

Call Number: 02-00-58

Flood Interview – Stanley Zaverl

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Notes:

The recording starts with Stanley Zaverl stating his name and stating his position as the chief of police for the city of Fairbanks. The interviewer asks the chief when he was first aware that the rising water would lead to an emergency situation. The chief says everything took place Saturday the 12th at about 7 pm when he checked in at headquarters and found out about rising waters in Nenana. The chief said he had his wife and two children in Nenana and he left at 8 o'clock that evening to pick up his wife and kids. He arrived there at about 9:45 pm and it was just time enough to get across the bridge that was still open and he got back over the bridge at about 10 pm. The chief arrived in Fairbanks at about 12:30 am on Sunday the 13th. Sunday afternoon, the chief checked back into headquarters and that evening water was coming up but not at any alarming rate so the chief left Fairbanks at 9 o'clock the night of the 13th and when the chief woke at 6:30 am the station told him the Chena River was high. He says the river was just about over a foot on Hamilton Street. The chief called in at about 6:45 am and all off duty personnel were called into work and all officers remained on duty until Saturday the 19th. The personnel remained all around the clock. They weren't relieved until Sunday the 20th. The interviewer asks if Civil Defense linked up with the police department on Sunday morning the 13th. The chief says Civil Defense headquarters were at the basement of the public safety building in Fairbanks. The interviewer asks if in an emergency situation, the police department has extra powers. The chief says "No", but any emergency may require police to take over a building and evacuate. By Tuesday, just about all the town had been evacuated. The chief says on Monday the 14th, the job of the police department was to report the happenings and where water was flooding. The chief says some people were removed late Monday afternoon, especially the areas of Highland Homes, Graehl Street, and Hampton Acres. Zaverl estimates 5,000-6,000 people were evacuated by the police department. The chief says some boats came in on late Monday and military vehicles from the Army late Monday afternoon because just about all of the police cars went under Monday afternoon at 6-7 o'clock at night. The State Civil Defense is mentioned as being in charge during a disaster but Zaverl says the State Civil Defense did not move their operation until Wednesday morning. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday morning was strictly local police assisting according to the chief. Zaverl is asked about assistance from the state police and he says the state police had their hands full with stuff happening outside the city. Zaverl says state police did help Monday morning when the water started rising in Fairbanks. The chief says that he had authorized 31 uniform officers but he was four men short so 27 were on duty the day the flood started. Zaverl says on Monday the 14th, the fire department was still functioning. On Monday night the fire department moved all the equipment and put it up at the Goldpan Service Station which was out of water all during the flood. The chief says the first day of the flooding [Monday the 14th], he was operating out of his

office and in Civil Defense downstairs. Tuesday he moved to the second floor of the police station. He said he started closing off streets early Monday morning at about 9 am. He said the road blocks were the permissive type. On Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday there were a lot of problems with congestion with sight seers on boats. One of the interviewers says he was sandbagging at the hospital Monday night and he says there were a tremendous amount of people trying to get back and forth on Cushman St. Bridge. The chief says it was daylight when they closed the Cushman St. Bridge. The chief says the bridge didn't stay above water all the time. People volunteered the boats used by the police. On Tuesday the police were asking for any boats available. The boats were mainly used for rescue operations. When the water started receding, the boats were used for patrol purposes. The chief says there was very little thieving although there was some. The chief says the police had the National Guard with them. The chief says there was no place to put the drunks because the jail went underwater. The chief says the bars [Alcohol] were closed Tuesday until the following Tuesday [The 23rd or the 22nd]. The chief says there was a man stationed at all the schools where people were staying with a portable two way radio. The person on patrol was a uniformed officer. In Denali, Lathrop, Main, and Barnett locations there was an officer of patrol. All the rescue operations were going through the control center in the upstairs of the police department. After the National Guard left on the 21st, there were about 50 security guards that were patrolling residential and business areas. They were temporary guards that were hired to replace the National Guard. General Isabel was in charge of the National Guard but there were many captains also. When the National Guard was in Fairbanks they stayed at the JC Penny building. They moved out to the University of Alaska after that. The JC Penny roof was used as a landing pad for helicopters. The chief says there must have been 100 landings on the JC Penny roof. He says the Army was not involved but some of their vehicles were obtained to assist with the flood. The Army sent a drive with the vehicles. The chief says he only had two occasions to use the helicopter. The mayor from Anchorage had to use the helicopter to fly over the city. The water started to come up really fast at about 9 pm on Monday night. When he got to his house on Graehl St. he got in an Army vehicle and from 9 pm to 3 am the water the house went from having no water in it to 2 feet in the house. The river was swift and a small pleasure boat wouldn't be able to cross the river. On Tuesday and Wednesday there were a lot of evacuations and a lot of medical emergencies. The chief says it was Monday night when St. Joseph's [Hospital] was evacuated. All the medical emergencies had to be taken to Ft. Wainwright. The chief says they got medical supplies wherever they could find some. The chief says the police got some gasoline from the Bureau of Land Management and some from Standard Oil. The fire department made arrangements with Standard Oil to get the gas. Goldpan Gas Station was a Standard Oil station so that is where the oil was delivered. There was gas cache in Tri-corners which is by Steese Highway and Committee. There was a cache on the west side of town and BLM brought a pickup truck full of gas cans and the truck stalled out in front of the State Building on the sidewalk so that is where the cache stayed. The chief says a woman died of a heart attack and there were three drowning in town. The chief says there were no instances of violent crime but there were people waving guns around to protect their property. Two cops were shot at but they never knew where the shots came from because it was dark. There was an instance of the doctor's clinic on the 400th block of Fourth Street. The window was smashed and people were going to steal drugs but no one was caught.

At 29:25, the chief begins discussing when normal operations were proceeded with. The chief says that normal operations didn't resume for two weeks after the flood. It was three weeks before any of the officers could get a day off. Cars weren't operating for a week after the flood [the 21st]. Private vehicles were also being used. The first week of the 14th through that Saturday the men were still in uniform but they got all muddy so all the officers changed. Uniforms were being lost because they were in lockers at the police department or at home which was underwater.

There is a knock on the door at 31:50 and the recording stops then starts again.

The chief says the 20th is when the officers started using their uniforms again. All of the security guards used riot type helmets. The chief says there was very little trouble at the schools.

There is a knock on the door at 33:40 and the recording stops then starts again.

The chief says people were getting boisterous because they were cooped. The University of Alaska-Fairbanks was different because people could wander compared to other schools. One of the interviewer says he was at Denali School on the 23rd and there were still a lot of people staying there. The chief says Barnett School was full of people evacuated from Nenana on Sunday and Monday the 13th and 14th. The people at Barnett were there for 2 weeks if not longer according to the chief. The only communication the officers had with Civil Defense was a man with the Civil Defense on a radio in the Civil Defense building. The chief says he can't thank the BLM enough. The chief says without the BLM the people would have been dead ducks. The chief says it was about 10 days before the radios were back up [toward the latter part of August]. All of the sound equipment was new. The chief says nine cars were lost. OEP is helping. A number of records were lost. The chief says everything was lost and absolutely nothing was saved. The chief says a lot of the lost records are irreplaceable. The chief says the city doesn't have a records management department but they have been working on one for years. The chief says that a lot of records were on microfilm and went underwater. The Kodak people came into town to help recover some of the files and some of the microfilm was saved.

At 40:00 the chief begins discussing the process of training security guards. The chief says that guards were necessary to discourage people from taking scraps from the dump of water damaged materials. The chief is asked if he anticipates any problems as a result of flood problems in the upcoming months. The chief says the only problem the police department has is going back to normal operations. The officers who were working around the clock would occasionally check and make sure their families were ok but they always came back to work. He says Tuesday night was when the police department had to be evacuated. He says there were 400-500 evacuees sleeping in the building and they had to be evacuated because of the flooding. Boats were helping transport people. The boats were coming in the 5th Avenue side and coming out the 7th Avenue side. The chief says he doesn't know what company provided the food but there was enough food. There was someone always cooking on the stove. The chief is asked if there is anything that can better prepare the police force in case something like the flood happens again and the chief says anytime there is an emergency people always learn. One of the interviewers says that Mark Hunt was saying that next time Fairbanks will be a little better prepared. The chief says a lot of people were claiming they borrowed things to the department and the things

were never returned. The chief says next time anyone borrows something they will need authorization to get it. Every John Doe was claiming they were police or Civil Defense and no one was questioning them. The chief says he doesn't know who is going to pay for the boat losses because there was a lot of boat damage. One guy was screaming for a helicopter because he hit a car that ripped off the bottom of his boat and he wanted a helicopter ride to get him to the Safeway parking lot. The chief says he saw the helicopter come down slowly near the MUS building to pick the stranded guy up. The helicopter picked the man, 2-3 children, and 2 women from the boat as it sank. The chief says 5th Avenue was the lowest part of downtown but 4th Avenue, 5th Avenue, 6th Avenue, and 7th Avenue were the deepest water. 5th and 6th Avenues were originally slough beds. The chief is asked how his officers were able to contact people in town to let them know to evacuate. The chief says people themselves knew when to evacuate. Some people stayed in their home [Note: There is a very loud, consistent banging during this portion of the recording]. By Saturday most of the city was passable with a good sized truck. The chief says he has been in Fairbanks since 1943 and you never know if there will be a flood. The chief says there are still some procedure that aren't normal but other than that everything is pretty much back to normal. The chief says there are only two phones that are direct lines in the police station and that has hurt the police department and the public. The chief says new vehicles are expected in October. The chief is not sure the brand of the vehicles. The vehicle situation is discussed further and the recording ends.