

## February 26, 1993: WTC Is Bombed but Does Not Collapse, as Bombers Had Hoped



Bomb damage in underground levels of the WTC in 1993. [Source: Najlah Feanny/ Corbis]

An attempt to topple the WTC fails, but six people are killed and over 1000 are injured in the misfired blast. An FBI explosives expert later states that, “If they had found the exact architectural Achilles’ heel or if the bomb had been a little bit bigger, not much more, 500 pounds more, I think it would have brought her down.” Ramzi Yousef, who has close ties to bin Laden, organizes the attempt. [[US Congress, 2/24/1998](#); Village Voice, 3/30/1993] The New York Times later reports on Emad Salem, an undercover agent who will be the key government witness in the trial against Yousef. Salem testifies that the FBI knew about the attack beforehand and told him

they would thwart it by substituting a harmless powder for the explosives. However, an FBI supervisor called off this plan, and the bombing was not stopped. [New York Times, 10/28/1993] Other suspects were ineptly investigated before the bombing as early as 1990. Several of the bombers were trained by the CIA to fight in the Afghan war, and the CIA later concludes, in internal documents, that it was “partly culpable” for this bombing. [Independent, 11/1/1998] US officials later state that the overall mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, is a close relative, probably an uncle, of Yousef. [[Independent, 6/6/2002](#); Los Angeles Times, 9/1/2002] One of the attackers even leaves a message which will later be found by investigators, stating, “Next time, it will be very precise.” [[Associated Press, 9/30/2001](#)]



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## The World Trade Center Bombing

On Friday, February 26, 1993, a massive explosion occurred in the public parking garage of the World Trade Center in New York City. As a result of the explosion, 6 persons were killed, and more than 1,000 injured. The site of the blast became one of the largest crime scenes in NYPD history. Estimates showed property damage in excess of one-half billion dollars. The sense of fear and panic in the city was palpable. Indeed, many in law enforcement thought of this investigation as the "case of the century."

The JTTF stepped into the maelstrom and helped restore calm to the city. Within a month of the blast, the JTTF apprehended four individuals responsible for the attack. The suspects went on trial on September 13, 1993. The trial lasted 6 months with the presentation of 204 witnesses and more than 1,000 pieces of evidence. A jury convicted the four defendants on March 4, 1994, in federal court on all 38 counts against them. On May 25, 1994, a judge sentenced each of the four defendants to 240 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. On February 7, 1995, authorities in Pakistan arrested the prime fugitive wanted in connection with the bombing and subsequently rendered him to U.S. authorities. This suspect, the mastermind behind the bombing, was sentenced to 240 years in prison on January 8, 1998.

The quick action taken by the JTTF did much to allay fears and return a sense of normalcy to New York City. The World Trade Center bombing will be remembered as the gravest attack of international terrorism to occur directly on American soil. As part of the plot to strike at the United States, these international terrorists intended to disrupt the dynamics of daily life, commerce, and finance in one of the most heavily populated cities in the United States. The suspect and his associates had hoped to kill upwards of 35,000 innocent people. The excellent work accomplished by the JTTF in investigating and successfully resolving the case dispelled the sense of vulnerability the terrorists had hoped to instill.



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## CNS Reports

# February 1993 Bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City

Extract from:

*John V. Parachini, "The World Trade Center Bombers (1993)" Chapter 11 in Jonathan B. Tucker, (ed.) [Toxic Terror: Assessing Terrorist Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons](#). MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. (2000), pp.185-206*

The February 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City marked the beginning of an ugly new phase of terrorism involving the indiscriminate killing of civilians[1]...The World Trade Center bombing was motivated by the desire to kill as many people as possible. The target of the bomb plot was the World Trade Center (WTC) complex, a sixteen-acre site in lower Manhattan... Although the explosion killed six people and injured more than 1,000 [1,042], the consequences could have been far worse...

This chapter largely refutes the claim that the WTC bombing involved the terrorist use of chemical weapons. Nevertheless, substantial evidence indicates that Ramzi Yousef, the mastermind behind the attack, seriously considered employing chemical agents in the WTC bombing and in subsequent attacks. Examining the motivations and behaviors of terrorists who *would have* used a chemical weapon if it was available, but did not for logistical or financial reasons, may offer important lessons about how to thwart such attacks in the future.

The perpetrators of the WTC bombing turned out to be a group of New Jersey men who had been suspected of terrorism for more than two years.[2] Yousef attended a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, where he honed his skills as an explosives expert. He then traveled around the world working as a professional terrorist in the name of Islamic Jihad, although expressions of religious faith or motivation were notably absent from his statements....

The terrorists apparently selected the World Trade Center as a target not because it was a symbol of Western values or the financial power of the United States, but simply because toppling the twin towers would enable them to inflict a large number of casualties... Thus, while the symbolism of the World Trade Center cannot be ignored, it does not fully explain its selection over other buildings or places occupied by large numbers of people. Physical attributes and location appear to have been more important. The imposing profile of the twin towers on the New York skyline lay in clear view from New Jersey, where the bombers assembled their weapon. Mahmud Abouhalima [one of the perpetrators] also picked up many of the fares for his car service right across the street from the WTC...

In November 1992, the conspirators started to prepare for an attack on the WTC. It took them more than two months to acquire the chemicals, assemble the sophisticated urea-nitrate bomb, and transport it to the designated target...

On February 26, 1993, the terrorists drove a yellow Ford Econoline rental van into the basement of the WTC and set a timer to detonate the 1,500-pound urea-nitrate bomb. The massive blast created a cavernous crater 200 feet by 100 feet wide and seven stories deep in the garage of the World Trade Center... In all, the explosion killed six people, injured more than 1,000 [1,042], and caused nearly \$300 million in property damage...[3]

With any major calamity, conspiracy theories tend to emerge when key details of the case appear incomplete. A few analysts suggest that Yousef and Ajaj [another of the bombers] were either Iraqi agents or freelance terrorists employed by Iraqi intelligence to exploit Islamic militants residing in the United States, as a means of continuing the Persian Gulf War on American soil...[4] Nevertheless, the theory that the Iraqi government sent Yousef on a mission to avenge the Gulf War relies too much on circumstantial evidence to create a compelling case...

As Yousef was being flown from Pakistan to the United States to stand trial, he told Secret Service agent Brian Parr that he would have put sodium cyanide into the WTC bomb if he had had enough money...[5]

Instead of state sponsorship, a large body of evidence indicates that the WTC conspirators were “transnational terrorists”—

inspired and assisted by several Islamic militant groups operating in the United States and abroad, but not a formal part of any of them...

In 1995, investigative journalist Steven Emerson noted that federal investigators had identified links between the WTC bombers and at least five Islamic organizations: the Gama al-Islamiya, Islamic Jihad, Hamas, the Sudanese National Islamic Front, and al-Fuqrah.<sup>[6]</sup> He observed that these groups work together more closely in diaspora communities outside the Middle East “because they feel they are surrounded by a common enemy: Westerners and their values.”...<sup>[7]</sup>

Several historical forces created a fertile climate for a loose collection of individuals to act out their anti-American feelings, even though they were not a part of a formal terrorist organization. The decade-long struggle in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union created a generation of rebel warriors who were fervently anti-Israel and anti-American. Both Ramzi Yousef and Eyad Ismoil, who drove Yousef in the rental van to the WTC garage, claimed to have had relatives killed during the Persian Gulf War or at the hands of the Israelis.<sup>[8]</sup> Moreover, the political mood throughout the Middle East immediately after the Gulf War, particularly in the Palestinian community, was strongly anti-American...

Osama bin Laden, widely believed to have been the mastermind of the August 1998 attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, would seem a natural candidate to support the WTC bombing, but to date none of the government indictments against him indicate a connection to the incident.<sup>[9]</sup>...

Although proof is lacking for the actual use of cyanide in the WTC bomb, much evidence suggests that the conspirators considered lacing the bomb with poison...

[S]ources suggest that Yousef was motivated by an inchoate mixture of visceral hatred and personal affirmation, wrapped in a variety of geopolitical rationales. The primary motivation for the WTC bombing was to kill and injure a large number of Americans. Yousef told Agent Parr that he intended for the explosion to cause one tower to fall into the other, inflicting 250,000 civilian casualties.<sup>[10]</sup> Throughout Yousef’s terrorist career in the mid-1990s, he sought to carry out truly diabolical terrorist acts, all of which he justified by visceral hatred of the United States because of its support for Israel. Another striking feature of Yousef’s motivations is the absence of a religious rationale... Yousef’s declared motivation was not religious but rather an anti-occupation crusade aimed against Israel and its main supporter, the United States. In contrast, Ayyad Abouhalima, and Ajaj all expressed religious sentiments during their statements at sentencing but never admitted any connection to the WTC bombing.<sup>[11]</sup> Their statements were more affirmations of faith than rationales for a terrorist attack. Given that several of the conspirators were followers of Sheikh Omar [Abdul Rahman], Yousef’s lack of religious justification is conspicuous by its absence. He appears to have been a secular terrorist who mobilized others by playing on their religious zeal. At the root of the WTC bombers’ intent to inflict mass casualties was a strong desire to punish, to seek revenge, and to underscore the dignity of Muslims. In the letter claiming responsibility for the bombing, they stated that their “action was done in response for the American political, economical, and military support to Israel, the state of terrorism, and to the rest of the dictator countries in the region.”<sup>[12]</sup> ...

Yousef justified his terrorism as both punishment and revenge. Since the United States never learns, he argued, it must be punished. Yousef equated the U.S. punishment inflicted on Libyan and Iraqi civilians with the punishment he had dispensed: “the United States is applying the system of collective punishment against Iraq and Libya—when either government makes any mistake, the United States punishes the people in their entirety for the government’s mistake. We are reciprocating the treatment.”<sup>[13]</sup>...

In essence, the terrorists argued that to appreciate the tragedy Palestinians had experienced at the hands of the Israelis, innocent Americans had to die. The implication of Yousef’s twisted logic was that as a result of the losses inflicted by terrorism, the American people would come to value Palestinian lives as much as their own and stop supporting Israel. Yousef also justified terrorism against U.S. civilians as revenge for what he perceived as a long history of moral transgressions by the United States... Working with deadly materials with the intent to cripple a global superpower by killing its people fed Yousef’s view of himself as an expert and a genius.

The World Trade Center bombers proved that determined terrorists can obtain large quantities of chemicals, mix them into a potent explosive device, and deliver them to a major target, potentially killing or injuring tens of thousands of people... Yousef’s terrorist crusade appears to have been driven by a confluence of anti-American and anti-Israeli rage and a significant dose of ego rather than religious ideology. He had more in common with the famous Latin American terrorist Carlos the Jackal than he did with the religiously inspired suicide-bombers of Hamas. Although he drew on the diaspora of militant Islamic fundamentalists, his attempt to inflict mass casualties in New York City did not stem from religious conviction. Instead, his twisted belief about how to respond to the plight of the Palestinian people seemed driven by the thrill of being an explosives expert, killing innocent people, and moving on to practice his brand of terrorism another day. His exploits as a transnational terrorist affirmed the high

opinion he held of himself. A terrorist who thinks that he is a genius will set the highest goals for practicing his craft. In Yousef's case, that meant attempting to kill as many innocent people as possible.

#### Notes:

[1] Jim Dwyer, David Kocieniewski, Deidre Murphy, and Peg Tyre, *Two Seconds Under the World: Terror Comes to America—The Conspiracy Behind the World Trade Center Bombing* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1994), p.50. See also Laurie Myroie, "The World Trade Center Bomb: Who is Ramzi Yousef? And Why It Matters," *The National Interest*, No. 42 (Winter 1995/96), pp. 3-15.

[2] Dwyer, et. al., *Two Seconds Under the World*, p.88.

[3] U.S. Senate, Committee on Judiciary, Subcommittee on Technology, Terrorism, and Government Information, Statement by Childers and DePippo, *Foreign Terrorists in America*.

[4] Myroie, "The World Trade Center Bomb," pp.3-15.

[5] Direct Examination of Brian Parr, *United States of America v. Ramzi Ahmed Yousef and Eyad Ismoil*, S1293CR.180 (KTD), October 22, 1997, pp. 4734-4735.

[6] Emerson, "The Other Fundamentalists," *New Republic*, June 12, 1995, p.40.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Raghidah Dirgham, "Ramzi Yusuf Discusses WTC Bombing, Other Activities," Al-Hayah, translated in FBIS-NES-95-097 (12 April 1995) p.5; Statement of Eyal Ismoil at sentencing, *United States of America v. Eyad Ismoil*, S1293CR. 180 (KTD), April 3, 1998, p. 16.

[9] Indictment, *United States of America v. Usama Bin Laden, Muhammad Atef, Wadiah El Hage, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, Mohamed Sadeek Odeh, Mohamed Rashed Daoud Al-'Owhali*, S(2) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS).

[10] Direct Examination of Brian Parr, *United States of America v. Ramzi Ahmed Yousef and Eyad Ismoil*, S1293CR.180 (KTD), October 22, 1997, p. 4721.

[11] Statements of Mohammed A. Salameh, Nidal Ayyad, Mahmud Abouhalima, and Amad Mohammad Ajaj at Sentencing, *United States of America v. Muhammad A. Salameh et. al.*, S1293CR 180 (KTD), May 24, 1994, pp. 26-34, 41-49, 53-65, 65-113.

[12] Ibid; Government Exhibit 196.

[13] Dirgham, "Ramzi Yusuf Discusses WTC Bombing," p.5.

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## Tapes Depict Proposal to Thwart Bomb Used in Trade Center Blast

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

The New York Times

Section A; Page 1; Column 4; Metropolitan Desk

October 28, 1993, Thursday, Late Edition - Final

Correction Appended

**Law-enforcement officials were told that terrorists were building a bomb that was eventually used to blow up the World Trade Center, and they planned to thwart the plotters by secretly substituting harmless powder for the explosives, an informer said after the blast.**

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**"Do you deny," Mr. Salem says he told the other agent, "your supervisor is the main reason of bombing the World Trade Center?" Mr. Salem said Mr. Anticev did not deny it. "We was handling the case perfectly well until the supervisor came and messed it up, upside down."**

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**The informer was to have helped the plotters build the bomb and supply the fake powder, but the plan was called off by an F.B.I. supervisor who had other ideas about how the informer, Emad A. Salem, should be used, the informer said.**

**The account, which is given in the transcript of hundreds of hours of tape recordings Mr. Salem secretly made of his talks with law-enforcement agents, portrays the authorities as in a far better position than previously known to foil the Feb. 26 bombing of New York City's tallest towers.** The explosion left six people dead, more than 1,000 injured and damages in excess of half a billion dollars. Four men are now on trial in Manhattan Federal Court in that attack.

Mr. Salem, a 43-year-old former Egyptian army officer, was used by the Government to penetrate a circle of Muslim extremists now charged in two bombing cases: the World Trade Center attack and a foiled plot to destroy the United Nations, the

Hudson River tunnels and other New York City landmarks. He is the crucial witness in the second bombing case, but his work for the Government was erratic, and for months before the trade center blast, he was feuding with the F.B.I.

Supervisor 'Messed It Up'

After the bombing, he resumed his undercover work. In an undated transcript of a conversation from that period, **Mr. Salem recounts a talk he had had earlier with an agent about an unnamed F.B.I. supervisor who, he said, "came and messed it up."**

"He requested to meet me in the hotel," Mr. Salem says of the supervisor. **"He requested to make me to testify and if he didn't push for that, we'll be going building the bomb with a phony powder and grabbing the people who was involved in it. But since you, we didn't do that."**

The transcript quotes Mr. Salem as saying that he wanted to complain to F.B.I. headquarters in Washington about the bureau's failure to stop the bombing, but was dissuaded by an agent identified as John Anticev.

"He said, I don't think that the New York people would like the things out of the New York office to go to Washington, D.C.," Mr. Salem said Mr. Anticev had told him.

Another agent, identified as Nancy Floyd, does not dispute Mr. Salem's account, but rather, appears to agree with it, saying of the New York people: "Well, of course not, because they don't want to get their butts chewed."

Mary Jo White, who, as the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York is prosecuting defendants in two related bombing cases, declined yesterday to comment on the Salem allegations or any other aspect of the cases. An investigator close to the case who refused to be identified further said, "We wish he would have saved the world," but called Mr. Salem's claims "figments of his imagination."

The transcripts, which are stamped "draft" and compiled from 70 tapes recorded secretly during the last two years by Mr. Salem, were turned over to defense lawyers in the second bombing case by the Government on Tuesday under a judge's order barring lawyers from disseminating them. A large portion of the material was made available to The New York Times.

In a letter to Federal Judge Michael B. Mukasey, Andrew C. McCarthy, an assistant United States attorney, said that he had learned of the tapes while debriefing Mr. Salem and that the informer had then voluntarily turned them over. Other Salem tapes and transcripts were being withheld pending Government review, of "security and other issues," Mr. McCarthy said.

William M. Kunstler, a defense lawyer in the case, accused the Government this week of improper delay in handing over all the material. The transcripts he had seen, he said, "were filled with all sorts of Government misconduct." But citing the judge's order, he said he could not provide any details.

**The transcripts do not make clear the extent to which Federal authorities knew that there was a plan to bomb the World Trade Center, merely that they knew that a bombing of some sort was being discussed. But Mr. Salem's evident anguish at not being able to thwart the trade center blast is a recurrent theme in the transcripts. In one of the first numbered tapes, Mr. Salem is quoted as telling agent Floyd: "Since the bomb went off I feel terrible. I feel bad. I feel here is people who don't listen."**

**Ms. Floyd seems to commiserate, saying, "hey, I mean it wasn't like you didn't try and I didn't try."**

**In an apparent reference to Mr. Salem's complaints about the supervisor, Agent Floyd adds, "You can't force people to do the right thing."**

The investigator involved in the case who would not be quoted by name said that Mr. Salem may have been led to believe by the agents that they were blameless for any mistakes. It was a classic agent's tactic, he said, to "blame the boss for all that's bad and take credit for all the good things."

In another point in the transcripts, Mr. Salem recounts a conversation he said he had with Mr. Anticev, saying, **"I said, 'Guys, now you saw this bomb went off and you both know that we could avoid that.' "** At another point, Mr. Salem says, **"You get paid, guys, to prevent problems like this from happening."**

**Mr. Salem talks of the plan to substitute harmless powder for explosives during another conversation with agent Floyd.** In that conversation, he recalls a previous discussion with Mr. Anticev.

**"Do you deny," Mr. Salem says he told the other agent, "your supervisor is the main reason of bombing the World Trade Center?" Mr. Salem said Mr. Anticev did not deny it. "We was handling the case perfectly well until the supervisor came and messed it up, upside down."**

The transcripts reflect an effort to keep Mr. Salem as an intelligence asset who would not have to go public or testify.

A police detective working with the F.B.I., Louis Napoli, assures Mr. Salem in one conversation, "We can give you total immunity towards prosecution, towards, ah, ah, testifying." But he adds: "I still have to tell you that if you're the only game in town in regards to the information," then, he says, "you'll have to testify."

### Studied for Signs of Illegality

The transcripts are being closely studied by lawyers looking for signs that Mr. Salem and the law enforcement officials, in their zeal to gather evidence, may have crossed the legal line into entrapment, a charge that defense counsel have already raised.

But the transcripts show that the officials were concerned that by associating with bombing defendants awaiting trial in the Metropolitan Correctional Center, Mr. Salem might have been accused of spying on the defense.

In an undated conversation, Mr. Anticev tries to explain the perils.

"We're not allowed to have any information regarding that," he tells Mr. Salem. "That could jeopardize, you know, if you go see a lawyer, ah, you know, with the defendant's friend or whatever like that, and you're talking about things we're not suppose to, ah, condone that. We're not supposed to make people do that for us. That's like sacred ground. You can't be privileged, ah, you can't know what's being talked about at all."

Mr. Salem seems to bridle. "I, I, I don't think that's right," he says.

The agent insists: "Yeah, but that's just a guideline. If that ever happened, ah, you can back and reported on the meeting between, ah, you know, Kunstler and Mohammad A. Elgabrown. Forget about it. I mean a lot of people ah the case can get thrown out. You understand?" The references were to the defense lawyer, Mr. Kunstler, and his client in the second bomb case, Ibrahim A. Elgabrown.

Mr. Salem seems to reluctantly agree.

"They want you to have a hand in it," Mr. Anticev goes on, "but they're afraid that when you get that kind of, ah, too deep, like me, it's almost like, especially with all this legal stuff going on right now."

If it were just intelligence gathering, the agent says, "You can do anything you want. You could go crazy over there and have a good time. Do you know what I mean?"

The agent goes on: "But now that everything is going to court and there is legal stuff and it's just, it's just too hard. It's just too tricky, if, this, you know. And then there's the fact if you come by with the big information, he did this, ah, let me talk about this with the other people again."

"O.K.," Mr. Salem says. "All right. O.K."

CORRECTION-DATE: October 29, 1993, Friday

CORRECTION:

An article yesterday about accounts of a plot to build a bomb that was eventually exploded at the World Trade Center referred imprecisely in some copies to what Federal officials knew about the plan before the blast. Transcripts of tapes made secretly by an informant, Emad A. Salem, quote him as saying he warned the Government that a bomb was being built. But the transcripts do not make clear the extent to which the Federal authorities knew that the target was the World Trade Center.

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## Tapes in Bombing Plot Show Informer and F.B.I. at Odds

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

The New York Times

Section A; Page 1; Column 4; Metropolitan Desk  
October 27, 1993, Wednesday, Late Edition - Final

The informer at the center of the Government's case in the plot to bomb New York City landmarks had a volatile relationship with his handlers, often quarreling with F.B.I. agents who used him to infiltrate a group of Muslim extremists who have been charged in the plot, according to transcripts of secretly taped conversations.

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**"You were informed.  
Everything is ready.  
The day and the time.  
Boom. Lock them up  
and that's that. That's  
why I feel so bad."**

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Transcripts of the hundreds of hours of tapes -- which were recorded by the informer, Emad A. Salem, without the knowledge of the F.B.I. -- were distributed to defense lawyers yesterday. Although Judge Michael B. Mukasey ordered the lawyers to keep them secret, a copy of the transcripts was made available to The New York Times.

The tapes offer a rare glimpse into the sensitive relationship between the confidential informer and the law-enforcement officials with whom he worked. They also reveal for the first time how Federal and police agents instructed him to "pump up" a suspect for information and negotiate a \$1 million fee from the Government for his services.

Scattered through the hundreds of pages of transcripts are many instances in which the Government agents appear to encourage Mr. Salem to lead the suspects to incriminate themselves. Defense lawyers have long contended that the Government crossed a legal line, instructing Mr. Salem in a fishing expedition that became entrapment. Although the bulk of the transcripts does not appear to show the agents steering Mr. Salem toward improper or illegal conduct, whether they did so finally will be resolved in court.

### Many New Details

Among the details included in the transcripts are the following:

\*A reference by Mr. Salem to 12 possible bombs and hitherto unmentioned targets, including Grand Central Terminal, the Empire State Building and Times Square.

\*A New York City police detective working with the F.B.I. told Mr. Salem, who was getting \$500 a week from the Government, that if he wanted a \$1 million informer's fee, he should press for \$1.5 million and then negotiate.

\*An unusual suggestion that some of the money sought by Mr. Salem was going to be put up by private individuals.

\*A reference from Mr. Salem, in a conversation with an F.B.I. agent, to an argument between F.B.I. officials over whether Mr. Salem should remain an unidentified informer or surface as a witness to testify at trial.

\*A major defendant in the World Trade Center trial was tipped off by a neighbor to an elaborate F.B.I. ruse to search the Brooklyn apartment of another suspect, Mahmud Abouhalima, and replace explosives in his apartment with false explosives supplied by the F.B.I.

\*Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, a defendant in the second bombing case, was using a fax machine to command anti-Communist Muslim rebels, moving forces from Pakistan to Afghanistan and dealing with a code-named agent from Hamas, the militant Palestinian group, Mr. Salem told the F.B.I.

The transcripts cover Mr. Salem's dealings with the suspects and his work for the Government over a period of at least two years, going back to the trial in the killing of Rabbi Meir Kahane. Mr. Salem recorded the conversations with Government agents on his own, without the knowledge or consent of his contacts in the F.B.I., apparently to use as an insurance policy to hold the Government to its promises of money and protection.

Some of the most striking passages in the transcripts show Mr. Salem agonizing over what he suggests was the failure of the F.B.I., despite his information, to halt the Feb. 26 bombing of the trade center, in which six people were killed. Although Mr. Salem is not a witness in that case, he was working with the Government at that time.

**"They told me that 'we want to set this,' " Mr. Salem said, referring to the bomb in a conversation on April 1 with John Anticev, one of the F.B.I. agents he reported to, and sometimes complained to others about. " 'What's the right place to put this?' "**

**Then he added, still speaking to the agent: "You were informed. Everything is ready. The day and the time. Boom. Lock them up and that's that. That's why I feel so bad."**

Federal officials have acknowledged in the past that they dropped Mr. Salem as an informer sometime before the trade center bombing over what they said was his reluctance to wear a body recorder, as well as other disagreements. They said he never provided detailed information of the attack in advance but that they began using his services again after the bombing and credited him with foiling the related but separate plot to bomb the United Nations, Holland and Lincoln tunnels and the Federal building housing the F.B.I. in Manhattan.

The case is expected to come to trial next year, perhaps shortly after the end of the related trial of four men charged with bombing the World Trade Center. As the most important witness, Mr. Salem is expected to be called upon to verify tapes he made of conversations with suspects and testify on his dealings with them.

In several instances, the transcripts show Mr. Salem lecturing Federal agents on how to do their jobs, criticizing their surveillance and interview techniques. In one instance, he suggests that they tell a possible source that his phone was tapped, when in fact it was not, and that they confront the man and push him hard for information. "Don't give him a chance to think," Mr. Salem is quoted as saying. "If he will think it's, 'I want my lawyer.' Then bingo, you are gone."

### Aid for Defense?

By creating the so-called bootleg tapes, Mr. Salem has given ammunition to defense lawyers who argue that he entrapped the 15 defendants charged with conspiring to bomb New York City landmarks.

In one instance that shows how Mr. Salem was prompted by Federal agents, Mr. Anticev is quoted as saying, "You know, pump, maybe kind of pump him up a little bit." The agent tells Mr. Salem to stress "the loyalty to his cousin." The target in that instance, Ibrahim A. Elgabrownny, is a cousin of the man who was charged with shooting Mr. Kahane and now a defendant in a plot to bomb New York City targets.

In another instance, Mr. Anticev is quoted as instructing Mr. Salem to press to learn whether Mr. Elgabrownny or his associates were hiding explosives. He is quoted as telling Mr. Salem not to worry about being exposed as the source of the information. "We'll just know where stuff exists and where it is," Mr. Anticev is quoted as saying. "And then we'll make our move."

"There's no danger, you know," he says later. "We can be sneaky and take our time."

Mr. Salem has dropped from sight since the June arrests, and an effort to get in touch with him through the witness protection program of the Federal Marshals Service was rejected. But a member of the defense team said he was spotted within the last month in Manhattan.

Mr. Salem, a 43-year-old former Egyptian Army officer and confidant of the radical Egyptian cleric, Mr. Abdel Rahman, surfaced as the Government's mole after a June 24 F.B.I. raid on a Queens garage that the Government said smashed an extremist Muslim plot to blow up the United Nations, Lincoln and Holland tunnels and the Manhattan Federal building housing the F.B.I., and to assassinate Senator Alfonse M. D'Amato and State Assemblyman Dov Hikind, among other targets.

The unauthorized tapes came to light immediately after the raid as Mr. Salem hurriedly evacuated his West Side Manhattan apartment and was quickly identified by associates of the sheik and by law-enforcement authorities as the "confidential informant" who had secretly gathered evidence, including many tape-recorded conversations, against those later charged as conspirators in the case.

### Tapes Left Behind

In the belongings Mr. Salem left behind either carelessly or by design were cassettes of the tapes he

had secretly recorded with the F.B.I.

Because these could shed light on the prosecution's evidence-gathering methods to the point of possible entrapment, defense lawyers convinced Judge Mukasey that they should gain access to this material as well as to Mr. Salem's authorized recordings, turned over earlier.

Even before he came in from the cold of his undercover role in June, the burly, bearded Mr. Salem was an enigmatic figure, a private investigator who supported himself as a jewelry designer, a security guard for the sheik who freely gave interviews to news reporters.

Officials in Cairo say he entered the Egyptian Army as a private and during an 18-year career fought in the 1973 war with Israel and was "pensioned out" as a senior officer while continuing a relationship with Egyptian military intelligence. His American wife, from whom he was divorced this year but to whom he is still close, told New York Newsday last week that he had recently sent a set of the bootleg tapes home to Egyptian authorities with a visiting relative.

In the United States for about six years, he lived most recently in a fifth-floor suite at the Bretton Hall residence hotel at 2350 Broadway.

A news reporter invited to interview him there shortly after the World Trade Center bombing found herself on camera as Mr. Salem insisted videotaping the encounter.

He showed her photographs of what he said was his sandbagged bunker in the 1973 war, the reviewing stand where former President Anwar el-Sadat was assassinated in 1981 and his grave site. He also showed pictures of people who had apparently been tortured: a woman with cigarette burns and a man confined in a cage.

He said that he prayed at the Abu Bakr mosque in Brooklyn and the al-Salaam mosque in Jersey City, where Sheik Omar often preached, and that he had known the cleric from Egypt. He said he was attracted by Mr. Rahman's aura of power and fearlessness.

### Remembered as Benefactor

Associates in Jersey City said they remembered Mr. Salem as a generous benefactor of the mosques and of the sheik himself. He also collected money for the defense of El Sayyid A. Nosair, an Egyptian contractor charged in the 1990 assassination of the militant Jewish leader, Rabbi Meir Kahane. Mr. Nosair was acquitted of that killing but convicted of related assault and weapons charges. He is also one of the 15 defendants in the bombing conspiracy case.

Mr. Salem also had dealings with Mr. Elgabrownny, a relative of Mr. Nosair for whom Mr. Salem said he helped obtain a pistol permit from the New York City Police Department.

Associates and lawyers of some of the defendants said that Mr. Salem appeared rather abruptly on the scene around the time of the Kahane killing and that they now suspect he was sent to infiltrate the circle around Mr. Nosair.



## Michael T. Turner

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### World Trade Center 1993

#### Investigation into Al-Qaeda and Iraqi involvement in the bombing

Eight and one half years prior to the devastatingly fatal blows to the World Trade Center in New York, a Ryder truck carrying approximately 1,200 to 1,500 pounds of a homemade fertilizer-based explosive detonates at 12:18 in the afternoon. The blast produced a crater stretching over 150 feet through five floors on the 26th of February 1993. Let it also be noted that this was the second anniversary of the ending of the first Gulf War. Initial reports suggested that the blast was the result of an exploded generator, but evidence gathered shortly thereafter suggested that it was clearly a malicious act that resulted in the injuries of over 1,000 people, and the deaths of six others.

The mastermind behind this terrorist attack was Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, a previously sought criminal who was suspected for the formulation of criminal plots against Pope John Paul II, President Bill Clinton, and potentially fatal attacks against numerous flights in 1995. Yousef's capture later that year led to the discovery of al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden's network of loosely tied Islamic militants. Yousef was convicted of the WTC bombing on November 12, 1997; however, a concrete analysis of the 1993 WTC attack must include an in depth examination of this figure, which will be discussed further.

On that fateful day in 1993, dispatcher Frank Raffa, of the FDNY, recalls the sentiment of the initial emergency phone call. "The working theory was that a transformer vault explosion had occurred in the basement of the World Trade Center Complex." However, as Raffa writes, "Normally, when a fire or emergency occurs that generates numerous phone calls, the phones stop ringing once an apparatus arrives. This time the phones never stopped." This was the sign that a major catastrophe was developing." Such calls indicated that smoke spread through the first thirty-three floors of the WTC towers, as well as the Vista Hotel, within only three minutes. With such a mass volume of telephone calls from panicking personnel in need of immediate help, the incident command was divided into three zones, one for each affected building. Even still, due to the sheer numbers of callers and absent the responders to field these calls, the acts of milling, rumors, and keynoting, the basic components to human interaction during a collective behavior situation, resulted in poor advice from certain actors and mediums (Schneider, 1995). Such an event is described by Raffa:

"One of the newscasters went on the air and advised people in the towers that if they were having trouble breathing, they should break out the glass window. This was the worst thing they could have done. By now the entire tower was filled with smoke and was acting like a 110 story smokestack. About that time I answered a call from someone seeking instructions. By now, we were told to tell all callers to stay where they are, block all air vents with whatever rags they could find, stay calm, and wait. The caller told me he was going to break out a window. He was on the 54th floor. I advised him not to stating that there are over 500 emergency personnel on the ground and he'd kill someone with the falling debris. Not to mention the fact that the open window will allow smoke to enter the area and vent itself. He hung up and went to break the window. I advised the radio dispatcher to let the command post know to expect falling glass from the 54th floor. Later, the newscaster was "admonished" by his supervisors. (Raffa, 1993)"

The bombing was noted as having been the largest incident ever handled in the City of New York Fire Department's 128-year history. In toll, based on the number of units that responded, the incident resulted in the equivalent of a 16-alarm fire (Manning, 2001). Just on the FDNY side alone, eighty-four engine companies responded, sixty truck companies, and twenty-six special units (representing nearly forty-five percent of the on-duty staff of the FDNY). It is estimated that approximately 50,000 people were evacuated from the WTC complex over a course of eleven hours, with 1,042 injured and six resulting deaths (Manning, 2001).

Major structural damage to the buildings, absent the five-level crater, included partition walls blown out onto the PATH train mezzanine, damaged fire alarm and public address systems, as well as temporary termination of elevator service for several weeks (Raffa, 1993). There also resulted the almost complete

termination of power to the complex, as primary circuitry was extensively damaged by the initial blast; in addition, water-cooled emergency generators shut down as a result of overheating when water supply was cut, thus disabling building-wide emergency lighting. The bomb itself was a "nitrourea bomb, in excess of 1,000 pounds, with hydrogen cylinders to add impact, was detonated in the now-infamous yellow Ryder Econoline van on the B-2 level of the parking garage, causing massive destruction that spanned seven layers, six below grade. The L-shaped blast crater on B-2 at its maximum measured 130 feet wide by 150 feet long" (Manning, 2001).

With the blast occurring at such a critical area of the WTC complex, cleanup and damage restoration costs were staggering. A total of 160,000 gallons of cleaning fluid, coupled by 200,000 gallons of detergent used by 2,700 workers per day, resulted in restoration fees skyrocketing past the \$250,000,000 mark. However, when one also considers the economic impact to include lost rent for an extended period, relocation costs for tenants, insurance claims, layoffs, and lawsuits, costs are exponentially inflated. According to U.S. House of Representatives report as published in the Congressional Record, "The economic losses resulting from the bombing are enormous. While it is difficult to measure accurately the extent of these losses, some estimates are as high as \$1 billion--not a surprising figure when one considers that the tens of thousands of people who work at the World Trade Center have been denied access to their offices for weeks" (March 10, 1993).

The attacks were perpetrated by a total of six individuals, each with differing backgrounds and training. However, it were three actors in particular, that physically drove that infamous Ryder truck into the WTC complex: Mohammad A. Salameh, Eyad Ismoil, and Ramzi Yousef. Prosecutors said Ismoil helped Yousef load the bomb into the truck the day before the bombing. Salameh then parked the vehicle in a garage beneath the twin 110-story trade center towers in Manhattan, and one of the men lit a fuse (CNN, 1998). All of the men then fled in another car. Ismoil eventually escaped to Jordan, where he was arrested in 1995. Ismoil, is a native of Jordan, but was born in Kuwait. He also attended high school in Jordan before transferring to the United States in 1989 to study engineering at Wichita State University in Kansas (CNN, 1998). Ismoil was convicted on April 3, 1998 and sentenced to 240 years imprisonment, plus a \$10 million dollar fine. Four co-defendants were convicted of federal charges on March 4, 1994, in the World Trade Center bombing: Mohammad Salameh, Nidal Ayyad, Mahmud Abouhalima, and Ahmad Mohammad Ajaj. They have each been sentenced to 240 years of imprisonment without the possibility of parole (U.S. Dept of Justice, 1995). While there were a total of six conspirators wanted for the 1993 attack, it is critical to review the background of Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, a citizen of Kuwait, and the convicted mastermind of the plot.

Prior to the September 11th attacks, Yousef's plots were the most ambitious terrorist conspiracies ever attempted against the United States. However, according to Mylroie, "had the attack gone as planned, tens of thousands of Americans would have died." The attack was originally designed to create enough structural damage to one tower, that it would thus cause it to collapse onto its twin; and yet at the same time, produce a cloud of cyanide gas to affect those who attempted to flee. "Instead, as we know, one tower did not fall on the other, and, rather than vaporizing, the cyanide gas burnt up in the heat of the explosion" (Mylroie, 1995).

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, using a false name, Yousef flew to New York from Pakistan in September 1992, and was temporarily detained having presented an Iraqi passport without a U.S. visa. However, he was granted asylum pending a hearing. "In mid-November [of 1993], the first of many calls to chemical companies appears on his phone bills. At the same time, Yousef also began calling surgical supply companies for the gloves, masks, and rubber tubing he needed to make the bomb" (Mylroie, 1995). In January and February of 1993, the co-conspirators of the WTC attack compiled the materials in the Jersey City apartment of Musab Yasin in order to produce the highly explosive charge.

While the disaster components continued to brew, Federal Bureau of Investigation officials were attempting to track some of the co-conspirators, mainly for reasons of false identity and informant tip-offs. Throughout various investigations, officials had the most difficult time in establishing identities and names of the involved participants. Yet at the same time, agents at U.S. Customs transportation hubs permitted the participants, Yousef in particular, to enter and depart the country on numerous occasions without verifiable documentation. Meanwhile, FBI investigators found and questioned Abdul Yasin; an Iraqi descendent, engineering student, and roommate of the aforementioned Mohammad Salameh (Dwyer, 1994). Yasin was released but quickly fled to Baghdad, Iraq. Following the meeting, Mylroie (1995), cites one of the FBI investigators who speculated:

"Do you ever think that Iraqi intelligence might have known of these people who were willing to do something crazy, and that Iraqi intelligence found them out and encouraged them to do this as a retaliation for the bombing of Iraq. . . . So the people who are left holding the bag here in America are Egyptian. . . or Palestinian. . . . But the other people we are looking for, Abdul Rahman, he is gone. . I hate to think what's going to happen if this guy turns out to be. . an Iraqi intelligence operative...and these people were used."

Mylroie goes on to suggest in her report that the event was not as big as the original plot. The most

straightforward explanation of the World Trade Center bombing: "It was an Iraqi intelligence operation, led by Ramzi Yousef, with the local fundamentalists serving first as aides and then as diversionary dupes. Yousef showed up on the scene, and escalated the initial plot. . . . Yousef used [them]. . . as pawns and then immediately after the blast left the country" (1995). While the definitive proof of such an allegation is difficult to produce, the theory does paint with very logical reasoning. It is also of importance to note that Yousef remained separate from the other co-conspirators in terms of ideology.

Ideologically speaking, Yousef had a Filipina girlfriend and enjoyed Manila's raucous night life. "Yousef's nationality and ethnicity have also become known: he is a Pakistani Baluch" (Dwyer, 1994). Thus, he had virtually no Islamic fundamentalist viewpoints. Instead, Baluchistan is a haven for smuggling both weaponry and drugs. The later being a definite indicator that fundamentalism was not at the root of Yousef. Additionally, "the Baluch are Sunni and are at sharp odds with Tehran's Shia clerical regime. Through Iraq's many years of conflict with Iran, first in the early 1970s and then during the Iran-Iraq war a decade later, Iraqi intelligence developed close ties with the Baluch on both sides of the Iranian-Pakistani border. Above all, it used them to carry out terrorism against Iran" (Mylroie, 1995). Thus, Yousef could be behind two possible lines of work with regards to the WTC bombing in 1993, as well as the aforementioned theories: he was either an Iraqi agent, or he was a free-lancer who committed tasks at the requisition of fundamentalism extremists. Ramzi Yousef was convicted in November of 1997, and sentenced to 240 years imprisonment (CNN, 1998).

The 1993 WTC bombing attack left many wide-eyed as to possible vulnerabilities by many of America's potentially targeted landmarks. When tenants began moving back into the buildings in late March of 1993, new mitigation efforts were in place. The most critical security measure was the implementation of strict access to the reconstructed WTC complex parking garage. While two decks were reserved for public parking access, the most significant numbers of spaces, especially in "critical" areas of the garage, were restricted spaces for governmental agencies and official WTC employees. Operational and physical countermeasures were also developed to help prohibit or lessen the impact of a future attack. Such operational changes included stationing guards at the building's access points, as well as installing automated barricades and metal detectors, both of which require monitoring. Other changes lead to the increased development of guard booths, sidewalk planters, and fountains at critical entry points, all as a way to limit access to potential car bombers.

Mylroie also raises a major policy issue regarding the cooperation of various governmental agencies.

"The details of the World Trade Center case are chilling. From the outset, the Justice Department refused to share key information with the national security agencies. The government had two sets of relevant information--foreign intelligence, gathered by the CIA from watching terrorist states such as Iran and Iraq, and evidence gathered by the FBI largely within the United States for use in the trial. The FBI flatly told the national security bureaucracies that there was "no evidence" of state sponsorship in the World Trade Center bombing. When the national security agencies asked to see the evidence themselves, the FBI replied, "No, this is a criminal matter. We're handling it." Thus, all that the national security agencies had available to decide the question of state sponsorship was foreign intelligence they themselves had collected."

With the creation of the Department of Homeland Security following the second, and fatal blows to the World Trade Center, future relationships between various agencies should be distinctively different. The department is now outlined to stretch information across traditional bureaucratic boundaries in order to prevent the single control of critical national security information by one agency. The test results of this reorganization are still in the making. In addition, efforts are still needed with regards to the free-wheeling nature of the U.S. Customs to permit entry and departure to travelers with inconsistent records. A primary example of delays and inaccuracies associated with the investigation of the co-conspirators fell largely in the inability to positively identify those at large.

Response efforts at the time of the attack are largely regarded by FEMA Officials, the U.S. Fire Administration, and Congressional Representatives as being strong. According to the incident commander, Anthony L. Fusco, "I can attest to the fact that it was the firefighters' tremendous efforts and courage that brought this incident to a successful conclusion" (Manning, 2001). While this event was only a precursor to what would eventually happen to the World Trade Center eight and one half years later, the mitigation efforts developed after 1993 largely protected the building from the chance of another entry-level explosion. Thus, as history would play out in September of 2001, only the methods of self-sacrifice, and a widely differing entry point through a widely differing mode of transportation, would lead to the ultimate devastation and destruction of the World Trade Center.

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## WORLD TRADE CENTER BOMBING

On February 26, 1993, an explosion occurred in the World Trade Center. The explosion caused six deaths, 1042 injuries, and nearly \$600 million in property damage. Two ATF National Response Teams (NRT) responded to assist the New York City Police Department and the FBI in the investigation. Also assisting in the investigation were the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Customs Service, the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Department of Defense, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and the New York and New Jersey State Police. An IRT member working with a New York City Police Department Bomb Squad investigator uncovered the key piece of evidence. Uncovered was a vehicle identification number from a van that had been rented but reported stolen the day prior to the explosion. Their recovery ultimately led to the identification and indictment of seven co-conspirators, four of whom have been prosecuted. The evidence linked the defendants to the purchase of chemicals and hydrogen tanks used to manufacture the bomb, to the rental of the shed to warehouse the chemicals and later the bomb, and the rental of the van that contained the bomb.

1993 Explosives Incident Report, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms

**CLICK PHOTO TO ENLARGE** (67K Photo)



Photo By Bureau of ATF 1993 Explosives Incident Report

#### EDITOR'S NOTE:

The heroism that was displayed by both the police officers of the NYPD and the firefighters of the FDNY during the rescue of thousands of trapped employees in the World Trade Center has been documented by journalists and the media. This cowardly attack on the innocent people of the City of New York will be written about for many years. There were thousands of individual acts of bravery that went unrecognized in the confusion and terror of that day. What follows is a bird's-eye view of some of the events of that day in the eyes of the Commanding Officer of the NYPD Aviation Unit, Captain William Wilkens, NYPD (retired):

OK, I know a lot of people think being the Commanding Officer (C.O.) of the New York City Police Departments Aviation Unit (AU) is a great job (it is), but there are pitfalls. Now that I am retired I can, for the first time, relate some of these:

The weather was nasty. Bitter cold, snow flurries, windy with a low ceiling and bad visibility. Typical February day. Definitely not a day for flying. There was no doubt in my mind that my command, the NYPD Aviation Unit, would spend a nice quiet day on the ground. I prepared to enjoy my day off and thought I would surprise my son, Bill, who was a sophomore in high school, by picking him up at school and taking him to lunch.



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Photo Courtesy of Capt Wilkens, NYPD (Ret)

My first indication that this was not going to be a nice quiet day came via the car radio as the local news station reported a possible explosion at the World Trade Center, at first thought to be a transformer malfunction. As I continued driving, more information was coming in: 1) it was in fact an explosion, possibly a serious one, 2) there was a report of injuries, 3) they were considering evacuating the building, but there was still no indication of the severity of the blast. I still felt confident that my plans would hold as it was definitely not a VFR day (visual flight rules) which would allow a response by the AU to the canyons of Manhattan.

Suddenly, the announcer switched to a traffic reporter airborne over the New Jersey shoreline opposite the WTC. His report sent my heart into my mouth and my car into a hard U turn (my time in Highway Patrol as a Sgt paying off) when he said " I am watching what appears to be an NYPD helicopter circle the building flying in and out of the clouds and the heavy smoke coming from the WTC. It now appears that he is going to attempt to land on the roof of the WTC."

Let's not panic, yet. I'm thinking it will probably turn into a big nothing like these "high rise fire" responses usually do. Still, my 80 Chevy was reaching limits it shouldn't have to on that trip home. As I opened my front door the phone was ringing, (I'm beginning to fear the explosion is a real disaster) and I raced to answer. The Aviation Operations Officer rapidly brought me up to date on what was, unfortunately rapidly developing into "the big one." "Cap, initial information is that there are thousands of people trapped on the upper floors of the World Trade Center which has been subjected to a major explosion, probably terrorist related, knocking out all power to the entire building." The biggest problem was that no one knew if that was the only bomb or if there were others waiting to go off.

It was around 12 noon, and my day off was over. My first problem was getting to the WTC. All streets in downtown were rapidly clogging with emergency vehicle traffic. I knew my trip from Staten Island would bog down probably as early as the Gowanus Parkway in Brooklyn. One big advantage to being the Commanding Officer of the Aviation unit was that there was another means of transportation available. I told the O.O. "No lost time, hold the 2nd platoon, call in as many pilots as you can raise and get me a helicopter to our emergency pick up LZ (landing zone) on Staten Island ASAP." I got down there as quickly as possible and was airborne for the WTC in less than 15 minutes.

The first helicopter to arrive at the WTC was one of our smaller, patrol class ships, which scouted out the situation, designated a possible L/Z (landing zone) and suggested putting the "high rise fire plan" in effect. Immediately, one of our big twin-engine rescue helicopters manned by two pilots and a crew chief in the back lifted out of Floyd Bennett field with the Emergency Service Officers whose job it would be to rappel onto the roof if necessary.



Photo Courtesy of Capt. Wilkens (Ret.)

When the twin towers were built there were small helipads set aside on both towers. However, over the years, antennae farms had developed on the rooftops making the pads almost useless. The pad on Tower #2 was in the center and on Tower #1 it was on a corner of the roof. Since #1 was the building most in danger the pilot was evaluating the possibility of landing on its pad. It quickly became apparent that there was no way of landing on the pad with all the antennas in place.

The Aviation unit and the

Emergency Service Unit had anticipated this problem and we trained over the years for just such a situation. In numerous "high rise fire drills" and semi annual training at camp Smith, rappelling was always a staple of the training. As the pilot hovered at 1500 ft, far above what resembled a war zone, with dozens of Police, Fire and EMS vehicles and hundreds of rescue personnel sifting through the debris in the crater at ground level, the E.S.U. Officers prepared to put their rappel training to it's first real battle use. Of all times to do a high-rise rappel, we had to be doing it on to one of the tallest buildings in the world! Miraculously, the ceiling had lifted and the snow had let up allowing the pilot to authorize the rappel. As the helicopter hovered, the ESU Officers looked out the open door on 1500 ft of air. They put their lives in the hands of the pilot and crew chief and exited the aircraft. As the pilot fought the winds to keep the ship as stable a platform as possible, the Officers slid down ropes they prayed would hold to a small, unrailed corner of the roof. Unlike our training to drop to a 20' high rappel platform, the ESU Officers dropped to their target, this time 1500ft high! Once on the roof they cleared the obstructions around the helipad giving the helicopter enough space to land.

Shortly after my arrival at the scene I was advised that there were about 200 people on the roof of Tower #2 trapped and in need of removal by helicopter. We then put out a request for additional helicopters both Police and commercial to assist us in what was shaping up to be the worst high-rise fire disaster in a generation. The helicopter fleet at the scene quickly grew to four NYPD ships, one from Nassau PD, one from Suffolk County PD, a Port Authority ship and a private commercial heli as well. Fortunately, the 200 people initially stranded on the observation tower were able to get down inside the building preventing what would have been a very dangerous airlift.



Photo Courtesy Capt Wilkens (Ret)

So, now we were in business. We had a clear pad and were ready for action. Meanwhile, Highway Patrol commandeered a large parking lot for Aviation to use as a base of operations with room for numerous helicopters to land, bring in the injured and take up more rescue personnel to the rooftops. Although the L/Z was very large and clear, it had one drawback: it was frozen solid with a 2" layer of ice on top of the entire area from a previous rainstorm and subsequent freeze. This made for some unanticipated "run on landings" for the helicopters and made the crew chiefs job assisting the rescued civilians off, and the rescue crews on the aircraft very difficult.

The first flights brought several ESU Officers to the roof to control the pad and prevent anyone who might make it to the roof on their own from endangering him or herself or the helicopter. Floor-by-floor ESU began assessing damage and assisting those in need to the roof for removal by the helicopters. Next, we transported several elevator mechanics to the roof in an attempt to get the elevators running again.



Photo By Paul Adao / New York Post

Since most of the EMS personnel were busy at "ground zero" tending to multiple injured at the WTC street level we had to kidnap a passing ambulance to stand by for "incoming medevacs." However, there was a problem. It was bitter cold at the L/Z, there was no sheltered site within blocks, and we knew we would be bringing in multiple cases in need of medical care on each flight. Since there were a couple of Highway Patrol Officers at our location assisting us I asked one to "get me a bus, as

clean as possible, anyway you can." As usual, Highway came through big time. Within 15 minutes we had a brand new NYC Transit Authority bus with a great heater on site

complete with a driver who had no idea what he was doing there and since he was at the end of his shift and going on overtime was happy to help anyway he could. This bus became our "emergency triage area" giving the EMS personnel a warm, somewhat comfortable area to treat the incoming injured while awaiting the few available ambulances.

Shortly thereafter the first helicopter bringing in injured civilians landed at the L/Z. The first aided out of the helicopter was a pregnant woman who was obviously in great difficulty. Although not thrilled with having her first helicopter ride under these conditions she knew she could never have attempted the 110 flights of stairs. After a quick evaluation by EMS she was put on another helicopter and airlifted to a nearby hospital where she gave birth soon after. She later thanked the Aviation Unit on a television magazine show for assisting her to have a normal, safe delivery in the hospital.

And so it went. Helicopters landing with people from the WTC, unloading and returning to the rooftops (by now both WTC Towers were being utilized) with Police and EMS rescue personnel. Although our "Joint High Rise Fire Plan" which we had trained for with the FD, called for firefighters to respond to the L/Z and be airlifted to the roof, the FD had committed their personnel to ground level entry. There were many surprised and exhausted Firefighters who, after climbing up 80 flights, were met by fresh Police rescue teams coming down the stairs.



Photo Courtesy of NYPD Website

Later in the evening, after darkness set in and power was gradually being restored to Towers #1 and 2, I was approached by a high-ranking Member of the Service. He said that the "Chief" wanted Aviation to fly Police Officers from the Task Force (TF) to the roof so they could "sweep" each floor. My initial response was positive and I awaited what I thought would be a rescue group of 10-15 TF Officers. Shortly thereafter, I was tapped on the shoulder by a ranking Officer from the TF. When I turned, I was shocked to see a group of 150-200 Task Force Cops lined up for what seemed like a block. This would have called for 15-20 additional landings in total darkness, in a far less than desirable area, blinded by the lower level lights, and after the real emergency was already over. I thought this a bad idea and I said so. I was immediately directed to the "Chief" to explain my reservations. His response was "Captain, (he declined to call me by name even though we worked together before) you're the CO of Aviation, if you don't think it's safe, don't do it." I didn't. This decision would have a major negative impact on my career in the future.

Nevertheless, the Aviation unit did a fantastic job; 40 landings bringing 125 emergency personnel to the rooftops (a really great feat on miniscule pads) and 135 people removed to safety. Fifteen hours later, as I flew back to the Aviation hanger for our after briefing and critique, I was extremely proud to be the Commanding Officer of the Aviation Unit.

The next day a critic, who shall remain nameless, made allegations that the Aviation Unit had acted "recklessly" landing on the rooftops of the Towers. This was picked up by the media and was plastered across the front page of most major NYC papers. The headlines were accompanied by photos, taken from ground level, of one of our rescue helicopters landing on the corner of Tower #1. To the untrained eye, landing a helicopter on a small pad on the top of a 1500 ft high building may seem a risky venture but I can assure you the Aviation Unit never took unnecessary risks. This was the type of mission the pilots, crew chiefs and ESU Officers had spent hundreds of hours training for. Every flight done for the duration of the WTC disaster was done 1) only if needed, 2) at the total discretion of the PIC (pilot in command) 3) with final approval of every flight being my difficult decision. Each flight was evaluated taking into consideration visibility, wind, light conditions and of course, need.

Although the WTC disaster was our biggest rescue effort ever and will certainly remain as one of the most challenging assignments in the history of Police Aviation it wasn't the last major effort of 1993 for the AU. Soon after we would once again battle the elements and the darkness attempting to locate and rescue several hundred illegal immigrants whose ship (the "Golden Venture") had run aground on the beaches of Rockaway. 1993 was a banner year for the AU. In addition to numerous rescue operations, we had a new high in hours flown, more arrest assists and a sizable decrease in down time for maintenance thanks to a superb effort by our maintenance staff (all sworn personnel, unique in Police Aviation).

In recognition of our achievements



that year the unit received the Police Departments highly coveted "Unit Citation" for 1993 and was the recipient of the first Chase Manhattan Banks award for heroism. As the song goes "It was a very good year."

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