

TESTIMONY OF EDWARD P. PLAUGHER

BEFORE THE

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES

May 19, 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission, Good morning. I am Edward Plaugher, Fire Chief of the Arlington County Virginia Fire Department. Let me begin by thanking the Commission for your efforts to understand fully the events of 9-11 and for your focus on emergency response to the events that unfolded on that never to be forgotten day.

As the commission heard on April 1, 2003, in testimony by Arlington County Fire Department Assistant Fire Chief Shawn Kelley, our department in cooperation with the Justice Department and its Office of Domestic Preparedness, now a part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), completed an in-depth after-action report, "*Arlington County After Action Report on the Response to the September 11 Terrorist Attack on the Pentagon*" (AAR). In that report, we attempted to provide a blueprint for preparedness for our nation at the local, state, and federal government levels.

Within the body of the after action report, which is divided into four (4) major sections: ⁽¹⁾ Annex A – Fire Department Operations; ⁽²⁾ Annex B – Hospitals and Clinics; ⁽³⁾ Annex C – Law Enforcement; and ⁽⁴⁾ Annex D – Emergency Management and the Emergency Operations Center, not only was the description of the response effort documented but also efforts were made to understand fully all elements for a successful response. The report was based on interviews of the first responders and generated with a bias towards their perspective, as well as the expertise of a recognized national firm that specializes in emergency preparedness and response. Staff preparing the report utilized an exhaustive multi-level validation process to produce the series of recommendations and findings. If I might for just a minute relate several key issues directly from the report:

1. Capabilities Others Should Emulate

- **ICS and Unified Command:** The primary response participants understood the ICS, implemented it effectively, and complied with its provisions. Other supporting jurisdictions and agencies, with few exceptions, operated seamlessly within the ICS framework.
- **Mutual Aid and Outside Support:** The management and integration of mutual-aid assets and the coordination and cooperation of agencies at all government echelons, volunteer organizations, and private businesses were outstanding and the response to the Pentagon attack revealed the total scope and magnitude of support available throughout the Washington Metropolitan Area and across the Nation.
- **Arlington County CEMP:** It was well thought out, properly maintained, frequently practiced, and effectively implemented. Government leaders were able to quickly marshal

the substantial resources of Arlington County in support of the first responders, without interfering with tactical operations.

- **Employee Assistance Program (EAP):** During the incident response and in follow-up sessions weeks afterward, the EAP proved invaluable to first responders, their families, and the entire county support network. This valuable resource must be incorporated in response plans.
- **Training, Exercises, and Shared Experiences:** Washington Metropolitan Area public safety organizations routinely work together on events of national prominence and shared jurisdictional interests, such as presidential inaugural celebrations, Heads of State visits, international conferences such as the periodic International Monetary Fund (IMF) conference, and others. They also regularly participate in frequent training exercises including those hosted by the Pentagon and MDW. All this and more contributed to the successful Pentagon response.

2. Challenges that Must Be Met

- **Self-Dispatching:** Organizations, response units, and individuals proceeding on their own initiative directly to an incident site, without the knowledge and permission of the host jurisdiction and the Incident Commander, complicate the exercise of command, increase the risks faced by bona-fide responders, and exacerbate the challenge of accountability. WMD terrorist event response plans should designate pre-selected and well-marked staging areas.
- **Fixed and Mobile Command and Control Facilities:** Arlington County does not have a facility specifically designed and equipped to support the emergency management functions specified in the CEMP and the conference room currently used as the EOC does not have adequate space and is not configured or properly equipped for that role.
- **Communications:** Almost all aspects of communications continue to be problematic, from initial notification to tactical operations.
- **Logistics:** Arlington County, like most other jurisdictions, was not logistically prepared for an operation of the duration and magnitude of the Pentagon attack.
- **Hospital Coordination:** Communications and coordination were deficient between EMS control at the incident site and area hospitals receiving injured victims and represent flaws in the system present on September 11.

In addition to these main issues, the report contains two hundred and thirty-five (235) recommendations/findings from which we believe a blueprint for preparedness and response can and should be developed. Let us not as a nation, at a later date, produce another after action report that again brings forward these same concerns, in other words, now is the time for comprehensive preparedness to be undertaken by all levels of government.

A basic undercurrent throughout the report was the fact that basic to all preparedness and response efforts is the need to build strong professional relationships between response partners prior to an incident. Failure to fully build a comprehensive network with response partners prior to an incident will lead to incident response failures. Critical to pre-incident success of relationship building is the need from the outset to utilize a command system that embraces Incident Command System (ICS) (National Incident Management System [NIMS]) and the concept of “Unified Command”. NIMS, the current ICS system embraced by DHS, coupled with a strong “unified command” concept that clearly articulates the “who’s in charge of what”, are the keystones for effective response. Without an effective, well-tested and practiced command and control system, confusion and accountability problems will surface and plague the responders. Together NIMS and “unified command”, as we have found in the National Capitol Region (NCR), work best in a regional response system that leverages the investment made by the local, state, and federal governments. Absent a regional mutual aid and response program, duplication of resources will occur and little progress will be made to reach maximum effectiveness. Moving away from the current baseline can only be achieved effectively with partnerships and strong dependence on your response partners. If you have a shovel and I have a wheel-barrel, together we can move mountains. Included in these efforts is a need to leverage private sector resources as well as public. Regional cross discipline and cross sector programs are essential to effective response preparedness.

Each of us as leaders must commit to breaking down barriers. Task forces must be formed and systems and structures must be put in place. Clearly articulating an “end state”, that is almost impossible to achieve, must become a priority for the preparedness and the response community. In that regards, mandatory regional efforts that build relationships and shores up capability must be undertaken by every level of government. I recommend that all future federal and state funding allocations be dedicated to regional efforts. We have spent billions of dollars on a fragmented approach that fails to leverage resources and staff in a way to achieve maximum effectiveness.

Another area of concern raised by the Commission’s staff was in regards to the perception that currently there is a splitting of intelligence and prevention efforts within “homeland security” from the ongoing efforts to enhance emergency preparedness and response. In the Washington, DC region known as the National Capitol Region (NCR), a Department of Homeland Security regional coordinator position was established for the express purpose of preventing this bifurcation of the intelligence/prevention and emergency preparedness programs. Efforts, I believe, must be undertaken to establish a regional coordinator position in all major metropolitan areas of our nation. Allowing the division of security and preparedness programs must not be allowed to occur in any community or metropolitan area.

In conclusion, I have provided each member of the Commission a copy of the after action report and look forward to responding to any questions by the Commission.