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MFRO402873

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Re: Judy Wein

Type of event: Interview

Date: March 24, 2004

Special access: None

Prepared by: Madeleine Blot

Team: 8b

Location: Hollis Hills, Queens

Participants – Non Commission: Judy Wein, Aon Corporation

Participants – Commission staff: Madeleine Blot

As of September 11th, 2001, Judy Wein worked for Aon in 2 WTC (the South Tower). Aon occupied the 98th - 105th floors of the South Tower (excluding half of the 104th floor) and the 92nd floor. Ms. Wein's office was in the southwest corner of the 103rd floor, facing West.

At the time AA Flight 11 struck the North Tower, Ms. Wein was in her office. She heard an explosion and felt the building shake. She turned toward the window and saw a fireball which seemed to be coming from below. [The zone of impact in the NT was in fact several stories below the height of Ms. Wein's floor]. Ms. Wein could feel the heat from the explosion in her office to a degree that it felt like her face was "in an oven." She ran out of her office and screamed for everyone on the floor to get out. Ms. Wein does not recall how many people were on the floor at the time, but remembers that it was not full.

Ms. Wein ran down a stairway to the 78th floor sky lobby. Some people took the local elevators but Ms. Wein's instinct, after seeing the fire, was to use the stairs. The stairway was already full, with people descending two at a time, one holding on to each side of the banister. Some people were actually going up, perhaps to get something they forgot. [These people may have heard the instruction over the p.a. system that ST occupants should return to their offices]. There was a not a great sense of panic in the stairwell.

Ms. Wein did not hear an immediate p.a. announcement after the North Tower was hit. She exited the stairwell at the 78th floor, thinking there would be more

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information there. The sky lobby was packed, “like a subway at rush hour.” People were cramming as many as they could into express elevator cars. In Ms. Wein’s recollection, two out of the ten express elevators which ran from the ground lobby to the upper sky lobby had been out of service for monthsⁱ. (These were to the right, as you faced the elevator bank, in the center of a group of 5).

Ms. Wein met up with some colleagues in the sky lobby and stood waiting in a group of six. Most of the people in Ms. Wein’s group knew that a plane had hit the North Tower and assumed, based on the clear weather that day, that it was not a mistake. Ms. Wein does not have information as to what others in the sky lobby knew or assumed.

While some people in the sky lobby planned to—and actually did—go back up to retrieve personal items, most were there to attempt to get downstairs. Ms. Wein had left her purse and other belongings upstairs but had no intention of going back up to get them. Her boss had said, ‘no you’re not going up’ and offered to give her money to get home.

It was at this point that Ms. Wein recalls hearing a p.a. announcement saying that the building was secure and it was safe to proceed. Ms. Wein took this to mean that it was safe to proceed downstairs, e.g., that the building was sufficiently secure to do so. Given the circumstances she could only imagine that the proper procedure would be to exit the building. However, others began going up at that point. One person from Ms. Wein’s small group began to head to the elevator. She is not sure how far he made it but he did not survive. [Giving the close timing of the announcement Ms. Wein recalls to the ST being struck, it may have been the “second” or modified instruction that occupants could begin an orderly evacuation if conditions warranted. However, it appears to have prompted some people to return upstairs]

Ms. Wein knows of one Aon employee who got down to the lobby and went back up, but he did so of his own volition (e.g., he was not personally directed to) to try to help colleagues above.

As they continued to wait for the elevators, the second plane hit their building. Ms. Wein went flying and landed on her arm, which she broke. She found out later that she had also punctured a lung. Out of the five remaining people in Ms. Wein’s group, one (her boss) died immediately, another was pinned by fallen marble which broke his legs; one man survived but stayed to help others and did not make it out; the remaining lady also suffered broken limbs (1 arm was broken and the other was badly burned).

Ms. Wein heard no further p.a. announcements or the fire alarm, though she believes that the sprinklers were going off because there was water on the floor (which, she theorizes, could also have been a burst pipe.) The sky lobby was dark but not extremely smoky. There were some “ambers,” but no real fire.

Ms. Wein walked towards the center of the sky lobby, where there was normally a security official stationed at a desk, but “all of that was gone.” As she walked in that

ⁱ Other evidence suggests that these elevators were repaired just prior to Sept 11th

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direction, it got darker and darker, and she encountered more and more bodies, so she knew she should turn back. She passed an escalator and got the impression that there was a fire on a higher floor. She walked back to the north side of the building, near the western wall. Because several windows had been blown out, there was some fresh air and lights. She could see the North Tower from the windows. She found the two surviving members of her group directed them to that area.

While they were waiting, they heard a person shout: anyone who can walk should walk to the stairs, and anyone who can help should help others to do so. This turned out to be a civilian employee of a company located on the other half of the 104th floor (the half not leased by Aon). He was also a volunteer firefighterⁱⁱ.

Ms. Wein does not know whether this man checked other stairways first, but he led them to the A stairwellⁱⁱⁱ. At that point, he had already directed at least one other group down. Ms. Wein learned of this later when she shared an ambulance with one of the people from this group. It was a woman who had been badly burned. She had left a fire extinguisher in the stairs, which the “man in the red bandanna” had given her, and Ms. Wein remembers seeing it there when she descended. Ms. Wein does not personally remember if there were other people alive on the 78th floor when she began descending the stairs, but she later heard that the “man in the red bandanna” had brought injured people into the stairways to facilitate their rescue by first responders.

Ms. Wein walked down the stairs with two other people, her female colleague from Aon and a male Aon employee whom she had not met before that day. Ms. Wein was aware that another plane had hit her building. The stairwell was bright and clear and conditions were pretty normal. If debris had been blocking certain areas, it was already removed. At one point, evacuees had pass under something, like a pipe, which may have fallen. There was also a point where they had to pass through a puddle with a wire dangling in it. Although Ms. Wein was worried about the hazards it might present, she did not want to turn around and go back. They walked through and, fortunately, it did not cause them any harm. Those were the only impediments they encountered in the stairwell.

Somewhere in the 70's, they observed a person communicating on a walkie-talkie. He was not in uniform and had no gear. [This could have been PA civilian or perhaps a fire warden from another company]. Ms. Wein told him about the injured people on the 78th floor. He ran up and down past them and then back up again.

ⁱⁱ This man, Wells Crowther, became known as “the man in the red bandanna.” He remained in the 78th floor sky lobby for some time assisting civilians—guiding them to the stairs and moving the injured to stairs to facilitate their rescue. He is reported to have died in the ground floor lobby of the South Tower (where his body was found) when it collapsed, where he later remained, after leaving the 78th floor, to assist firefighters.

ⁱⁱⁱ As the A stairwell remained structurally intact precisely because it was removed from the point of impact on impact floors, it is likely that any who survived the impact on impact floors (because they too were removed from the impact of the plane) were nearer to the A stairwell than to the other 2 (especially the C stairwell, which, on impact floors, actually deviated southward in the direction of the crash site.)

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About 10 to 15 flights down, in the 60's, they began encountering firefighters in full gear who looked very tired. The firefighters told them to go down to the 40th floor for help. [They had found a working elevator which ran to that floor]. On their descent from there to the 40th floor, they encountered 3 or 4 more sets of firefighters. This was at approximately 9:30 a.m.

As instructed, they exited the stairwell on the 40th floor, where they met one firefighter and 2 security guards in blue blazers [these were Summit employees.] Ms. Wein saw a kitchen, and one of the security guards got her some water which she shared with the other two civilians. The firefighter and one of the security guards took them down to the lobby in a small elevator.^{iv}

When they got down to the lobby, the firefighter went back upstairs^v. Ms. Wein and the other 2 civilians were turned over to a uniformed female security guard with a walkie-talkie who walked them through the concourse to a designated exit on Church St, near Vesey. Ms. Wein did not see get a full view of the lobby but heard that some triage was being performed. From her perspective, the lobby and the concourse were empty, like a ghost town. She felt that they were the only people in the concourse. On Church Street, there were many ambulances and emergency workers as well as patients, with relatively less serious injuries, waiting to be transported.

The female security officer got Ms. Wein into an ambulance and said she was going back. Ms. Wein was first taken out of the ambulance to fit 2 women who were burned (one was Ling Young, the woman who had left the fire extinguisher in stairwell A.), but then put back in after she told EMS about the pain she was experiencing in her chest area (which was a punctured lung).

As the ambulance was pulling away, Ms. Wein saw the south tower collapse out of the back window. She heard the noise and saw billowing smoke. They had somewhat of a difficult time attempting to drive out of the area, but were able to get to NY Presbyterian Hospital where Ms. Wein was treated.

In general, Ms. Wein felt that there were not good instructions on what to do. After the first plane hit the North Tower, she left her floor at her own initiative, because she had seen the fireball from tower one.

Post-1993 Fire Drill Training

Ms. Wein was not at the WTC in 1993 but felt that subsequent fire drills could have been more helpful. She confirmed the basic procedure, e.g., that civilians were to gather in the center of floor, use the floor warden phone, check for heat, and that they were

^{iv} Ms. Wein's impression was that this was an internal elevator belonging perhaps to the company occupying space in that location

^v Ms. Wein's husband later heard that the elevator became stuck during its next trip, trapping the occupants inside, where they were when the building collapsed—it is correct that the firefighter running the elevator did get stuck and die in the collapse as he was trying to cut his way out

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informed about re-entry floors. The fire drill coordinators (DFSD's) blew whistles for tenants to listen, but people did not always pay too much attention. It would have been more helpful to do actual evacuation drills. Ms. Wein does not recall any uniform instructions on which way to evacuate, e.g., up or down.