look at
13 this document that they understand that there -- the
14 inter-relationships between different groups. In this
15 case, the Army, the Air, the Naval, the New York Guard.
16 They work. When they put a Task Force together, these
17 people, people worked closely and cooperatively. We
18 work as a team.

19 So don't be worried about, you know, this group
20 versus that group. And how one's going to feel. And
21 somebody's nose is going to be out of joint. In a

1 crisis, I can tell you in, in this 42nd Joint Task
2 Force everybody has come together and we work as a
3 team. We work as one.

4 **MAJ LANDRY:** Excellent. Well, thank you very much
5 for your time, sir.

6 **BG BARRAGA:** It's been a pleasure.

7 **MAJ LANDRY:** MAJ Paul Landry, 126th Military
8 History Detachment. This concludes the oral history
9 interview with GEN Barraga. The time is 1114 hours on
10 the 6th of October 2001. This interview is conducted
11 at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City.

12 (Interview concluded at 1114 hours.)