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NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES

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First public hearing of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States

Statement of Lee Ielpi to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States March 31, 2003

The FDNY response and evacuation of over 26,000 people speaks to the experience and dedication beyond the traditional training and preparedness. Despite the knowledge of a possible collapse, every member of the department who was dispatched and many who were off duty responded to the 5 alarm including my son Jonathan Ielpi from FDNY Squad 288.

On September 11, I arrived a half an hour after the collapse of Tower 2. My main objective was to locate my son Jonathan Ielpi who was on duty with the FDNY. It became obvious the monumental task at hand to discover anyone. I began rescue operations at the South West Corner of the 16-acre site on West Street. I continued this process for several hours at

Current News

The Commission has released its final report. [\[more\]](#)

The Chair and Vice Chair have released a statement regarding the Commission's closing. [\[more\]](#)

The Commission closed August 21, 2004. [\[more\]](#)

Commission Members

Thomas H. Kean
Chair

Lee H. Hamilton
Vice Chair

which time I realized the need for heavy equipment to begin clearing a path into the site to facilitate rescue operations. I was told by an FDNY staff chief to operate with any means that I was able to acquire to begin the task. We continued to work until midnight that evening to search for any survivors.

The FDNY was deemed to be the lead agency for search and rescue operations at the World Trade Center. I continued to work within the FDNY reporting and operating guidelines as the site transitioned from a rescue to a recovery operation. It took three months until December 11, 2001 when we found my son. At which time I continued a daily schedule acting as a liaison with the FDNY recovery operations and contracted private construction companies clearing the site.

This process continued in a twenty-four hour operation seven days a week for nine months. One must understand in the nine-month process the total of 19,934 human body parts were recovered. In October, 2001 through May, 2002 the FDNY utilized a GPS system to map the location of discovery of human loss as displayed on this map with in a 75-foot grid. Multiple layers of discovery from the top of the 75-foot pile to 7 stories beneath the ground level are not represented. The overwhelming task of recovery within the ashes, dust and debris to recover our loved ones took an extreme toll on New York City. The condition of remains and length of recovery attributed to the agony of many families who today still have not been notified of identification. More than 65% of the remains recovered have not been identified today. I commend New York City on the unified response and expertise to manage such monumental catastrophe within a city of 13 million people. The expertise and training for crowd control, response and management for New York City.

The need for information regarding recovery

Richard Ben-Veniste
Fred F. Fielding
Jamie S. Gorelick
Slade Gorton
Bob Kerrey
John F. Lehman
Timothy J. Roemer
James R. Thompson

Commission Staff

Philip D. Zelikow
Executive Director

Chris Kojm
*Deputy Executive
Director*

Daniel Marcus
General Counsel

operations from the families who lost loved ones became apparent, especially from the non-uniformed service families. I became involved with the September 11th Widows and Victims Families' Association to distribute information to other families regarding the recovery and identification of our loved ones. Due to the unprecedented nature of the attacks and devastation, the coordination of information, relief and resources became an incredible task in the months that followed. From the consolidation of the missing persons to the filing of paperwork for relief for the families the need for coordination of agencies became apparent.

Failures in Homeland Security.

- Immigration; FAA Security; Intelligence Failures.

Response to Attacks at WTC on September 11, 2001.

- Coordination of FDNY and Agencies.
- Immediate Rescue Extrication.
- Heavy Equipment needs. Management of immediate resources.
- Recovery operations.

Coordination of Relief on September 11, 2001

- Families Response and Information.

Homeland Security Response Preparedness

- Deployment of FEMA & Urban Search and Rescue Teams during grounding of FAA.
- Future Attacks, coordination for major cities.
- Response of New York & Lessons for the Future.
- Improvements to response.

Responsibilities of Commission

- Regulation of domestic buildings and construction. Guidelines for any construction regulated by local emergency response agency.
- Coordination of agencies and relief.
- Response and Preparedness.

Lee Ielpi is a native of Great Neck, NY where he resides today with his family. Lee is a father of two girls and two boys. Both sons are firefighters with the FDNY. Lee became a volunteer with his local Great Neck Vigilant Fire Department in 1963 where he rose through the ranks to become Chief of the Department. Lee continues to serve as an active member and trustee of the Vigilant Department.

In 1968, Lee was drafted to serve in the US Army in Vietnam. While serving, he volunteered to be deployed under the Reconnaissance Unit with the Second of the 28 Infantry, First Infantry Division. While serving for his country, Lee earned a Bronze Star for Valor and two ARCOM medals for Valor in addition to being decorated with a Combat Infantry Man's Badge and Air Medals. Lee's first child was born while he was serving in Vietnam in 1970.

Lee Ielpi joined the New York City Fire Department in September, 1970. As a probationary firefighter he was trained during one of the busiest periods of firefighting in Brownsville section of Brooklyn, NY. Lee was selected to serve as a member of the elite Special Operations Company, Rescue 2 in 1977. Rescue companies of the FDNY serve to operate at all working fires within their borough, any type of rescue operation, hazardous materials and scuba operation. These companies assist with all rescue equipment for any type of extrication. While serving in the FDNY, Lee Ielpi was awarded twenty-four recognitions of exemplary service ranging from Class 3 metals to Unit Citations from his Rescue Company. The awards included three of the prestigious Class 3

Rescue medals awarded on separate occasions by New York City and the firefighters who witnessed the hazardous conditions under which the rescues were performed. Lee also received a Class B ribbon of honor for service beyond duty.

On September 11, 2001, Lee arrived at the World Trade Center within a half hour of the second collapse and assisted to organize operations until midnight of that evening. Lee returned to Ground Zero daily to assist organization of the rescue operations. Upon the third week, the rescue operations were reclassified by the City of New York as a recovery operation. As is tradition within the FDNY, Lee worked hands on daily for nine months to bring home all that were lost including his son Jonathan Ielpi, FDNY Squad 288.

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States
The Commission closed on August 21, 2004. This site is archived.