The plane struck the World Trade Center around a quarter to 10, if I recall correctly. We could see a slight cloud of smoke from Manhattan from where we were — it was a clear day. I had worked at Gateway and was very familiar with New York City. I knew the layouts. I knew what the park police and the park ranger staff had at Gateway and at the Statue of Liberty. I knew what their resources were. I was still in law enforcement at the time, and I knew, because I had been an incident commander in several large events, what they would be going through in those first couple hours.

We had two 41-foot oceangoing patrol boats, actually converted Coast Guard boats, at Fire Island. I called the commander of the U.S. Park Police, who I knew pretty well, and said, “Major, I’m sure you don’t even know — no one knows — what’s going on, but I would voluntarily send our two 41-foot patrol boats down with a full ranger staff to help protect the Statue of Liberty, if you felt that they would be of benefit.” He thanked me profusely, said he wasn’t sure what they would do with them, but it would take about an hour and a half for the boats to get there. So by noon that day, I had ordered our boats with a staff of about six on each to New York City, and they were immediately sent to secure the perimeter of the Statue of Liberty.

It was a very interesting day. No one — no one really knew what was going to happen.

Several of the folks from the Long Island area where we lived lost their lives that day. Several [of my children’s] friends lost parents that day. It was a very emotional day for Long Island. In the coming weeks and months, we were sending all of our rangers in uniforms to funerals of firefighters and law enforcement. There were so many funerals out there on the same day that there literally weren’t enough uniformed people to properly pay respect.

The Oral History Project

The oral history project is financed by the Rick Gale Memorial Fund. Many remember Rick, one of the founders of ANPR and a long-serving president, as a moving force of the organization. With his passing in 2009, ANPR established a memorial fund, which his family and the board agreed to use for the oral history project. The audio recordings and transcriptions will be archived at the Harpers Ferry Center in West Virginia.

You can continue Rick’s legacy with a tax-deductible donation. This will help pay for transcription services for these important interviews. Please visit www.anpr.org/donate.htm.