

NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU  
Historical Services Branch

**Interview NGB-15**

INTERVIEW OF

SPC ALBERTO TORRES  
HHC, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry

CONDUCTED BY

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National Guard Bureau

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Transcript reviewed and corrections made by MAJ Melnyk.  
Editorial comments inserted by him appear in brackets  
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TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

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

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**MAJ MELNYK:** This is MAJ Les' Melnyk, Army National Guard Historian at the National Guard Bureau, and today I am interviewing SPC Alberto Torres, that's T-o-r-r-e-s, who is a medic in HHC, 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry. This interview is taking place at the 69th Regimental Armory, at 68 Lexington Avenue, that's Lexington Avenue and 25th Street, in New York City, on the 17th of September 2001.

SPC Torres, you have read and signed the access agreement for oral history materials and agreed that there is no need for anything to be withheld.

Okay. I need you to actually say that out loud.

**SPC TORRES:** Yeah, I agree. I actually need to say so.

**MAJ MELNYK:** That's in case the paperwork gets separated from the tape, we know that you agreed to release it to the Army, and without any stipulations.

SPC Torres, I wanted to ask you where you were and what your initial reaction was when the first plane

1 -- when you heard about the plane striking the World  
2 Trade Center.

3           **SPC TORRES:** I was on my way to Manhattan. I  
4 was on my way -- as a matter of fact, I was on my way  
5 to the armory.

6           I didn't attend drill for like a month or  
7 something and I felt really guilty about not coming and  
8 not calling, but I was like really busy with like my  
9 family and my three and my two year old, and my wife  
10 just started -- she went back to college again, and I  
11 had like the whole first -- had a half of the week off.

12           So I said on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday,  
13 let me do this first thing in the morning.

14           So Monday I didn't get to do it. So I was  
15 like, okay, Tuesday, I said no, let me -- if I don't do  
16 it now, I'm not going to do it for another week.

17           So I wanted to come in, also, because I wanted  
18 to come to the city, because I heard in the news it was  
19 going to be a nice day and I wanted to come.

20           I'm always in the area and I'm always in the  
21 armory. I come here often on my time off and to see

1 the guys and see how they're doing.

2 And then when I came into the city, I saw the  
3 news and I saw that there was a fire in the World  
4 Trade, but I didn't know that there was a plane that  
5 hit.

6 And I went to Bellevue to -- where the EMS  
7 station is, because I have friends that work, and then  
8 I said, oh, this is -- this looks serious.

9 And then I called sergeant Sanchez over the  
10 phone.

11 **MAJ MELNYK:** And sergeant Sanchez is?

12 **SPC TORRES:** The first sergeant for  
13 Headquarters Company. And he put me on hold. Then SGT  
14 Rabinowitz picked up the phone.

15 **MAJ MELNYK:** And he is the full-time  
16 technician?

17 **SPC TORRES:** He is the full-time admin NCO.  
18 And then I told him what was going on and he says,  
19 "Yeah, I know." And I said, "So do you need us to do  
20 anything." He said, "No, not right now. Maybe."

21 He put me on hold and sergeant Sanchez picked

1 up again and his voice was cracking and he says "Give  
2 me your number and I'll call you back."

3 I was like, "Listen, don't worry about the  
4 number. I'm a few blocks away on Bellevue, I'll be  
5 there in a few minutes." He said, "Okay, guy."

6 Then when I came in here, there was only a few  
7 people that were in the armory. It was like about 9:00  
8 o'clock, 9:30. It was early. I didn't -- I didn't  
9 really look at my watch to see what time it was,  
10 because I really wasn't thinking about the time. I was  
11 thinking, you know, oh -- can I curse? I was thinking,  
12 "Oh, shit, look what's going on."

13 So then I was thinking, well, I'm on my day  
14 off. If I stay in the fire station, they're going to  
15 put me to work.

16 **MAJ MELNYK:** So you're a firefighter in your  
17 civilian job.

18 **SPC TORRES:** I'm a paramedic.

19 **MAJ MELNYK:** You're a paramedic.

20 **SPC TORRES:** Yeah. And I was really tired  
21 from working the week before and I figured let me go to

1 the 69th, you know, to help the soldiers out, because I  
2 felt -- I feel guilty about not coming to the drill.

3           And like, you know, I kind of like felt guilty  
4 when I came here, but when I went upstairs, sergeant  
5 Sanchez says, "Oh, welcome back, Torres." So I kind of  
6 felt like he broke the ice and I had my medical  
7 equipment, and then I got into the BDUs from the locker  
8 really fast.

9           **MAJ MELNYK:** If I could break in. Why were  
10 you carrying your medical equipment?

11           **SPC TORRES:** No. I was in Bellevue, I got it  
12 in my locker.

13           **MAJ MELNYK:** So a lot of the folks you work  
14 with are at Bellevue and when you heard about the  
15 disaster, you --

16           **SPC TORRES:** I came here, yeah.

17           **MAJ MELNYK:** -- you picked up your EMT --

18           **SPC TORRES:** My gear.

19           **MAJ MELNYK:** -- gear and came here.

20           **SPC TORRES:** And came here. Yeah.

21           **MAJ MELNYK:** So you were here fairly -- middle

1 of the morning. You got into your BDUs. There weren't  
2 many people in the armory.

3 **SPC TORRES:** No.

4 **MAJ MELNYK:** Who took charge of you?

5 **SPC TORRES:** Nobody yet.

6 **MAJ MELNYK:** Nobody really.

7 **SPC TORRES:** Because like there weren't any  
8 medics here.

9 **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay.

10 **SPC TORRES:** I was the only one.

11 **MAJ MELNYK:** So what did you do? You waited  
12 for --

13 **SPC TORRES:** No. I went and I got keys. I  
14 got dressed, I came back down, I put my bag down. Then  
15 I remember putting my ATM card somewhere and I lost  
16 that. That's what I remember.

17 It was like really hectic and there was only  
18 like ten people here. It was like almost no one was  
19 here.

20 So I got the keys from -- I don't know who I  
21 got the keys from.

1           **MAJ MELNYK:** The keys to?

2           **SPC TORRES:** The keys to the medical room.

3           **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay.

4           **SPC TORRES:** And I went downstairs, I opened  
5 the medical locker, and I threw -- I took three medical  
6 chests, heavy metal medical chests, and I laid it out  
7 on the floor and I said, okay, this is what we need,  
8 this is what we need, this is what we need.

9           And then SGT Silva walked in with his civilian  
10 clothes.

11          **MAJ MELNYK:** And SGT Silva is?

12          **SPC TORRES:** He's the medical NCO.

13          **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay.

14          **SPC TORRES:** And he kind of laughed. He was  
15 like -- I was like, "Oh, did you hear the news?" He  
16 says, "Of course, I can't go home now." I think he was  
17 getting off from work. Oh, he was going to work. It  
18 was early in the morning. He was going. He's like, "I  
19 might as well just come in," the trains, they just shut  
20 them down.

21                 I said, "Oh, wow, they just shut the trains



1 down." So I said, "Listen, I'm getting the medical  
2 chests ready." He says, "Okay, I'm going to get into  
3 my uniform upstairs." He says, "Is there a sign-in  
4 sheet?" I was like, "I don't know. I didn't sign in."

5 I just let them know that like I'm here, here  
6 I am, we'll do it later. And then I got -- I had -- I  
7 checked the equipment and I noticed that there's like  
8 some stuff missing from the boxes.

9 So I went across the street to the medical  
10 supply store and they had just opened and they were  
11 like, "Oh, it's so early. Look what's going on." And  
12 I said, "Yeah." They're like, "It just happened, it  
13 just happened." I said, "Yeah, I know. I don't mean  
14 to bother you, but, you know, maybe later we can work  
15 some payment out. Can I borrow some equipment?"

16 And they said whatever I wanted, so I said,  
17 no, I don't really want to abuse, I just need like BP  
18 cuffs, stethoscopes, a few forceps, a few -- stuff I  
19 know I'm going to need that we don't have downstairs.

20 And we have enough -- so they gave me pretty  
21 expensive stuff. So I thought, yeesh, okay, thank you,

1 I really don't need that many.

2 I just -- there was only two medics here, SGT  
3 Silva and I. Then I went back to the chests. I packed  
4 the chests up and then I went back upstairs and I told  
5 SGT Sanchez, "Okay, I'm ready." He said, "Well, wait a  
6 minute. I don't know who's going downtown yet."

7 And then MAJ Obregon said --

8 **MAJ MELNYK:** MAJ Obregon is the --

9 **SPC TORRES:** He's the --

10 **MAJ MELNYK:** -- executive officer for the  
11 battalion.

12 **SPC TORRES:** -- executive officer. Then I  
13 heard somebody said something and MAJ Obregon has two  
14 vehicles out front and I think he said he was going to  
15 go downtown and something. Somebody had -- I didn't  
16 really listen to or (inaudible) because I don't  
17 concern.

18 So I said, okay, well, it's going on, let's  
19 go, I got two medics, let's go. And SGT Sanchez was  
20 like "Okay. If you feel ready. Hey, wait, you got to  
21 wait for a ride."

1           All right, I'll wait. But then what happened  
2 was all of a sudden, like someone said just pack them,  
3 just pack them, let's get ready to go. Oh, it was 1SG  
4 Acevedo from Alpha Company.

5           **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay.

6           **SPC TORRES:** I believe he was here when I was  
7 here. I came in about nine. I came in -- I came in  
8 early in the morning. And then sergeant Acevedo said  
9 "Okay. Let's go. Let's go." So I packed one of the  
10 Humvees with the gear and I already had my LBE, I  
11 already had my helmet, and I already -- I was ready.

12           So the sergeant was ready, we were ready, and  
13 then MAJ Obregon was going to lead a convoy of two  
14 Humvees. Yeah, two Humvees. And we all went uptown.

15           **MAJ MELNYK:** Uptown?

16           **SPC TORRES:** Well, downtown.

17           **MAJ MELNYK:** Right.

18           **SPC TORRES:** And then when we were there, SGT  
19 Acevedo and MAJ Obregon were separated by the traffic.

20           They started closing traffic and all the police cars.

21           So we went to the west side. MAJ Obregon went

1 to the east side.

2           **MAJ MELNYK:** So you tried to go down the west  
3 side highway and he tried the FDR Drive.

4           **SPC TORRES:** The FDR Drive.

5           **MAJ MELNYK:** Yeah.

6           **SPC TORRES:** And when we went the west side,  
7 that's when we saw the fire department, the staging  
8 area where they have all the ambulances, and they told  
9 us that none of the ambulances were down there yet.

10                   And it was really early in the morning.  
11 Everything was happening fast. So I said okay. So  
12 then what happened was SGT Acevedo said let's go back  
13 to the armory and link up with MAJ Obregon, because I  
14 don't know if he wants to set up a C.P. downtown or if  
15 he has spoken with somebody where we're supposed to be.

16                   But he says he knows that he -- he knows where  
17 we should -- where the medics can go. So I told 1SG  
18 Acevedo, I said "Why don't you take me downtown to the  
19 World Trade, we'll pinpoint an area, and then you go  
20 back and you tell them that's where we're at, we'll  
21 link up later."

1           So he said "That's a good idea." So we went  
2 to the World Trade and then when we were there, SGT  
3 Silva and I took the three chests and we went into the  
4 building that they were doing triage with people that  
5 were hurt.

6           **MAJ MELNYK:** Do you know where that was?

7           **SPC TORRES:** One Liberty Plaza.

8           **MAJ MELNYK:** It was One Liberty Plaza.

9           **SPC TORRES:** Mm-hmm. Right across the street  
10 from the World Trade.

11          **MAJ MELNYK:** That's like the southwest corner  
12 or directly south of the --

13          **SPC TORRES:** I'll tell you. Hold on a second.  
14 [Looks at map] It's -- no. Actually, where's north and  
15 south on this? The northeast, like right in front of  
16 both World Trade Centers.

17          **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay.

18          **SPC TORRES:** One Liberty Plaza, I think it's  
19 right -- it's on the corner of Liberty and Church.

20          **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay.

21          **SPC TORRES:** It's north --

1           **MAJ MELNYK:** That's southeast.

2           **SPC TORRES:** No. This and this.

3           **MAJ MELNYK:** Right.

4           **SPC TORRES:** This is the World Trade. These  
5 are the World Trade, these two. We were at Liberty and  
6 Church.

7           **MAJ MELNYK:** Right. Okay. So you set up in  
8 One Liberty Plaza.

9           **SPC TORRES:** We set up down in the base --  
10 like down in the lobby, because the people were running  
11 from the World Trade and they were telling everybody  
12 who was injured go downstairs, go down to the lobby.

13           So we went, our medical chests, and Silva and  
14 I told the nurses and the doctors we're paramedic and  
15 one is -- he's an Army medic, EMT, and I'm a paramedic  
16 and I'm an Army medic.

17           So they were like good, set up your equipment.

18           So while we were setting up, people were like running  
19 and firefighters and people were running into the lobby  
20 and we were triage and then we got in it.

21           Just triaging, just helping out, just, you

1 know, just giving oxygen, setting oxygen. We were  
2 like, you know, doing what we had to do.

3 And then --

4 **MAJ MELNYK:** Were the World Trade Center  
5 towers collapsed by this point?

6 **SPC TORRES:** One of them did.

7 **MAJ MELNYK:** But not --

8 **SPC TORRES:** Not the other one.

9 **MAJ MELNYK:** You were there when the second  
10 one collapsed.

11 **SPC TORRES:** The second one fell down, because  
12 there's a pizzeria right on the corner of Liberty and  
13 Church, or is it Albany and Church.

14 **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay.

15 **SPC TORRES:** Albany and Church.

16 **MAJ MELNYK:** But across the street from you,  
17 from where you were located.

18 **SPC TORRES:** Like southwest of us.

19 **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay.

20 **SPC TORRES:** Because you had -- you couldn't  
21 go right there. So what happened was SGT Silva said,

1 "Oh, I just went to the armory. I'm hungry. I'm  
2 really" -- no. He said "I'm hungry and thirsty."

3 Then I looked at him and said, "I'm okay. I'm  
4 only thirsty. I'll stay." I said, "You know what?  
5 Let's go together, don't separate." Nobody knows. So  
6 I said let's go together.

7 Then a few police officers started walking  
8 with us and he says if you go right in there, the guy  
9 is giving out free food for PD and firefighters and  
10 Army. He says go right in there right now, because  
11 he's giving out food right now.

12 So as we were walking, we were walking with a  
13 lot of police officers. We heard a rumble. Then one  
14 of the police officers grabbed my shoulder and we were  
15 running and everybody just ran, like ran, running like  
16 a lot of (inaudible) and they came down, and --

17 **MAJ MELNYK:** So you didn't see it. You were  
18 just running.

19 **SPC TORRES:** I was just running. And I kind  
20 of heard something, but I couldn't look back, because  
21 everybody was running behind me.



1           So then we -- then when everything kind of  
2 cleared and all the dust was gone, then SGT Silva said  
3 -- he was laughing, he says -- he was laughing, but I  
4 know he was nervous. He said, "You were running like a  
5 bitch."

6           So I was like, "You were running slower than  
7 me." I was like I only ran because the police -- he  
8 looked back and he started pushing me. He grabbed me  
9 by the shoulder and he kept grabbing me by the shoulder  
10 while we were running.

11           Everybody was running. Then I remember a few  
12 police officers says "I'm missing my gun, I'm missing  
13 my gun" or "I dropped my radio, I dropped my" -- and  
14 then a lot of people were kind of like looking for  
15 other people.

16           And then we just went back to the building,  
17 like, well, let's go back.

18           **MAJ MELNYK:** You went back to where you were  
19 doing triage before.

20           **SPC TORRES:** Mm-hmm. Yeah. That's when  
21 everybody was setting up and still treating like

1 everybody, we were treating everybody. We were  
2 treating firefighters that were exhausted and  
3 complaining of chest pain. Everybody was complaining  
4 about the dust and the smoke, the dust, the dust, oh, I  
5 can't breath, I can't breath, I can't breath.

6 And I remember -- I remember asking one EMT,  
7 check his lung sound to make sure he's no wheezing, and  
8 we just -- everybody was doing everything, not one  
9 person was doing one thing.

10 It was like real chaotic. And then I told SGT  
11 Silva I hope they come back. They left us. I said I  
12 hope somebody comes back, because it's getting hectic.

13 I was like I hope they come back.

14 SGT Silva says "I don't think they're coming  
15 back." And then we stayed there all night, we stayed  
16 there.

17 **MAJ MELNYK:** In One Liberty Plaza, the  
18 basement.

19 **SPC TORRES:** Yeah. We stayed there all day,  
20 all night. I didn't even know, time just flew.

21 **MAJ MELNYK:** Were there other people, people

1 you were treating the whole time, people who got hurt -  
2 -

3 **SPC TORRES:** Yeah.

4 **MAJ MELNYK:** -- during the recovery  
5 operations.

6 **SPC TORRES:** Mm-hmm. Yeah. A lot of  
7 firefighters, because of the dust or exhausted and a  
8 lot of them were short of breath and complaining about  
9 chest pain.

10 **MAJ MELNYK:** And what were you doing for the  
11 dust? Were you wearing a mask?

12 **SPC TORRES:** I just -- yeah. I just cleaned  
13 myself off and then there was a lot of dust. It was  
14 like thick. I mean, I had to throw away my BDUs  
15 because they smelled like fire, smoke, debris. They  
16 smelled really bad.

17 But at the time, I was already numb. I was  
18 short of breath. But I remember when the building  
19 fell, I almost choked, like there was no air for like a  
20 minute. So I was like, well, it's not that bad now,  
21 but when it fell, it was bad. It was like I couldn't

1 breath. But I was like it's bad.

2 And I knew it smelled bad and I was just --  
3 well, what am I going to do, everybody's really bad.  
4 It was bad. It was like really, really like horrible,  
5 the scene, people cut. It was nasty.

6 So I told SGT Silva I think we got ourselves  
7 in deeper than we thought, because I don't think -- I  
8 think that's it, we got to stay. And we did. We  
9 stayed all night and we were helping and it just -- the  
10 whole day went by. I don't even know what happened. I  
11 didn't even know what time it was.

12 It just -- it was just crazy, hectic, and we  
13 just -- we were like what are we going to do, what are  
14 we going to do. I hope somebody comes to help us.

15 And then we just kind of like linked up with  
16 everybody else and then everybody was helping  
17 everybody.

18 **MAJ MELNYK:** Well, who did you link up with?  
19 Are you talking about --

20 **SPC TORRES:** Late, late, late, I don't know  
21 what time it was, the 101st came in.

1           **MAJ MELNYK:** This is what day? Is this  
2     Wednesday?

3           **SPC TORRES:** The same night. The same night.  
4     I don't know what time it was. It was like that  
5     night. I don't know if it was like that Tuesday night  
6     or that Wednesday if midnight had already turned.

7           **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay.

8           **SPC TORRES:** But I know SGT Bros, B-r-o-s, and  
9     a few medics, they came downstairs with a little bit of  
10    -- with some equipment.

11          **MAJ MELNYK:** They were from the 101st.

12          **SPC TORRES:** From -- we were like whew,  
13    familiar face, now somebody knows we're here. That's  
14    what I kept thinking. And SGT Silva was already -- he  
15    was tired, he was exhausted. He was like I want to  
16    leave. And I was like I do, too, but I don't even know  
17    what time it is.

18                 I don't even know where we're at. Then I came  
19    out of the building and I looked and I was like we're  
20    at One Liberty, and I really didn't know. We just --  
21    everything was automatic. They were like (inaudible.)

1       They saw us with the bag, the medical chests.

2               So we were there and then me and SGT Silva  
3 stayed all night, til the morning, you know.

4               **MAJ MELNYK:** When did you hook back up with  
5 the other medics from headquarters, 1st and 69th?

6               **SPC TORRES:** A few days later. I think it was  
7 --

8               **MAJ MELNYK:** How long did you stay in One  
9 Liberty Plaza?

10              **SPC TORRES:** From the moment we got there to  
11 the next day.

12              **MAJ MELNYK:** Sometime Wednesday. And then  
13 where did you move to?

14              **SPC TORRES:** I came here.

15              **MAJ MELNYK:** You came back to the armory.

16              **SPC TORRES:** Yeah. To let somebody know I was  
17 all right, I was alive, because everybody -- you know,  
18 we went downtown. So I called, my mother said, "Yeah,  
19 I know you were in Manhattan, but I didn't know where  
20 you were." I was like, "No, I'm okay. I'm fine."  
21 They were like, "That's good. We thought something

1 happened to you."

2 I said, "No. The second building fell when we  
3 were there, but we were down the block. So everybody  
4 had time to run." She was like, "Oh, oh." Then she  
5 got a little upset. She was like, "Oh, you know, why  
6 do you have to go."

7 I was like, "Oh, it's okay." And then she  
8 says, "Oh, just take care. Just take care. Keep  
9 calling." I said, "Yeah." She said, "Where are you  
10 staying?" I said, "For now, I guess One Liberty Plaza,  
11 but I came to the armory because I got to change  
12 clothes. I have no clothes." I got to take some kind  
13 of shower or something. I had dirt and dust in my eyes  
14 and every time I blinked, the corner of my eyes, I felt  
15 like I had like sand, man, and they were black and then  
16 I had gray ash all over me, and it was really nasty.

17 I had dust in my ears. It was -- and my  
18 uniform -- I was starting to smell badly. I was  
19 starting to smell like everything. I was starting to  
20 smell like fire, dust, dirt, sweat. I smelled like  
21 everything.

1           Then everybody in the armory was telling me,  
2 "Whew, man, get away from us."

3           So I felt bad about coming back to the armory  
4 smelling like crap. I was like, well, my God, I don't  
5 know what -- what the hell did we just get into.

6           And then I didn't know what was going on,  
7 because I didn't get no news or anything, and I was  
8 like I don't know what's going on, but let's go back.

9           Then we changed our clothes, I got dressed, I  
10 ate something, and then I went back to One Liberty  
11 Plaza, because I told them I left medical equipment.

12           **MAJ MELNYK:** This is -- I'm losing track of  
13 what time.

14           **SPC TORRES:** This is like Wednesday. Now it's  
15 like Wednesday. Now it's Wednesday morning.

16           **MAJ MELNYK:** Wednesday. Still morning, not  
17 afternoon?

18           **SPC TORRES:** No. It's morning.

19           **MAJ MELNYK:** It's morning.

20           **SPC TORRES:** Yeah.

21           **MAJ MELNYK:** You've changed and --



1           **SPC TORRES:** Because I looked at my watch and  
2 I said, oh, my God, I can't believe it's been 20 hours  
3 past. And that's what I remember. That's -- I  
4 remember that clearly. I remember I looked at my watch  
5 and it was about six or seven in the morning and I was  
6 like I can't believe I just have been standing up for  
7 20 hours straight, and 19 hours had just went by.

8           And we got to the World Trade at like 9:30,  
9 9:45, and when I looked at my watch, it was like six or  
10 seven. And I was like I can't believe the whole night  
11 just went by and I didn't even look at my watch to see  
12 what time it was.

13           I couldn't believe it.

14           **MAJ MELNYK:** Right.

15           **SPC TORRES:** You know, I was like I can't  
16 believe I've been there this long.

17           **MAJ MELNYK:** So did you go back to One  
18 Liberty?

19           **SPC TORRES:** Mm-hmm.

20           **MAJ MELNYK:** Is that where you spent the rest  
21 of the week?

1           **SPC TORRES:** I spent the rest of the latter  
2 week at One Liberty and then they had said that night,  
3 they had said the eighth and the eleventh floor were on  
4 fire, that they were going to move everything out.

5           So we moved everything out of One Liberty  
6 Plaza.

7           **MAJ MELNYK:** And went where?

8           **SPC TORRES:** Everybody, like all the medical  
9 personnel consolidated at another building like a few  
10 blocks down. It was like a bar, a diner. And then  
11 somebody wrote on a glass window "triage."

12           **MAJ MELNYK:** So all the medical personnel,  
13 military. Was this also --

14           **SPC TORRES:** It was New York City, volunteer  
15 fire from somewhere else. They had doctors, physicians  
16 from all the hospitals. They were wearing their IDs.  
17 Valley firefighters, Valley paramedics, EMTs from other  
18 places, military. SGT Silva and I were there alone for  
19 hours and then came SGT Bros and I felt so relieved. I  
20 was like thank God, we don't look like the only ones  
21 here.

1           Then everybody else was there, also. They had  
2 nurses from the civilian hospitals. They had doctors  
3 from civilian hospitals.

4           **MAJ MELNYK:** Did --

5           **SPC TORRES:** They set up like a little MASH,  
6 but it was like a hurry up MASH, and then when they  
7 said the building was on fire, everybody started like  
8 picking up anything and running out.

9           So we're like -- Silva and I were like, you  
10 know, we're already (inaudible.) We were like when we  
11 get a chance, we're out of here. One fell on us and I  
12 don't think he liked that too much. He was like -- and  
13 then the other one, he was like I'm out of here.

14           **MAJ MELNYK:** What about the rest of the 69th's  
15 medics, do you know where they were?

16           **SPC TORRES:** No. We didn't see them for a  
17 while. The only one we saw was MAJ Tomasino  
18 (phonetic.) That's about it.

19           **MAJ MELNYK:** And he's a medical officer?

20           **SPC TORRES:** He's a physician's assistant.  
21 He's a medical officer, yeah. And he knew where we

1 were at, but I don't think they had access to the area  
2 yet, because of --

3 **MAJ MELNYK:** Because of the building falling.

4 **SPC TORRES:** Yeah. It was hard to get in and  
5 -- it was like impossible to get in, it was impossible  
6 to get out.

7 I know we were like, gees, what did we just  
8 get ourselves into. Then when we saw SGT Bros, he kind  
9 of made his way. Then I said, "How did you guys get  
10 here?" He says, "Oh, we took the ferry."

11 **MAJ MELNYK:** Over from Staten Island.

12 **SPC TORRES:** Yeah. I said, "Oh, then how did  
13 you get here?" He says, "Oh, from Battery Park to One  
14 Liberty." It was only a few blocks and they came with  
15 Humvees and with a fresh batch of medics. And then I  
16 asked which one of them were paramedics and one of them  
17 was a paramedic, the other ones were medic, Army  
18 medics.

19 So I was like all right, me and him felt  
20 really relieved, and SGT Silva was quiet. He was like  
21 -- he kept telling me real low, "Let's go, I want to

1 go, I want to go." And I was like, yeah, I know. We  
2 had a long day.

3 He was tired. He was like two almost fell on  
4 us. It was like he wasn't happy. After a whole, he  
5 wasn't happy.

6 **MAJ MELNYK:** About how many people do you  
7 think you treated?

8 **SPC TORRES:** I don't remember.

9 **MAJ MELNYK:** Who was in charge of it? Was  
10 there anybody directing --

11 **SPC TORRES:** There was one --

12 **MAJ MELNYK:** -- some patients to you, some  
13 patients to you?

14 **SPC TORRES:** There was one person in front of  
15 the revolving doors in the lobby. She was really  
16 coordinating like which injured people would go in one  
17 ambulance or what bus or whatever vehicle to take them  
18 to wherever, to the rear. They weren't going directly  
19 to the hospital. It was hard to get out of there.

20 **MAJ MELNYK:** Right.

21 **SPC TORRES:** Because like the fire was still

1 going on. There was a lot of smoke still there. So  
2 there was somebody else in the lobby directing who  
3 would do what and whatever, can we get some oxygen over  
4 here. So anybody would get it, can you help this  
5 firefighter, this firefighter is short of breath.

6 So anybody would take -- they had like a few  
7 first responders or -- they had anybody that knew how  
8 to take a blood pressure, good, take a blood pressure.

9 They had anybody who knew how to set up a nebulizer or  
10 an oxygen mask, do that. And then an RN or an MD would  
11 be talking to them and treating them.

12 You know, we have someone else here injured,  
13 here, here. So they would sit them in a chair and I  
14 would interview them, are you having chest pain, are  
15 you wheezing right now, okay, as long as you're not  
16 having chest pain, wheezing, you're short of breath,  
17 and a lot of them are like, yeah, I'm short of breath,  
18 I'm dizzy.

19 So I was like, okay, and you (inaudible) from  
20 there, but it was a lot. Everybody was -- every -- it  
21 was a lot of treating people, but it was mostly

1 treating like injured rescuers, like firefighters,  
2 police, EMS, a few people from ConEd.

3           Yeah. I remember there were about -- I  
4 remember -- I remember two people from ConEd. One had  
5 chest pain and one was just short of breath. Them I  
6 remember.

7           Who else? There was like no really  
8 denomination. There was like no really I am chief, you  
9 are not. No. Because I had my stethoscope over my  
10 shoulder and I already presented myself as a paramedic  
11 and then we just went at it. Everybody was just like  
12 grab what you could, do the best you could, because  
13 nobody's leaving.

14           **MAJ MELNYK:** Right.

15           **SPC TORRES:** We couldn't go anywhere. And we  
16 were like, oh, gees, we're stuck. And that was the  
17 biggest fear. We're like stuck.

18           **MAJ MELNYK:** So you were in One Liberty Plaza  
19 until what point, what day?

20           **SPC TORRES:** Til that morning, til the --  
21 Wednesday morning.

1           **MAJ MELNYK:** And then you said you came to the  
2 armory and then you went back there.

3           **SPC TORRES:** Yeah.

4           **MAJ MELNYK:** But then you moved because they  
5 were afraid --

6           **SPC TORRES:** They were afraid that the  
7 building was unstable. They said that the fire from  
8 the eighth or eleventh floor, I'm not too sure, but the  
9 fire from the eighth and eleventh floor, there's  
10 something going on with the building that we had to  
11 leave.

12           **MAJ MELNYK:** So you evacuated and you went to  
13 this new location.

14           **SPC TORRES:** About two blocks down and it was  
15 like a bar.

16           **MAJ MELNYK:** And you were there til --

17           **SPC TORRES:** Til like Wednesday night.

18           **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay. And then?

19           **SPC TORRES:** Then I walked to Pace University.

20           **MAJ MELNYK:** Okay.

21           **SPC TORRES:** Then when I got to Pace



1 University, they had, like in the lobby of the  
2 university, they had oxygen set up and cold water and  
3 food. They said, "Are you okay," and I said, "No, I'm  
4 short of breath."

5 I was really short of breath, and I was like  
6 "I'm short of breath." And they sat me down and they  
7 gave me oxygen. And then volunteer, I don't know what  
8 they were, paramedics, nurses, they're like "Where were  
9 you, where were you, we'll go, we'll go." I said, "Oh,  
10 thank God. You go, I can go."

11 And then I saw a police car and he took me --  
12 brought me back to the armory the next day.

13 **MAJ MELNYK:** Did you stay at the armory then  
14 through --

15 **SPC TORRES:** Yeah. I stayed, because I ran  
16 out of uniforms. So now it's like Friday morning.  
17 Tuesday, Wednesday -- yeah, Friday morning.

18 Then I was joking around and I asked somebody,  
19 "Do we get paid? Who knows? Who has direct deposit?  
20 Do we get paid? This is city employees?" Somebody  
21 (inaudible.) We were laughing.

1           Then I was like, I was --

2           (Tape change.)

3           **MAJ MELNYK:** This is side two of the interview  
4 with SPC Alberto Torres, on 17 September '01.

5           You had returned to the armory and run out of  
6 uniforms.

7           **SPC TORRES:** Yeah. When I got back to the  
8 armory, I ran out of uniforms and I had this one  
9 uniform where one name tape was different than the  
10 other. And that's the uniform shirt that I wear when  
11 we're like in the field.

12           And then in my civilian job, I have direct  
13 deposit, so I was like "Do we get paid," you know, I  
14 was just joking around with a few other guys. And then  
15 it didn't really hit me until I asked somebody, I said,  
16 "Wait a minute. What's today?"

17           That's how -- I mean, I felt really bad when I  
18 didn't know what day it was. I was like what's today,  
19 because they just kept -- I didn't -- I couldn't recall  
20 the difference between night and day.

21           I could recall the events, but I couldn't

1 recall seeing afternoon, morning, afternoon, night. I  
2 didn't really get any good -- like til Friday, I got  
3 seven hours total sleep from Tuesday to Friday.

4 And I just couldn't recall like what --  
5 whether day or night had passed. I just knew -- that's  
6 all I knew, like it was -- I wasn't worried about time.

7 **MAJ MELNYK:** Were you thinking about your  
8 civilian job, that they might -- where do you work as a  
9 paramedic?

10 **SPC TORRES:** In the South Bronx.

11 **MAJ MELNYK:** In the South Bronx. And were you  
12 thinking that your unit might be down there, as well,  
13 trying to recall you?

14 **SPC TORRES:** No. I met some of my coworkers.

15 **MAJ MELNYK:** While you were down at the World  
16 Trade Center.

17 **SPC TORRES:** While I was down there. Mm-hmm.

18 **MAJ MELNYK:** So they knew that you were at the  
19 Guard.

20 **SPC TORRES:** They knew. Yeah, they knew. A  
21 few of my coworkers had said, "Oh, oh, you're" --

1 "yeah, oh, yeah, somebody went," -- somebody at my job  
2 had said that they saw Torres downtown and in the World  
3 Trade.

4           So I felt like -- really like -- really like  
5 relieved, you know, because someone had said -- someone  
6 I met at Liberty Plaza like the next day, when the  
7 morning came, someone said, "Yeah, someone said they  
8 saw you down here." I said, "Oh, yeah." And they were  
9 like, "Yeah. They know you're here." And I was like,  
10 "Oh, yeah, they do," they were like "Yeah." And I was  
11 like, "Oh, all right."

12           I felt relieved. I felt like, wow, first I  
13 see SGT Bros and the 101 medics, now I see a few of my  
14 coworkers.

15           So I'm starting to feel good.

16           **MAJ MELNYK:** You're not alone. Yeah.

17           **SPC TORRES:** Yeah. Started to feel like, oh,  
18 my God, what did we get into. Now I'm feeling more  
19 comfortable, but I'm tired. Physically, I'm like --  
20 then joking around, do we get paid.

21           And then when I got to the armory, I said

1 "What's today," and they were like "Oh, it's Friday."  
2 I didn't really have a concept of time. And then there  
3 were TVs going on and I didn't really notice. I didn't  
4 really know what actually -- I didn't really know  
5 actually what happened.

6 I was like, "What actually did happen," and  
7 they were like "Yeah, one fell, then the other one  
8 fell, and then you guys" -- and then they stopped some  
9 people in the airport and then they think it was some  
10 pilots and trying to bomb the airport and then -- you  
11 know, and on.

12 And I didn't find out about the Pentagon until  
13 like Thursday and Friday, and I was like, "Really, that  
14 too." I didn't -- you know, it was just -- everybody  
15 was sent to right around World Trade.

16 **MAJ MELNYK:** Sure.

17 **SPC TORRES:** Everything around -- the world  
18 outside of us did not exist. We felt like that was it.  
19 So I said let me call my mom, she must be flipping  
20 out.

21 **MAJ MELNYK:** You called her Friday.

1           **SPC TORRES:** Yeah. And she says, "Oh, no, I  
2 knew you'd be there, you crazy," you know, and then I  
3 called your job and your job said that you were in the  
4 Reserve and I knew you were going to be okay, because  
5 somebody said that they saw you and that you were okay.

6           I said, "Yeah." And I said, "I'm really  
7 hungry and really hungry." Now I'm hungry. She said,  
8 (inaudible) I said, "Yeah, yeah." But, you know, I  
9 kind of lied. I'm really tired, hungry, and beat.

10           And I was just worried because I didn't have  
11 another pair of boots and was like, oh, you know, I'm  
12 worried about the small stuff now. Friday is there and  
13 all I'm worried about is small stuff, I only got one  
14 more uniform, I got no socks, I got no underwear, I got  
15 no tee shirt, I haven't taken a bath since, and then in  
16 the armory here, they made me feel bad.

17           They were like -- so I said let me take care  
18 of what I got to do. Then I sat down for like a half  
19 an hour and I saw TV. That's when I was in shock. I  
20 was like and they even stopped baseball. And they're  
21 like, "Yeah." I was like dang.

1           I didn't really get to like -- I didn't know  
2 what was going on til I had time to sit down and  
3 actually take it in. And I was like, you know, my  
4 first reaction was like what the hell went on.

5           Like I didn't -- I didn't know a plane went  
6 down in Pennsylvania. I didn't know a plane hit the  
7 Pentagon. I didn't know that they stopped baseball. I  
8 didn't know that it was -- I didn't know whether I got  
9 paid or not. It was like already Friday afternoon.

10           You know, I was like -- we were like in a --  
11 it was like in another world. You know, like the world  
12 didn't exist outside of the World Trade Center, you  
13 know.

14           **MAJ MELNYK:** Did you go back down there  
15 Saturday or Sunday?

16           **SPC TORRES:** Saturday I stayed here.

17           **MAJ MELNYK:** At the armory.

18           **SPC TORRES:** Because I spoke to -- there was a  
19 physician here from the Red Cross, whatever, and he was  
20 handing out pamphlets on post traumatic stress and I  
21 told him I only slept like five hours since Tuesday,

1 and he says, "Why don't you go talk to your major and  
2 maybe you can rest. Maybe this will be your first day  
3 of rest." And I was like first day, I couldn't even --  
4 I told him the truth. I said I didn't even know three  
5 days went by.

6 He said, "Oh, I think you're showing signs of  
7 just being tired. I think you should rest." So then I  
8 rested Saturday and then yesterday I went back out to  
9 the field, and that's it.

10 **MAJ MELNYK:** The field being Battery Park.

11 **SPC TORRES:** Went back into Battery Park,  
12 yeah.

13 **MAJ MELNYK:** So the last day you were down in  
14 Battery Park.

15 **SPC TORRES:** Mm-hmm.

16 **MAJ MELNYK:** Yeah.

17 **SPC TORRES:** Yeah. Then we came back like  
18 last night, like 11:00 o'clock, and I was like  
19 exhausted. I was so exhausted. I called a few -- I  
20 called my cousins and I said, no, I'm not going to call  
21 my mother, it's 12:30 and she's sleeping.



1           And then I said, but I bet you if I call her,  
2 she'll wake up. She was like talking to me. They were  
3 like, "Yeah, don't worry about it. We'll call her in  
4 the morning." They were like, "Did you eat," and I  
5 said, "I ate a little bit." I don't have too much --  
6 and then it hit me.

7           I was like "Listen, I got to hang up. I'm  
8 really beat. I'm going to get a cot." They're like  
9 "All right, all right, all right. Take care, take  
10 care." Then they said, "We'll tell your mom tomorrow,  
11 don't worry about it, don't worry about it, don't go  
12 back, don't go back, don't go back."

13           My family is telling me, "Don't go back, don't  
14 go back, don't go back." And they were like "Don't  
15 worry about it. Just take care of yourself. Try to  
16 get some sleep, try to get some sleep, and eat, eat,  
17 eat."

18           I was like, "Yeah," I didn't sleep or eat til  
19 Friday.

20           **MAJ MELNYK:** Do you have any other impressions  
21 of what happened down there, what you saw?

1           **SPC TORRES:** Like it was just -- it was  
2   ripped. It was -- I was -- I was walking with SGT  
3   Silva and I said, "Man, do you believe this? This is  
4   like we're in another world." I was like look at the  
5   buildings, and we're looking up at glass, everything  
6   was blown out, everything was -- everything was  
7   shattered.

8           The cars were like crushed and the windows  
9   were crushed and everything was burnt to like -- like  
10   charred. Everything was like -- and I just felt like  
11   it was like we were in another world.

12           I felt like, you know, I felt like -- I didn't  
13   -- I didn't -- I couldn't really -- I wasn't thinking  
14   about who did this or why they did this. I was -- my  
15   mind was like I couldn't believe where we were at and I  
16   couldn't believe all the people that were hurt and sick  
17   and it was sick -- it was sickening place.

18           I felt like -- I couldn't believe like the  
19   world -- to me, the world didn't exist anymore. It was  
20   like, you know, I couldn't believe that we were going  
21   to leave. I thought that that was it.

1           I thought the whole world was in the World  
2 Trade Center. You know, I didn't think that like maybe  
3 a few miles down, there were streets and stores. It's  
4 just -- I felt like there was like -- there was dust  
5 everywhere and ashes and papers and debris and cars and  
6 some alarms were going off, and windows were busted and  
7 buildings were crumbled, and people were running and  
8 screaming, and I felt like we were in another world.

9           You felt like you were in your own world and  
10 nothing else existed.

11           **MAJ MELNYK:** Is there anything else you want  
12 to add?

13           **SPC TORRES:** Oh, yeah. And then today, when  
14 when we -- last night, I fell asleep and I woke up this  
15 morning and I told the lieutenant I'm a little tired,  
16 I'm going to go get coffee. He says, "Okay." So when  
17 I went to get coffee at Starbucks, I was coming down  
18 the block again and I stood in front of the supply  
19 place, the medical supply store, and the secretary  
20 noticed me and she was like almost freaking out.

21           She says you came in here so early in the

1 morning and we gave you -- and I was like, oh, by the  
2 way, I can't repay you, I'm sorry, we lost it, the  
3 building fell and we lost the medical chests.

4           **MAJ MELNYK:** So you didn't pull those out when  
5 you evacuated the building.

6           **SPC TORRES:** No. We pulled whatever we could.  
7 Everybody was like -- whatever you could. And then I  
8 told her I was like really sorry, how am I going to pay  
9 it back. Sorry, I'm like really sorry. She said "No.  
10 Everybody in the office was freaking out because they  
11 remember somebody coming in early in the morning."

12           She said, "Yeah, you came in, we gave you  
13 supplies. Like an hour later, the building fell, and  
14 we're like oh, my God, that's where that soldier is  
15 at."

16           And she said "Come inside the store, they want  
17 to see you, they want to see you." I went inside the  
18 store and they were happy to see me. They're like  
19 "Yeah, we thought that you perished." They're like,  
20 "Oh, my God, we can't believe it."

21           And I was like yeah. I didn't think about

1 coming back to the store. I wasn't thinking about it,  
2 but then I told them I was sorry that I can't get the  
3 equipment, that the building had collapsed, and then we  
4 grabbed what we do, but I couldn't grab everything.

5 **MAJ MELNYK:** Right.

6 **SPC TORRES:** And they were like -- they were  
7 in shock. They were like, "Oh, my God, we thought  
8 something happened to you." One of the came across the  
9 street asking for it, but they didn't know who they  
10 were talking about, because we left then.

11 **MAJ MELNYK:** Right.

12 **SPC TORRES:** And then they wanted me to stay  
13 there and talk to me and give me coffee. I said, "No,  
14 no, no, no, no. I'm okay. I'm fine. Really, I'm  
15 happy to see you, too," and they were so happy to see  
16 me. They were like, "Oh, my God, we were all worried.  
17 We were watching TV and we said oh, my God, that young  
18 -- that guy came in with the stethoscope and we gave  
19 him all the equipment and we felt so bad, because like  
20 a little while later, when we saw you get in the truck  
21 and" -- they were at the window.

1           And like a half an hour later, the building  
2 fell. We were like -- they were all panicking and they  
3 wanted -- they just wanted to know my name and, you  
4 know, they said, "Oh, what's your name."

5           **MAJ MELNYK:** Never asked for their money.

6           **SPC TORRES:** Huh?

7           **MAJ MELNYK:** Never asked for their money?

8           **SPC TORRES:** No. I said I was sorry. You  
9 know, if there's some way I can pay you back, I'll get  
10 something from the unit, I don't know, maybe like a  
11 lost and something, I don't know. Sorry. I felt bad.

12 I felt bad being there, because I'm like -- they don't  
13 think -- they were like, "No, no, no. You came in."

14 The secretary remembered me.

15           The secretary said, "No, you came in, you were  
16 quiet, we gave you equipment, you put it on the truck  
17 right outside, parked outside, and then you left," and  
18 like half an hour later they saw the building fall, and  
19 they were worried and they felt really guilty about  
20 giving me equipment.

21           I'm like, no, I feel bad. I'm the one that

1 lost it.

2           **MAJ MELNYK:** Right.

3           **SPC TORRES:** Then they wanted like to, "Here,  
4 you want coffee." I'm like no, I have -- I had a cup  
5 of coffee. I said, "No, no, no. I'm okay. I'm okay."

6

7           And then they were like how do you feel, and I  
8 was like I haven't really -- it hasn't sunk in yet,  
9 because I haven't been -- I haven't really even been --  
10 I haven't been a mile away. I haven't even been home.

11 I don't know how I feel. I haven't sat down and  
12 actually looked at the news.

13           I told them I don't know how it feels yet.

14 Maybe in a few days or in a few weeks.

15           **MAJ MELNYK:** You'll figure it out.

16           **SPC TORRES:** I'll let you know. And they were  
17 like okay. But they were really happy to see me. You  
18 know, they were like, "Oh, my God, we went down across  
19 the street to the armory" and they were saying we gave  
20 all this equipment to this paramedic and the next thing  
21 you know, the building fell, and the news, they were

1 like, "oh, oh," and they closed the store all week.

2                   And I was like "I'm fine." SGT Silva wasn't  
3 too happy.

4                   **MAJ MELNYK:** Yeah. Sounds like it.

5                   **SPC TORRES:** He wasn't too happy. He was like  
6 let's hurry up and get out of here.

7                   **MAJ MELNYK:** Thank you very much.

8                   **SPC TORRES:** You're welcome.

9                   **MAJ MELNYK:** Appreciate it.

10                   (The interview was concluded.)

11

\* \* \* \* \*