

NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU
Historical Services Branch

Interview NGB-04

INTERVIEW OF

LTC GEOFFREY SLACK
Commander, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry

CONDUCTED BY

NGB-VISC VIDEO TEAM - Interviewer CW4 Carolyn Estes.
Conducted at the 69th Regiment Armory, 68 Lexington Ave,
New York City.

Monday, September 17, 2001

Editorial clarifications inserted in brackets [] by MAJ
Les' Melnyk, National Guard Bureau historian

TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

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

2 **INTERVIEWER:** So if you want to just begin, I
3 need you to give us your rank, your name, your unit,
4 and your assignment.

5 **LTC SLACK:** My name is LTC Geoffrey J. Slack.
6 I'm assigned to -- well, I'm the Commander of the 1st
7 Battalion, 69th Infantry Mechanized, 3rd Brigade, 42nd
8 Infantry Division Mechanized.

9 **INTERVIEWER:** Would you like to preface this
10 by stating how you came to be sitting here today and
11 what you've just come from?

12 **LTC SLACK:** Okay. I have just completed my
13 battalion's involvement in the disaster at the World
14 Trade Center site.

15 I participated -- my battalion participated
16 with two other battalions of the 3rd Brigade, under the
17 leadership of, under the command and control of the
18 53rd Troop Command.

19 We just -- my battalion just rotated out of a
20 full week in lower Manhattan, where we provided
21 disaster assistance to the civil authorities there,

1 both police and the fire department, and at this
2 juncture, my soldiers are just at the point where they
3 needed a break and we just rotated out.

4 **INTERVIEWER:** Physically and emotionally, how
5 are you (inaudible?)

6 **LTC SLACK:** Well, I like to think that my
7 troops and the troops that were in the other two
8 battalions of the 3rd Brigade that were down there
9 providing that assistance, being they're all combat
10 arms, they're fairly tough and robust, and they're all
11 inner city soldiers, for the most part, they're just
12 generally a good, tough bunch of kids.

13 But there's no doubt about it. After all the
14 things we've seen and done for the past week, everybody
15 is pretty much emotionally drained.

16 I know I'm physically very tired and I feel
17 now that my regular command responsibilities are down a
18 bit, being I've released my battalion, I feel
19 definitely a sense of emotion.

20 I don't know if you've had a chance to walk
21 through the armory or look outside, but it's covered

1 with the pictures of the missing and presumed dead.

2 There are thousands of them in here.

3 Directly behind you over the fireplace there
4 is a picture of our lieutenant, who was killed as a
5 fireman in the World Trade Center, and many of my
6 soldiers lost friends. Some, at least one I know lost
7 his brother. Quite a few lost cousins or other family
8 members.

9 So it's a draining thing. We are very closely
10 tied to this part of the city. And so my battalion, I
11 think maybe more than others, has really suffered some
12 direct losses and we feel it.

13 **INTERVIEWER:** Let's go back to last Tuesday.
14 Where were you, sir, and how did this begin to come
15 into play for you, sir?

16 **LTC SLACK:** Well, I was personally working at
17 my computer at home on some military products, when I
18 got a phone call from my physician's assistant, who
19 told me that I'd better get to the television, that
20 planes were striking the World Trade Center.

21 This is about -- I guess about 9:00 o'clock in

1 the morning. And if my times aren't precise, it's
2 because I just really haven't given a lot -- I haven't
3 had a chance to really be too introspective or to
4 reflect on this whole thing.

5 So I haven't nailed down -- I'm going to go
6 back and watch television and nail this all down to the
7 beginning, but it's just been a series of personal
8 actions and unit actions that I haven't had a chance to
9 really think about and put into chronological order, in
10 my mind.

11 But it was about 9:00 o'clock in the morning
12 when my physician's assistant called me and told me to
13 go to the TV.

14 I turned it on and I actually saw the second
15 aircraft go into the World Trade Center. I hung up. I
16 called my full-time staff here and I told them that I
17 thought we might get called out and that I was going to
18 go directly into New York City.

19 So I scrambled around like a lunatic, grabbed
20 my uniforms, my underwear, the things I thought I would
21 need for a day, and hopped in my civilian vehicle and

1 started heading toward my motor pool, where I was going
2 to draw my headquarters truck, my headquarters six.

3 On the way in, as I was listening to the
4 radio, they were talking about this not being an
5 accident, but being an attack.

6 And I had thought it was an accident at first.

7 I left my house so fast, that I thought it was an
8 accident.

9 And it wasn't until I was about 20 miles down
10 the road, heading west toward -- because I live east,
11 out on Long Island, when I realized this was an attack.

12 So I called up -- I tried to call, again, back
13 here to my full-time staff, but my phone, I couldn't
14 get through.

15 So I called my wife at her -- she had already
16 gone to work and I told her to go back to our house and
17 take my alert roster and start calling my company
18 commanders, first sergeants, and senior NCOs in charge
19 of headquarters sections, which she did.

20 Others got the word over the radio, because
21 they started broadcasting, and pretty soon my cell

1 phone wouldn't work to any place, because it was --
2 cell phone service, I'm not sure why exactly, but the
3 closer you got to New York City, the less reliable it
4 became, until finally I could talk to no one.

5 I got to Farmingdale Motor Pool. I drew my
6 truck [HMMWV] and then I got back out on the highway
7 and I started heading west.

8 And as most of my soldiers will tell you, as
9 they tried to get into the city, everything was shut
10 down. A lot of guys who tried to get in in their
11 personal vehicle couldn't make it at all.

12 Some -- like my operations officer - abandoned
13 his car by the side of the road and started hiking down
14 the highway and eventually took a train into New York
15 City.

16 But with my military vehicle, the road,
17 civilian police let me go through, and it was
18 pandemonium. You know, not to make it sound too
19 melodramatic, but I ran down quite a few traffic cones,
20 knocked down a few signs along the side of the
21 highways, and basically got myself into New York City.

1 By the time I got to the New York City line,
2 the Nassau-New York City line, the police just waved me
3 through and there was really no traffic at that point,
4 and I headed directly into my armory.

5 I picked up my executive officer and we were
6 down at the World Trade Center about two hours and 15
7 minutes after the second tower collapsed.

8 **INTERVIEWER:** What was your first impression?

9 **LTC SLACK:** Well, we pulled up north of the
10 World Trade Center, because we are north of lower
11 Manhattan, where the World Trade Center used to be, and
12 we parked the military vehicle.

13 First, I think my first surprising impression
14 was that everyone waved us through. The civilian
15 police, firemen, everyone got out of our way, because
16 they saw a military vehicle and they just waved us
17 right in.

18 And from that point on, I found that we could
19 go and do anything we wanted to and everyone seemed to
20 assume that we had -- I don't know if they thought we
21 had a legal right to be there or a moral right to be

1 there, and we noticed that for days.

2 That all agencies began to -- especially the
3 lower ranking personnel, individual patrolmen and
4 firemen assumed that we were in charge.

5 But knowing that -- well, we knew nothing. My
6 executive officer and I knew nothing and we drove down
7 as far as we could get before there were just fire
8 trucks beginning to block the road.

9 And we double-timed down til we got to Maiden
10 Street and we turned and there was the remains of the
11 World Trade Center, and it is impossible to describe
12 what it looked like from the ground.

13 The buildings were down, but everything around
14 them was on fire. All the buildings that were -- many
15 of the buildings that were around them were on fire in
16 various places up and down, the height of the
17 buildings.

18 And we stood there in shock, stunned,
19 disbelief, really useful to about nobody at that point
20 for about a few minutes, until a fire truck blew up
21 next -- about a half a block away, and that sort of

1 triggered us back into life.

2 And we stood there looking and there's nothing
3 that you could see on TV that can -- I think that can
4 show you.

5 Maybe there is. I haven't seen any TV yet.
6 This is now, I guess, six days out from last Tuesday
7 and I haven't seen any television yet.

8 So I don't know. My wife has told me that
9 most of the shots were from a great distance, probably
10 because my unit was fairly effective and the other two
11 battalions were fairly effective at keeping the press
12 out, good or bad, but that was our orders.

13 But at first, when you got there, it was
14 something akin to what I imagine Hiroshima had to have
15 looked like after the atomic bomb, because only the
16 skeletal remains of the two towers stick up in the air.

17 Everything else, 110 stories of both towers
18 were down only maybe only four or five stories above
19 the level of the ground. So it pancaked, it collapsed,
20 as I think it was designed to do, and a lot of it ended
21 up in the basements of those buildings.

1 And ash and dust and debris were very deep,
2 maybe calf deep in that area.

3 Obviously, a tremendous amount of wreckage.
4 Like I said, a lot of burning vehicles. Not to be
5 graphic, but there were human remains. I think what my
6 first instinct was to do was to see if -- to try and
7 make an assessment, and I think my brain started to
8 work after about five minutes and I tried to make an
9 assessment of what my unit would do, and I still hadn't
10 heard from our higher headquarters.

11 I had reported -- actually, when I got to the
12 armory, before I headed downtown, I did call my brigade
13 commander and tell him that I was heading down there,
14 and I called him again from a phone when I got down and
15 surprisingly enough, some of the phone booths closest
16 to the World Trade Center had melted and others worked,
17 and I picked up the phone and used my calling card and
18 called my brigade headquarters in Buffalo.

19 I gave my brigade commander an assessment of
20 what I saw. He told me that my unit was fully
21 mobilized, which I found out now only for the first

1 time, and that all the units in New York were being
2 mobilized, and that I should report to division what I
3 had seen.

4 So my next phone call was to one of the full-
5 time colonels on the division staff. Most of my
6 division staff was deployed to Fort Leavenworth for a
7 Warfighter seminar and there was only a skeletal crew
8 up at 42nd Division Headquarters.

9 And he told me to do the same thing, to make
10 an assessment and that to report back. So I stood
11 there for about 15 minutes and then I began to move
12 around from east to west around the southern perimeter
13 of the World Trade Center, and I found about ten
14 uniformed personnel in different uniforms, and these
15 were the first heroes that I encountered.

16 There was an active duty recruiter, a female,
17 E-6, in her class Bs, in low quarters, who also had a
18 secondary MOS in the medical field and she had been
19 giving treatment to wounded personnel there.

20 I had a soldier, actually, he's in the IRR
21 [Inactive Ready Reserve]. He came off active duty in

1 '98, and saw this on television, put on his uniform.
2 His last assignment had been the 1st of the 5th
3 Infantry -- correction -- 1st of the 5th Artillery, in
4 the 1st Infantry Division, and came in, and I'm going
5 to recommend that soldier up through the chain, I hope
6 we can find him. I have his social security number,
7 for the Soldier's Medal.

8 This man in combat would probably be worthy of
9 a recommendation for a Silver Star or higher. He
10 climbed over and onto a still collapsing World Trade
11 Center and was doing searches by himself.

12 Later on, I found him utterly exhausted, but
13 still dragging steel out of the road by himself, trying
14 to clear the road for emergency service vehicles, and
15 his actions actually get me choked up as I'm trying to
16 tell you this.

17 There were a bunch of other soldiers, and some
18 of them are New York Guard personnel, and there is a
19 distinction between New York Guard and New York Army
20 National Guard, in that New York Guard personnel are
21 non-paid persons who don't receive any of the formal

1 military training that New York Army National Guardsmen
2 do, and their essential job is to guard armories, after
3 the New York Army National Guard would be mobilized and
4 deployed.

5 But four of those young people were down there
6 and three of them, I have their statements here, before
7 I got there, had gone down with firemen and had rescued
8 other firemen from the lower concourse of the World
9 Trade Center after the first one had collapsed but
10 before the second had collapsed.

11 And they are certainly heroes, also.

12 So there were a number of persons there and I
13 tried to quickly grab their names and social security
14 numbers, even as I was making my assessment, because I
15 knew I was looking at real heroes there.

16 So Active, Guard, Reserve, those were the
17 first eight or nine people in any type of uniform that
18 was a military uniform that I saw.

19 And then I think my executive officer and I
20 were the first field grade officers from any military
21 component that had arrived.

1 And after I had finished that, I sent my
2 executive officer back to the armory to begin getting
3 troops and bringing them down at even platoon strength
4 in whatever vehicles we had available, and then I stood
5 there waiting to -- continuing my assessment and
6 beginning to ground guide -- I was prepared to start
7 ground guiding my units in and start a cordon effort
8 around this thing.

9 I made another phone call back, talked to,
10 again, my brigade commander, who told me to report back
11 to my armory, get my entire force, and report to the
12 53rd Troop Command, which is located in the Park Avenue
13 Armory, I think 67th and Park Avenue, that they would
14 be my higher headquarters, which I think went back to
15 my armory and tried making phone contact with them, had
16 some difficulty. [Park Ave is actually the location of
17 the 107th Support Group, which was given operational
18 control of units in NYC for the first day or so]

19 I had received some other phone calls, which
20 were confusing, from what later turned out to be a
21 self-designated composite organization of military and

1 quasi-military people who were in retired status, and
2 it's a story unto itself, but it's one of the lessons -
3 - it's a two-edged sword.

4 These were American, I think, patriots, who
5 took it upon themselves to go in there and do things,
6 but they did it on their own volition and they just
7 formed themselves up right there within a couple blocks
8 of the crash site and started doing actions, but later
9 had to be disbanded because they had no formal reason
10 to -- title or orders to be there, and the 53rd Troop
11 Command rapidly began to deploy its units down there.

12 And we began to actually get organized for the
13 operation. That was -- that probably was where I was
14 at late Tuesday, when we were recovered from the
15 initial shock of this, knowing that we were under
16 attack, certainly not convinced, by any stretch of the
17 imagination, that the attacks were over, that I had
18 already now been placed OPCON to a higher headquarters,
19 and was beginning to mobilize my battalion and watching
20 the strength come up rapidly.

21 So about dusk is when I reported for the first

1 time up to Troop Command for my first commanders
2 meeting to get ready to deploy down there formally and
3 into the area of operations.

4 **INTERVIEWER:** (Inaudible) your primary mission
5 was (inaudible.) (Inaudible) mission.

6 **LTC SLACK:** Right. Well, at first, the need
7 for soldiers down there was very severe and we went
8 down there before any published products were issued.

9 There was some confusion initially as to
10 whether or not I was going to be OPCON'd to the 53rd
11 Troop Command, which is, I think, in Valhalla, or
12 whether I was going to be OPCON'd to the 107th Support
13 Group [located in New York City at Park Ave and 67th
14 St.].

15 Frankly, whatever little bit of confusion
16 occurred, I think it was very understandable,
17 considering that one I don't think in New York or
18 perhaps the United States could have ever envisioned
19 this kind of catastrophe.

20 But luckily, the three battalions, my
21 battalion, the 1st of the 69th Infantry, the 101 Armor

1 Battalion, Staten Island, and the 258 Field Artillery
2 up in Queensbridge Armory in the Bronx, are all units
3 of the 3rd Brigade. So that all of us have an habitual
4 relationship.

5 We train together all the time. We're all
6 personal friends, the battalion commanders. Our staffs
7 know each other very well.

8 So I think it would have been best if there
9 had been the organic headquarters of the 3rd Brigade
10 which had deployed as our higher headquarters, but it
11 is located in Buffalo, on the opposite side of the
12 state, about six or seven hours, hard hours of driving
13 time away from New York.

14 So 53rd Troop Command was the headquarters
15 that we were placed to OPCON to.

16 **INTERVIEWER:** (Inaudible) after the initial
17 shock. (Inaudible.) Let's talk about those next. You
18 say (inaudible.)

19 **LTC SLACK:** Well, my unit, because half of it
20 is on Long Island, I have three companies here in the
21 building that we're in now and I have three companies

1 and my motor pool, anywhere from 40 to almost 60 miles
2 away out on Long Island.

3 It was deemed that the 258th Field Artillery
4 would go in that night. So Tuesday night, very late, I
5 would say probably around 0200 hours on what is now
6 Wednesday morning, the 258 began to really occupy the
7 perimeter.

8 And the police department physically ground
9 guided them what became the -- what we called the
10 cordon line and positioned them.

11 It was done in darkness and it was very
12 difficult for anybody at that point to determine what
13 were the key intersection or how best to occupy the
14 terrain.

15 But they got in there and began to interdict
16 the people who we were told that the city did not want
17 in there, which were any reporters, at that point, any
18 reporters and looters. And we didn't see looters
19 initially that first night, but there were an ever
20 increasing number of photographers.

21 Although we kept contact, cell phone contact

1 between ourselves and the other commands, it really
2 wasn't until the following morning when my battalion
3 had to take over the cordon line, and with another
4 battalion.

5 The police department told us that they could
6 accept a smaller presence at night. Therefore, they
7 wanted one of the three battalions to do the entire
8 perimeter, which is many miles, and the next day, they
9 anticipated a tremendous amount of pressure from people
10 who wanted to come down there and see what was going
11 on, and they needed two battalions.

12 So it turned out each of us -- each of the
13 battalions averaged roughly 400 to 450 soldiers, which
14 were all we ever got in our battalions because of the
15 amount of persons who were -- who never could get in or
16 in my case, I had a tremendous amount of -- I have a
17 tremendous amount of police and fireman who are also
18 assigned to my unit, and they were elsewhere doing
19 their military -- correction -- their police and fire
20 duties.

21 So I topped out at about four and a quarter

1 for this mission. So I had the entire west side. The
2 101 Armor had the entire east side. And it was shaped
3 like a giant triangle, with the narrow end pointed down
4 toward lower Manhattan, where we [the battalion
5 headquarters] were at Battery Park, and went up and
6 came across Chambers Street north of the impact site,
7 and linked up about dead center on Church Street.

8 So that next morning, we went out, the
9 commanders, and this is well before sun up, and we did
10 our leaders recon and we began moving our soldiers
11 straight up that cordon line, until we linked up on
12 Chambers Street.

13 And then for the balance of that day, we
14 adjusted our perimeter, started to determine where the
15 real flow of vehicles and persons were going to be,
16 minimized my presence on some of the smaller ingress
17 routes and increased it up to platoon strength at
18 places where it was the most direct route out from
19 northern Manhattan into the Battery area, where the
20 World Trade Center is, and just continued to try to
21 adjust our perimeter, while, at the same time,

1 receiving reports.

2 Buildings were collapsing. There was no
3 method at first on Wednesday to let you know when
4 buildings were coming down. So they just came down and
5 we thought -- and I still don't know if people were
6 injured who were working there.

7 That first day, on Wednesday, it didn't really
8 appear as if there was that much pressure from the
9 civilian populous trying to come in, but what there was
10 was a glaring need for people to get into the collapsed
11 World Trade Center and begin clearing debris.

12 You obviously don't want to get heavy
13 machinery in there. So everything had to be done by
14 hand.

15 So my soldiers did that function, as did the
16 other battalions. There was still this composite group
17 that I was telling you about working there. There were
18 no end of military personnel in various uniforms.

19 The only way we could tell all the different
20 soldiers of the 3rd Brigade were the fact that we were
21 all in full LBE and Kevlar, and whereas all these other

1 well-meaning people who were in there working were in
2 all different kinds of other uniforms, Air Force
3 uniforms, partial military uniforms, very few with
4 Kevlar.

5 So that became the distinguishing feature of
6 the soldiers authorized to be there.

7 The process of adjusting our perimeter and
8 starting to get that pattern analysis and understanding
9 of what was going on that was coming into our sector
10 was an ongoing process that never stopped from Tuesday
11 night through to when we finished. My battalion came
12 out this morning -- correction -- last night [Sunday,
13 Sept. 16].

14 Never ended. You would block an intersection
15 and the people who you did not want there would find
16 another route in.

17 They would go through the destroyed buildings.

18 They found routes around at the river.

19 Because we were -- this whole area of
20 operations is bordered by the Hudson River on the west
21 and the East River on the east.

1 The power went out on all of it and lower
2 Manhattan is a honeycomb, a very old part of the city
3 that went back before grid layout, tangled little small
4 streets down into Wall Street, and the stock market
5 area.

6 So it was just a lot of ingress routes that
7 people could take, and we hadn't realized it at the
8 time, because it was -- even our staff actions were
9 minimal. It was what we had to do to keep reorienting
10 our forces, gathering information, interfacing with the
11 local authorities, and trying to look to see where we
12 could make the most assistance without yet still a lot
13 of coordination from a well orchestrated city higher
14 headquarters down there, or a military higher
15 headquarters.

16 Most of our orders were coming down from Park
17 Avenue, which is some 60 or 70 blocks north. The city
18 was shut down. You couldn't move easily anywhere
19 around.

20 We did it all off our cell phones, quite
21 frankly. All the coordination was off our personal

1 cell phones. We had no issue. Our FM COMMs, although
2 we had it down there in significant quantities, until
3 we learned some tricks about how to use our FM COMMs,
4 we didn't have -- my units, the 3rd Brigade of the 42nd
5 Division does not yet have SINCGARS. So we were using
6 PRC-77s and -47 series on the vehicles and it didn't
7 take us long to realize that we could actually
8 communicate over most of Manhattan Island off of long
9 whip antennas and OE-524 antennas, as long as we had --
10 we moved our transmission points from open
11 intersections where you could transmit down the
12 boulevards.

13 So it took a little while, but we found that
14 we actually had pretty good COMMs by FM. So in
15 combination between our junior leaders at squad level,
16 operating off of FM, which we had an abundance of, and
17 the senior leaders operating off of cell phones, we, by
18 Wednesday evening, we had pretty much linked up the
19 three battalions, the higher headquarters, and the guys
20 were actually on the cordon line.

21 But it was a very chaotic time, probably the

1 most chaotic time. And later on, as the city built its
2 strength and moved its resources in, it became pretty
3 evident to me and the other battalion commanders that
4 our -- it was necessary for us to go out and build our
5 cordon line up into an impermeable barrier, which we
6 never really succeeded in until the day I came out.

7 At that point, I think we got so tight,
8 especially when the sanitation department began moving
9 in linkable chain link fence that blocked off these big
10 intersections and hooked it up at the corners of the
11 buildings, that a smaller force was able to block those
12 intersections.

13 But initially, we were surprised at how many
14 times police officers deferred to us and we made no
15 bones about it. There was no martial law. We made no
16 pretense of martial law.

17 Although I had deployed with all my arms, at
18 least small arms, I kept them in my trucks. I really
19 had not yet heard from higher headquarters definitively
20 about what the uniform was going to be or our armament
21 or whether we were under continued attack.

1 During the course of that Wednesday, we had
2 heard that van loads of explosives had been interdicted
3 on the way to the George Washington Bridge. I still
4 don't know how much of that was true.

5 We were definitely concerned that we would be
6 attacked by some other method coming in there.

7 Now, I never armed any of my persons, but --
8 my soldiers, but I had a limited amount of nine
9 millimeter ammunition and no 5.56. So we would have
10 had to have been provided that ammunition before we
11 would have been able to use our arms.

12 The only way we had the nine millimeter
13 ammunition, which we never issued, is that one of my
14 officers had his police ammunition, which he brought in
15 and kept under his control as a police officer.

16 So we thought to ourselves that if the need
17 arose, we could always go back and use his ammunition
18 to defend at least our soldiers from some sort of
19 attack.

20 The police and the firemen were in the dig
21 site and working and never stopped working and are

1 working now to dig those people out.

2 So by Thursday, my units began backing out of
3 the dig site, although we still put platoons in there
4 to augment the fire department, moving the material
5 that they were passing down from the top of the
6 collapsed buildings.

7 They would move it down and then we would pick
8 it up and move it over to another pile, where front end
9 loaders could pick it up.

10 It had to be done by hand to find remains. So
11 we would go in and do a mission like that, when my
12 soldiers were exhausted. We would do two 90-minute
13 efforts, with a half an hour break in between. Then I
14 would pull my guys out.

15 Other lines would form by firemen or police
16 officers or other people and they would -- there were
17 just snaking lines coming down off these piles, off
18 each building, and it wasn't just the two World Trade
19 Centers. I mean, there were still the other buildings
20 that were collapsed and collapsing and on fire still.

21 So it was -- chaos is not a word that would

1 even come close to describing the whole thing.

2 My voice is raspy and I -- for the first
3 couple of days, there were no masks down there, except
4 the little paper masks, if you could even get them. So
5 all of us who were working down there were pretty much
6 breathing in everything that was in the air.

7 We were breathing everything in the air.

8 Later on, toward the middle of the week, Tuesday, paper
9 masks at best. Wednesday, still paper masks and a few
10 firemen in better masks. By Thursday, the flood of
11 equipment began to spill in from America, which is
12 really -- aside from the efforts of the police and the
13 firemen and the National Guard and the other agencies
14 that were there, official agencies that were ordered to
15 be there or wanted to be there, the most remarkable
16 thing is what the American people did and the city
17 people did and everybody else, because we rapidly
18 became so inundated with every possible piece of
19 equipment or food stuff or beverage, but I guess that's
20 a story unto itself.

21 But as I sit here, I'm still amazed at that.

1 (Tape change.)

2 -- at that thing. And I guess from a lessons
3 learned perspective, I guess you can always count on
4 that kind of support in a huge, horrible, aid to civil
5 authorities mission like this.

6 It shouldn't be dismissed about what the local
7 people are going to begin to provide in ever increasing
8 quantities. So you can't plan on it, obviously, but it
9 was amazing what was there. And we ate better there
10 than I think I eat at home, not to say anything about
11 -- not to get myself in trouble with my wife, but it's
12 not every day you get your sandwiches supplied by
13 Tavern on the Green on a disaster site and you eat the
14 very best New York can offer and eat it there at a
15 horrible site like that.

16 So New York and America outdid itself in
17 providing us support.

18 So those first couple of days, we sorted out
19 the command relationships. We attended very few
20 meetings. Our commanding officer for this event was
21 commander of the 53rd Troop Command, [brigadier]

1 general Klein, who came down, I think, on either late
2 Wednesday or early Thursday, surveyed the scene, and,
3 to his tremendous credit, told us, told the three
4 battalion commanders "It looks like you've got it, you
5 don't need much guidance from us, you're doing the
6 right thing; if you do the wrong thing, I'll back you
7 up anyhow; just continue to do what you're doing and
8 make magic happen."

9 And he went out of his way to stay out of our
10 way. And luckily, because we're all personal friends
11 and we've soldiered together for years, the three
12 battalions just had no problems, no problems
13 whatsoever.

14 I can't say enough about how proud I am about
15 the soldiers and the officers of my brigade, just
16 tremendous, tremendous effort.

17 That was the first half of the week, starting
18 with the arrival on Tuesday. That first three days
19 were our efforts to sort ourselves out, establish our
20 headquarters, which we did down at the northern end of
21 Battery Park, where we were able to control our own

1 flow, because northern Manhattan was chaotic.

2 But by getting on the West Side Highway, the
3 police were able to allow all military police, firemen,
4 sanitation workers, Con Edison, the power people,
5 everybody who had to get into lower Manhattan could get
6 on the FDR Drive, which is a main highway running along
7 the edge of Manhattan, and ride unimpeded down to the
8 Battery, which is an old fortress at the very lower tip
9 of Manhattan island, where we could then spill into a
10 large park, occupy terrain, set up headquarters, stage
11 ourselves, recover our troops at the end of shifts,
12 store supplies, and then later on begin effectively
13 controlling the traffic flow that would be coming up
14 later on in the second half of the week, as they were
15 allowed to -- people were allowed to get into lower
16 Manhattan and start getting into their buildings.

17 So the first half of the week was definitely a
18 reaction to the situations that developed, an impromptu
19 desire to support the police in any way or the firemen
20 in any way they could, and definitely our mission was
21 to establish the cordon line.

1 But the reaction to the request of the civil
2 authorities was ongoing.

3 Later on it became a bigger effort by 53rd
4 Troop Command to process those requests and direct
5 those forces that they controlled in a more
6 comprehensive way.

7 But the first half of the week, it was
8 battalion commanders and their sector reacting as they
9 saw fit and trying to keep our soldiers from getting
10 hurt, which was pretty hard to do.

11 A lot of soldiers were in jeopardy. There's
12 no way around it. The firemen and the police were in
13 the greatest jeopardy. They put themselves in harm's
14 way and I am amazed that there haven't been -- I don't
15 -- to date, I don't know of any fatalities amongst a
16 rescue team, but I can't believe that it hasn't
17 happened.

18 My soldiers are not trained or equipped to do
19 building searches of collapsed rubble buildings.
20 Everything is falling from dozens of stories up.
21 Debris is lodged, sticking out of the sides of

1 buildings around there, facades are falling. It's a
2 dangerous place and continues to be a dangerous place.

3 So we tried to put our people where we thought
4 they could function without risking fatality, but I
5 know for a fact all three battalions put their soldiers
6 under those buildings, under those hanging girders, in
7 those sites, and we did so because every one of our
8 soldiers was willing to give his life, and they would
9 go back today, tonight, if I asked them to.

10 But the emotional strain and the fatigue of
11 pretty much continuous operations within the 3rd
12 Brigade just wore us down.

13 And I know my battalion came out first. The
14 other battalions should be, hopefully, right behind me.

15 But they're all great guys, and I think that
16 concludes a description of the first half of the week.

17 **INTERVIEWER:** Tell me (inaudible) actually
18 took the (inaudible) so that you could go (inaudible.)

19 If you don't mind, sir, I would like to (inaudible.)

20 **LTC SLACK:** Sure. Well, my wife -- I took
21 command formally a half a year ago, though I was in

1 acting command a few months before that.

2 My wife has been in the process of trying to
3 stand up our family support group and she has linked up
4 quite a few of the officers' wives and the senior NCO's
5 wives, and she got going on that pretty quickly.

6 And her role throughout this piece was, to me,
7 personally, amazing, because she was getting -- to give
8 you an example, she got an offer from Eveready Battery
9 Company to send us tractor-trailer loads of batteries,
10 which we have, and flashlights, which we have in our
11 possession now.

12 She turned down the offer for 45,000 pounds of
13 raw beef. She handled no end of phone calls to the
14 ladies of the battalion, including one of my officer's
15 wives who hadn't heard from him. Just no end of
16 coordination up and down the chain of command, those
17 kinds of things.

18 She took -- she stopped working, took time off
19 to be there at the phone, and I think she's a great
20 lady.

21 **INTERVIEWER:** Was there an opportunity for

1 your soldiers to make contact with their families?

2 **LTC SLACK:** Yes. Every day, we -- we were on
3 for 12 hours shifts. We would go on from 0800 to 2000
4 hours. Then we would take two hours to do -- we'd
5 shift off. We would refer to it as battle handoff,
6 with the 258 FA, which took the entire perimeter for
7 the night.

8 So the 101 and the 1-69 would come in at about
9 06. We would work to move our soldiers. There was no
10 quick way to do battle handoff. We'd pull into Battery
11 Park and our soldiers had to road march up the entire
12 lower end of Manhattan, starting from low to moving up
13 high, until we covered down behind the battalion in
14 place.

15 We would tap them on the shoulders, release
16 them. They would march back.

17 By the time -- all of this is happening in a
18 melee of confusion and when we would get back, they
19 would get on city busses that were provided for us,
20 which would promptly move out and get caught in
21 traffic.

1 So most of my soldiers and the soldiers of the
2 other battalions averaged anywhere from three and a
3 half of four hours of sleep a night.

4 So it got -- the wearing effect increased
5 continuously to the point where that's why some of my
6 guys are really now ineffective and some of them can't
7 even form a good sentence at this point. They're just
8 that tired.

9 So I don't know if I can stress too strongly
10 the idea of a family support group, even in the
11 National Guard, and whereas we thought we had a
12 functional little message traffic system for IDT
13 [Inactive Duty Training] weekends and maybe annual
14 training, we're going to go back and try and push this
15 now pretty hard to get something on a much more formal,
16 widespread network.

17 The active Army does it brilliantly and I
18 think -- I can't recommend it too strongly for every
19 battalion to have a pretty tight family support group.

20 **INTERVIEWER:** Aside from the things that were
21 done (inaudible) the city, how long did it take for

1 logistics to start working (inaudible?)

2 **LTC SLACK:** Well, for the first day, we ate
3 MREs. And the second day, we began to get our first
4 gift food and it was better than the MREs. By the end
5 of the first day, we were eating -- by the end of the
6 first day, literally, you could walk on the food. It
7 was -- we couldn't even move it out of our way fast
8 enough in our assembly areas.

9 Then American Red Cross, other agencies, other
10 formal agencies were there, but what was most
11 remarkable was the volunteers who were authorized by
12 the city to come down there and hand out absolutely
13 every possible imaginable thing.

14 And if all they had was candy bars, they would
15 go out and give candy bars. If they had water, they'd
16 give out water. If they had sandwiches, they gave out
17 sandwiches. I know -- I'm sure that formal food was
18 being sent down by the state. I know, at one point, I
19 had been given a directive to receive 11,000 sandwiches
20 and I told my chain of command that I didn't have the
21 manpower, the refrigeration, the distribution

1 capability or any way, shape or form to handle 11,000
2 sandwiches.

3 And truthfully, I weaseled out of the mission
4 because I just -- I was too busy for it and I didn't
5 think that the state had understood what they were
6 doing when they pumped down that kind of -- 11,000
7 sandwiches. There was no way for us to receive it.

8 Being I knew there was plenty of food being
9 distributed by the volunteers in the city. I don't
10 know what happened to the 11,000 sandwiches and I just
11 -- maybe somebody else finally got those 11,000, but I
12 never went to look for them.

13 I knew where the linkup point was, but I never
14 sent my soldiers there. When I talked to my company
15 commander and told him you're nearest to the 11,000
16 sandwiches, I won't even tell you what he told me. It
17 wasn't polite.

18 But there's no doubt about it. The City of
19 New York and the American people did a great job. As
20 it is right now, we're in the process of trying to move
21 tons of supplies out of my armory and back to the dig

1 site.

2 So we're -- because we're full and I'm sure
3 there's other armories that have that kind of volume of
4 food sitting here, and it's stockpiled up. I don't
5 think it could be consumed at this point.

6 Now that the mission is starting to wind down,
7 at least from a military perspective, there is now --
8 now that the system is fully working, there is more
9 supplies, resources, food, water, whatever you can
10 imagine, than anybody could ever -- I mean, you could
11 feed a division for days on what's just sitting out
12 here.

13 **INTERVIEWER:** I'm sure you have (inaudible.)
14 In your opinion, sir, at this point in time, can you
15 think of any way that we can -- maybe not train
16 (inaudible,) but train smarter, to try to better
17 prepare for the world that we obviously (inaudible.)

18 **LTC SLACK:** Definitely. This was -- September
19 is the traditional month that most of the units in the
20 New York Army National Guard do civil disturbance
21 training.

1 It's mandated training that we do and it's
2 what we normally call, sort of derisively, stomp and
3 drag drills, with riot batons and so forth, and it's
4 pretty much a protest kind of exercise.

5 And so the current doctrine that I have
6 available to me is completely outdated. What was
7 useful for me personally and what I had made available
8 to some of my other officers, without any knowledge
9 that this thing was every coming down the line, were
10 the reviews that I saw written up in Army publications
11 that came out of the riots in California in L.A. some
12 years ago.

13 That was very instructive about how to be
14 prepared for a situation like this, but that was,
15 again, from a civil disturbance, not something like
16 this.

17 I think the Army needs to take a hard look at
18 creating a doctrine, and I'm sure they will after this,
19 that has lessons learned, that is updated regularly, a
20 whole new publication, and we change our complete
21 methodology of approaching aid to civil authorities

1 missions.

2 I've done -- this is now about, I think, my
3 ninth aid to civil authorities mission. We have done
4 snow storms, ice storms, forest fires. We've done the
5 [TWA] Flight 800 disaster.

6 We've done nor'easters and hurricanes.

7 This is the first thing of this nature and the
8 first thing ever in New York City that I'm aware of,
9 other than a nor'easter where we threw sandbags into
10 the Hudson River.

11 This was a cataclysmic event that I actually
12 would have thought that the city and the New York Army
13 National Guard would have been more prepared for, and I
14 mean this -- and I don't think anybody can consider
15 that I'm casting dispersions, aspersion on the Guard,
16 because this is, I think, incredible and totally unique
17 in history, at least for Americans.

18 But we talked about it and we thought that
19 perhaps some sort of CONplan should have been in my
20 desk drawer here.

21 We do -- New York State does have aid to civil

1 authorities contingency plans, but they are not any way
2 -- I don't think the ones I have seen are geared for
3 this kind of thing, this scale, and I think that's --
4 my only real recommendation up the chain of command,
5 and I will make this in my formal AAR to the 42nd
6 Infantry Division, is that those of us in New York City
7 need to work with the agencies and the government to
8 become fully linked and that command posts are
9 available to rapidly move from at least brigade level
10 within New York State to this kind of disaster that
11 have everything in those Expandovans or whatever better
12 piece of equipment that they can purchase, that
13 communications is already set up in there, and that at
14 brigade level, which is most likely the level that will
15 first respond for C2, that those things are set,
16 because the control, the organization, if it hadn't
17 been that we were three battalions at the same brigade,
18 I can't imagine how we would have been able to do this.

19 It was just a quick huddle and information
20 dump at our BUBs [nightly Battle Update Briefings].
21 The commanders just sync'd up rapidly before shift

1 change and then soldiers moved out rapidly and covered
2 down on each other, and it was -- it went quickly and
3 each of the three battalions held a reserve, which gave
4 us the flexibility to respond across our sector to
5 these endless, endless developments.

6 Every few hours, there was a necessity to
7 shift another platoon for a larger size force. We did
8 rooftop searches for body parts and aircraft parts.

9 We escorted thousands, thousands of civilians
10 into what became known as the escort zone, which is
11 another entire learning curve.

12 If it weren't for the fact that I have a
13 couple of soldiers, NCOs who actually took it by
14 themselves and who I am going to put in for the
15 Meritorious Service Medal, because they became so
16 effective at what they did, that they processed people
17 like a subway. Hundreds and hundreds of people every
18 few minutes were being processed by two sergeants, in
19 the sector that I could most, where I had the greatest
20 flow.

21 This was, again, in the second half of the

1 week, when the situation really started to settle down
2 and the agencies of the City of New York were
3 completely in control of the situation and working as
4 they needed to do.

5 The first couple of days were chaotic for
6 everybody. The city definitely mobilized brilliantly.

7 The National Guard began to pump down resources to us
8 in ever increasing volumes.

9 Units were stacked up throughout the state,
10 ready to lend assistance. And I think that aside from
11 a ready seat to the kind of organizations that are
12 mobilized, maybe even separate working directly for the
13 headquarters of the New York National Guard at state
14 level, and maybe not organic or attached to a division
15 or to regions, but even if they were just sitting up in
16 our or near our state headquarters, which is centrally
17 located in the state.

18 They could respond within a few hours and that
19 would be probably -- and then the linkage to them, to
20 the municipalities, and perhaps that's been done, but I
21 did not experience that. I did not see that.

1 So I don't want to say that it wasn't in
2 place, but I just didn't see it while I was on the
3 ground there.

4 **INTERVIEWER:** If you could send a message to
5 all the other commanders, not just (inaudible,) but
6 nationwide, based on what you have just experienced in
7 your own brigade, what would that message be?

8 **LTC SLACK:** Well, I think at the division
9 level, where I should -- see, I usually cap out my
10 thought processes at division level.

11 But at state level, I think each state needs
12 to get a team together and link up and re-look at this,
13 because aid to civil authorities missions, I think, for
14 the most part, have always been natural kind of
15 disasters, weather-related disasters or fires, things
16 like that.

17 Now I think it's time to go back at the state
18 level and look at catastrophic attack and then develop
19 these CON plans and look, re-look again, re-look at
20 their linkage to the municipalities and the state
21 agencies.

1 And I know some of that framework is already
2 in place, because I've seen it many times with SEMA,
3 our State Emergency Management Agency. I've dealt very
4 effectively at county level on disasters on Long Island
5 and so forth, out in the smaller, less urban areas.

6 I know the city has got an enormous capability
7 to do that, but I think they need to go back and I'm
8 sure they will. I don't think they need me to tell
9 them. I think the -- because your average rifle
10 battalions or combat service support battalions are
11 never going to -- I shouldn't say never. Maybe now
12 they will.

13 But it's not part of their normal mental
14 tasks. We're all war fighters by directive, as we need
15 to be. But a new smarter way to approach these aid to
16 civil authorities missions in light of this current
17 kind of thing needs to be -- start from the top, maybe
18 even start from the Federal Government, but certainly
19 the states need to get a jump on it and look at all
20 those places that are assailable in their state.

21 And New York, I know, is, I'm sure, going to

1 dig deep into looking at our big cities and the places
2 -- I'm not going to -- I'm not going to state many,
3 unless it's a classified briefing, where I think our
4 greatest weak points are, but I've lived and worked in
5 the New York metropolitan area and I know what would be
6 pretty easy to have a great impact on the city.

7 This was, I think, a political statement and
8 just aimed to kill people, but there's other things
9 that could shut down the infrastructure, and those, I'm
10 sure, are being looked at hard. Brighter minds than
11 mine are, I'm sure, hard at work in the State of New
12 York right now.

13 But I'd say that's -- just be prepared. Start
14 working now, because I don't ever want to do this
15 again, ever, and none of my guys do either.

16 **INTERVIEWER:** Is there anything else
17 (inaudible?)

18 **LTC SLACK:** Well, aside from the fact that my
19 soldiers, to a man, want to kill people now. And I
20 know that sounds hard, but that was the last thing that
21 was said to me as they walked out their door, as

1 they've done their aid to civil authorities mission,
2 and now they want to deploy someplace and kill
3 somebody, which is, I guess, maybe a natural instinct
4 of any soldier, certainly of infantrymen.

5 I'm overwhelmed, you know, and I haven't
6 decompressed yet and maybe I'll get my moment to do so
7 in the future, but right now I don't ever want to go
8 back to the World Trade Center. I am probably never
9 going to go back to that part of Manhattan, unless I'm
10 ordered to go there and continue my mission.

11 And I don't mean to sound melodramatic, but
12 you have to -- my armory, which is a sort of a sidebar
13 note, but a pretty ugly one, I'm honored to have the
14 City of New York put the bereavement center for this
15 disaster in my armory.

16 There are, as you walk around my armory,
17 thousands of photographs, hand-drawn, xeroxed, pasted
18 up photographs of the efforts of the families to find
19 their loved ones.

20 When my soldiers came back to this armory, at
21 night, they had to pass through those people who threw

1 themselves, in some cases, on me personally, because
2 you're filthy, you're covered in the dust of the
3 disaster, and they knew where we were coming from, and
4 they wanted hope, and I hope they find it. I hope they
5 find their people.

6 But you can't be prepared emotionally for
7 something like this. Maybe you can if you roll in on
8 the second wave of relief of the battalions that are
9 coming in. But if you are the first person on the
10 spot, if you are the first units on the spot, you
11 definitely are in for a roller coaster of emotions.

12 And my guys went through the shock, the fury,
13 the disgust, the confusion, then the determination to
14 do their job, and then the utter emotional devastation
15 which they're going through now.

16 So it's a hard thing.

17 **INTERVIEWER:** (Inaudible.) Did your troops
18 have an opportunity to get some counseling, if they
19 needed it?

20 **LTC SLACK:** You know, my guys were so
21 completely focused on what they were doing down there

1 that when they broke down, they did it at a team or
2 squad level.

3 And I don't think they wanted -- we had two
4 religious ceremonies. We have -- we work with the same
5 chaplains all the time. We have some of the best guys
6 that you'll run across anywhere. My chaplain baptized
7 both my children, and we're pretty tightly linked with
8 those guys.

9 I think if one of my soldiers needed to
10 decompress a little bit, they did so at squad level.
11 If they needed maybe some greater amount of opportunity
12 to say something, they did so to the chaplain. I don't
13 think they're anywhere near -- I think now is the time
14 that they're going to suffer.

15 You have to understand that we're really tied
16 very closely to this part of Manhattan. The area below
17 us where a lot of my guys work.

18 There's very few people in this battalion who
19 don't know somebody who died there, their friends.

20 I got to one checkpoint, one guy was there,
21 lost his brother. Another guy there lost his first

1 cousin.

2 So I sent the guy who lost his brother home,
3 but he didn't want to leave. He want to do something.

4 So, I mean, we lost a lot of people. So it's
5 hard. Maybe it's almost better in a way not to be --
6 to come from the area that you normally live in.

7 My guys were determined. They were effective.

8 I guess I'm sounding a little bit emotional right now,
9 but they were effective and there was no wholesale
10 breakdown in ability. They were brilliant.

11 Every one of those 1,100 guys from the 3rd
12 Brigade that were there for that first week were
13 extraordinary. You couldn't crack them with a hammer.

14 I mean, they're just that tough. So I can't
15 say enough good things about the New York Army National
16 Guard and the 3rd Brigade.

17 And now maybe they're going to suffer a little
18 bit. I know that we had some mental health
19 professionals show up today and offer to help, but I've
20 already released my guys. They had to leave and I
21 wasn't going to keep them around.

1 So I think they're going to go home and
2 they're going to go through this, and I'm sure that I
3 will hear about some guys who are having some rough
4 times.

5 But they're not detached, because this is
6 their town. So they're going to have to suffer a
7 little bit.

8 **INTERVIEWER:** Anything else?

9 **LTC SLACK:** No. I actually thank you for
10 coming down here. I hope if this video goes out to
11 anybody who gets a chance to see it, just like I
12 benefitted from my readings of the efforts of the
13 California Army National Guard when they went through
14 the big L.A. riots, if this can help some battalion
15 commander or somebody else tweak some thoughts about
16 what they can do for one of those unimaginable attacks
17 against our people, that maybe this will stir some
18 thought or whatever.

19 I'd certainly be happy to -- and I will put
20 together my after action review, which will be much
21 more specific, and send it up my chain of command.

1 But this is a tough thing and I don't know how
2 anybody can really plan for this completely, but I hope
3 this helps a little bit.

4 Thank you for coming down.

5 (The interview was concluded.)

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