



## Former Agents of the FBI Foundation Oral History Heritage Project

Subject: Attacks of September 11, 2001 -15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Interview

Interviewee: Sheri Farrar Oral History Interview on February 2, 2016 by telephone in Omaha, Nebraska. Special Agent Service Dates: Unknown

Assigned Locations: FBIHQ

Interviewer: Rosanne Russo, Special Agent Service Dates: 1979-2007

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### Summary:

Sheri Farrar was the Deputy Assistant Director of Administrative Services handling personnel and facility matters at FBI Headquarters. She was assigned by Deputy Director Tom Pickard as temporary Acting Chief of Staff to work with the incoming Director Mueller to help with his transition into the FBI and was brought into the 9/11 response directly through that temporary position. On the morning of September 11, 2001, after finishing a morning meeting with the Director, Ms. Farrar was walking with Tom Pickard to his office when his executive assistant informed them that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. They turned on the television and saw the second plane hit and immediately moved to the Strategic Information Operations Center (SIOC) where Farrar remained full time for the next two to three weeks. The situation was very fluid and she was responsible for traveling with the Director to ensure that he had whatever resources he needed. This included seeing that briefing materials he required each morning were in order for his daily meeting with the President and Director of the CIA to discuss developments of the past 24 hours. In this interview she talks about the challenges she faced and the mentality of everyone involved trying to “solve” things in a way that honored the victims and the FBI.

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**Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Interview of Former Special Agent,  
Sheri Farrar  
Rosanne Russo, Interviewer  
February 2, 2016**

Rosanne Russo

(R): My name is Rosanne Russo. I am a retired Special Agent of the FBI. I'm talking by telephone to Sheri Farrar at her home in Omaha, Nebraska. This conversation is being recorded for the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI for the Oral History Project commemorating the Fifteenth Anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

Per our conversation, on February 2, 2016, again I thank you Sherri for having volunteered to be interviewed for the Oral History Project and for having signed and returned the waiver form. Your time is certainly appreciated.

After this interview is completed it will be transcribed by a former Bureau typist. You will be sent a draft for your review and corrections or changes if needed. Following your review you will receive a copy of your transcript and a disk containing the transcript.

As a result, I remind you not to disclose the identities of any informants and sensitive material could be redacted by the Bureau to preserve security.

So Sheri let's begin with the questions and the first thing I'm going to ask you is where and what were you doing when the Nine-Eleven attacks occurred?

Sheri Farrar

(F): Okay that morning we were just finishing up the executive conference that we had every morning with the Director and I was in conversation with Tom Pickard, the Deputy Director and we were walking towards his office to finish our conversation and his executive assistant said, "A plane just flew into the World Trade Center." So Tom and I walked into his office and he immediately turned on the television and we were both already kind of saying, "How could a plane fly into the World Trade Center." And we turned on the t.v. and stood there and watched for about five minutes and saw the second plane go through the second tower.

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F: Of course we knew immediately that this was not some mistake and then he and I proceeded to go directly to the Director's office and obviously we were all at FBI Headquarters.

R: What was your position at that time of the attack?

F: Actually I was the Deputy Assistant Director of Administrative Services handling personnel, handling personnel and facility matters but I had been asked by Tom Pickard about three weeks before that if I would be willing to assist with Director Mueller's transition into the FBI. He had just been approved and was coming on board the first week in September and so I had left my duties temporarily to begin to work with Deputy Director Pickard and with incoming Director Mueller and other people from the executive level to begin to arrange his briefings and set up appointments for him to meet outside agencies and just get acclimated to the FBI. So it was sort of temporary assignment as the new Director's Chief of Staff.

R: Okay. So how were you then brought into the response directly, through that temporary position?

F: Yes. Yes because I was working for the Director I was then with him throughout the first several weeks of the investigation. So we went immediately to the Strategic Information Operations Center and pretty much stayed there for about two to three weeks I believe that I was down there full time.

R: So the next question is kind of...you've kind of answered that, where you reported and to whom you reported. You were with the Director. You were in the Command Center during that time pretty much full time and you've identified your assignment as a temporary position as the acting Chief of Staff for the Director. Is that correct?

F: Yes, that's right.

R: So what challenges did you face in doing your job?

F: Oh my. Unless you were there in the SIOC it's hard to describe. The first day there was just so much confusion and chaos. When I look back on it now, it's hard still for me to understand how it took so long for us to even figure out which planes had crashed which planes were unaccounted for and then begin to make some sense out of it and have an organized investigation.

F: I mean it was really amazing to watch the people with the counter-terrorism experience put all of their skills in a plan and which they bring some order out of this chaos.

My primary responsibility during that time though was not engaged in the actual investigation but making sure that the Director had the resources that he needed.

You have to understand he didn't know hardly any of the people in the FBI at that time. He didn't know his executive staff. He didn't know the heads of the different divisions. He really didn't know where things were in the building. I don't think he really knew, and I didn't even know to some degree, all the resources that we had at our disposal to bring toward this investigation. So my job really was to just make sure that when he needed something I was there to try to find the right person to get it to him.

But in my primary job, after the couple of days became to come in early and make sure that his briefing materials were in order because he had a meeting every morning, I believe it was at nine a.m. with the President. He and George Tenet from the CIA and I'm sure several others from the intelligence community met with the President every morning at nine a.m. so he had to have all the materials. He had to have all of the printed information that had been developed in the course of the twenty-four hours since he had just been there doing the briefing and that was a huge challenge.

The people who worked the night shift; I would usually come in about six o'clock and I would stay until eight or nine in the evening but then the night shift people who were there in the SIOC would try and gather all the intelligence that had been picked up, the results of any pertinent investigations of different people that had been identified to be completed in that day and make sure that all that was together.

It was particularly challenging because in the FBI at that time, we really didn't have an area that prepared briefing materials on a twenty-four basis. In the lab they did. They could make those kinds of things but they didn't do it on an on-going basis and the one thing that I remember specifically was that the Director would come back and he would be really frustrated because the CIA would have these fancy, glossy briefing materials and our stuff was, you know, typed pages and Xerox pages and it really bothered him that the quality of our briefing materials weren't the same as the CIA's.

- F: So it was just little things like that that made it even more challenging.
- R: And as I recall as far as challenges there were also these eight a.m. all office briefings conference calls going on as well.
- F: Yes. He would be doing those and getting as much information from those as he could before he went over to meet with the President. So sometimes there would be new material that would come up, those that weren't in his briefing material.
- R: That would immediately have to be added.
- F: Yes, yes. It was an interesting and challenging times.
- R: Sounds very challenging. So I think you've answered this but let's go through what you were able to achieve.
- F: You know that's a hard question because I wasn't really in a position where like I said, I wasn't involved in the day-to-day investigation. So you know my goal was basically just to try to make sure that the Director had what he needed, when he needed it, travel with him when we traveled and just make sure his needs were accommodated and whether I achieved that or not I guess you would have to ask him because there were days when I felt I did a good job and there were days when I felt like he never had what he really wanted. He was somewhat impatient and not, understandably I mean, he wanted to be on top of everything.
- So I don't know whether I achieved anything. I tried to do my job to the best of my ability but it was a very fluid job and a very fluid situation. So on any given day it was hard to tell what might come up that needed to be taken care of.
- R: I think just from what I see is that if it weren't for you to be there to help him with this transition and to learn where and who everyone was I think that's just a big achievement in itself, taking away his need to want to know everything. I don't think anyone could ever achieve fulfilling that.
- F: Well I guess that may be.
- R: So what were the most touching moments of your experience?

F: Oh gosh. You know I traveled with the Director. The first place we went was to New York to Agent Lenny Hatton's funeral and even when I think about that experience today it makes me want to cry because we met with his family and then the agents from the office and all of the people there for the service was blocked down the street in the town he lived in in New Jersey and to the church. I don't know how far it was. It was several blocks.

First of all he had all the agents from the FBI Office in New York that could be spared and he had lived in that town most of his life as I understand it, except I don't know. I think he'd been in New York his whole career and really kind of moved back to his home town.

All those people knew him and the streets were lined with people. It was the most phenomenal thing. It was so moving and so sad.

Then we came back to New York a week later and we went to Ground Zero with Mayor Giuliani and Governor Pataki and toured the Ground Zero area and there was still enough smoke in the air that they recommended that you wear a mask.

Just to go through and see all the people working in there and they were all; when the Mayor would go by, the workers would stop and cheer him. They were so crazy about this man at that time.

We also went to the Pentagon and we also went to Pennsylvania. So every one of those was a touching, moving experience that I guess will forever be in my mind to go and see these horrific things happened and then see the people working there and the challenges that they had.

R: Yeah, that would have been very touching. Is there a particular story that you found interesting that you would like to share?

F: Well there were lots of interesting stories, I guess and you know that Lenny's funeral was probably the most moving thing that sticks out in my mind aside from touring Ground Zero.

But there was one moment that was actually sort of funny but I think it gives a sense of where everybody's emotions were at the time and it was a few hours after we had all assembled in SIOC on Nine-Eleven.

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F: We were in a large conference room. The Director, Assistant Director Dale Watson, Deputy Director Tom Pickard. I don't remember who all was in there but a lot of people.

We had one individual in there who was an agent who had headphones that had a connection to the FAA and he was listening to the FAA transmissions because we were still trying to figure out the actual identity of the planes that had crashed and we were still trying to make sure that all the planes were accounted for.

We knew specifically that we had one plane that was not accounted for that did turn out to be United 93 that was crashed in Pennsylvania. But that plane was still in the air at the time and they were trying to talk to that plane and they were talking about where the plane was. They knew it was headed toward D.C.

My recollection is we really didn't know how close it was and we also didn't know if there were any other planes out there for sure. About that time there was this giant roaring sound which sounded a lot like an airplane overhead at a low altitude.

We all just stopped talking and looked at each other. I think everybody sort of held their breath and then all of a sudden we realized it was the air-conditioning in the SIOC because there were so many people in there and it had gotten so warm in there and that it kicked on.

R: Yeah, yeah.

F: But it gives you a sense of where everybody's mind was. I mean I don't think any of us really thought we were in danger there in SIOC but nobody knew for sure what was going on yet. So it was just one of those moments that I think we all kind of will remember; those that were in the room.

R: It really reflects the tension and the stress.

F: It does. It does.

R: You've talked a lot about moving moments, interesting moments. What feelings did you experience during this time?

F: I don't know if I can describe them all.

R: Yeah.

F: You know one moment that sticks in my mind is sitting...of course you know we had all the t.v.s., in SIOC. I was mostly in one conference room where they were starting to put up pictures of different individuals that they had been able to identify already and it was amazing how quickly they did some of those things. But sitting there and watching the first Tower come down and shortly after the second Tower. You just wanted to burst into tears because you knew how many people were still in those buildings.

So there was that sadness, that sort of helplessness in that regard. There was, for me, I had certain feelings of inadequacy because I didn't know a lot about counter- terrorism. I didn't know the Director very well and I wanted to be able to anticipate needs and meet them before he even knew that he needed something and that was hard to do.

There was frustration in just trying to work through all the logistics of getting everything where it needed to be and you know, with a new Director there were lots of people who were really trying to make a good impression on him and you're trying to keep all that out of the midst of what needed to be done.

But there was also incredible amazement at what our people could accomplish, what they could learn, the information they could pull together and decipher in such a short period of time. I became a true believer in Intelligence Analysts during that time period.

So there were many feelings that I went through; many different ones on any given day because there was just so much going on. I'm kind of a control freak so it was really hard for me to feel out of control in many ways.

R: Yeah. I think that sums up what you would have gone through. I think that captures that very well. What heroic efforts did you observe?

F: Oh so many. I mean being at the crash sites and seeing all the workers there trying to sort through the rubble and recognizing that there were bodies, pieces of bodies.

F: Particularly, when I went to the Pennsylvania crash site a couple of the Evidence Response Teams that were there were from offices that I had been in before as ASAC and then as SAC so I knew many of those workers and was able to talk to them and just to see the conditions they were working in and their sheer will to do the very best job that they could do was just...I mean you were so proud of how everybody performed.

There were heroic efforts of those eight o'clock meetings every day, and those telecom conferences, and the people in the field offices who were going twenty-four hours a day trying to get the information that would follow up on any tiny little lead. It was just, I don't know if you want to call it heroism but I do because these were people who were working day and night. They had no regard for their own well-being or their own needs. They were on a mission to solve this thing and to do it in a way that honored the FBI and honored the victims of everything that had happened.

R: Sheri is there anything else that we didn't talk about or that you'd like to mention or discuss?

F: No I don't think so. I have a really bad memory so it's hard for me to remember lots of things that I did in my Bureau career but those few weeks down in SIOC and those places that I went with the Director are things that I will never forget. They are locked in my brain and you know it was the nation's worst hour. It was the Bureau's finest hour in my opinion.

R: Thank you so much Sheri. I think that was really an excellent interview. It was just really from the heart. I am going to go ahead and turn the recording off.

F: Okay.