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M: This is an interview with Captain Terry Urista. I'm at the Sheriff's Office in Larimer County, Fort Collins, Colorado. The date is August 18, 1976, and my name is David McComb.

Well, we're talking about the Big Thompson, and what I need to find out from you is basically your story in that Big Thompson disaster. But my understanding is that you were called in very early. You were up in the Canyon and the water was rising. So let's kind of take it up at the point where you're called in.

U: Well, I was at home and it was Saturday night, and I was working on some schedules that . . . just a poster board and you put acetate over them and you can write on them with grease pencils and what not, and I'd taken a shower and standing there in my shorts and an old football jersey, and working on that and kind of half watching TV.

And so it was about a quarter after nine, I think, and the only reason I can gauge that is this program had just started on the tube there. I got a call from the office and they said the Big Thompson was flooding. I said, "You gotta be kidding me," and they said, "No, the sheriff . . . called the sheriff and everybody else, and we've got reports of high water." And I said, "Well, okay, fine, I'll get on the road right away."

So I went in and got a pair of jeans and boots, and I grabbed the uniform and the shirt and jumped in the patrol car, and as I went out the door, I told the wife that probably everybody was getting a little carried away with a little bit of high water, and I'd probably be back in a half hour.

M: This is in Fort Collins?

U: No, I live in Loveland. I live right there. I was in the flood. My home was.

M: Oh, my word.
U: See, I was right, just off Highway 34 and Glade Road. So I told the wife I'd probably be back in a half hour and left.

Well, the first place I stopped was at a trailer court there at Highway 34 and Glade Road. That was the one that was wiped out. And contacted about three or four of the residents there because when I pulled in, I know a couple of the people that were in there, and they came out, and I told them I had a report of high water.

We had to stop there and tell people, because that trailer court has been washed out, I understand, two times in the past, so I was concerned about that, and I told them that we had reports of flooding. And that they'd better be, that somebody better not go to sleep that night and somebody better be watching the river all night long.

And we went over and looked at the river, and on that bridge, on the bridge abutment, they've got "one foot," "two foot," "three feet," they got foot marks marked off, with a spray can of paint; evidently they'd done this after the last flood. Then when they got to the seven-foot mark, and then just above that they've got, "Get OUT Now!" and a line, but I looked at the river and the river was normal.

M: Whereabouts are you now?

U: Right at Glade and 34. Okay, down here in the valley.

M: Right.

U: And the river was normal. It was running at about what it had all day, and normal for August, and so I wasn't really too concerned, and I started up Highway 34 and no rain, dry, and I got up into the Narrows, and I start up the Narrows, course the river runs right along there, I noticed that it was running pretty choppy.

And it was about what it is during the spring runoff, you know, but there was a lot of debris in it. Lot of branches and garbage, you know,
wood and stuff, and somehow that didn't seem too right. But it really just didn't concern me even at that point.

I got up in the Cedar Cove area, and I kept going right on straight through. I was going to try to get as high up the Canyon as I could to try to see what was going on, because I understand the State Patrol was supposed to be up in the Drake area or something, I was going to run up to there.

And I made the bend right there by the Loveland Power Plant, there's a sharp S-curve affair, and there was no road. The road was gone right there. Right above the power plant.

And, well, the road bends around this point, rock outcropping, and actually, the river hits that point of the road about head-on; it's almost a right-angle turn from the river. I see why the river knocked that road out right away. It ate underneath it, and then the road collapsed. But I turned around, and I started coming down then.

M: You were reporting all this, I assume?

U: Yes, I told them the road was out above the power plant and there was a lot of debris you could see. I could see trees, and propane, a few propane bottles coming at that time, and whatnot, and I was a little concerned at that point, and I told them they'd better start warning people and have them getting them out because the water was really coming up pretty fast.

And I ran back down to where Cedar Cove is, and I saw some headlights over across the river, and they have a little wooden bridge that goes across the river there by Cedar Cove, and to those homes, the road runs behind all those homes, and all the homes are right on the river.

And I saw some headlights over there, so I figured I'd run over in
there and get on my P A and warn the people. And pulled onto this little wooden bridge they've got, got my wheels right up to it, and I took a look at it, and the river was right up to the bottom of it.

There was still a lot of junk in there and everything, and I had some second thoughts about it, and I pulled it into low gear and I was just going to shoot across the bridge, and I figured I'd be okay; I'd be cool.

About the time I got ready to put my foot into it, put it into low gear and just ready to cram it to the floor, the upriver side of that bridge started to sink. And a little water started lapping over, and then a pine tree about two foot in diameter and about forty-foot-long came through and just wiped that bridge out right in front of me. Just took it completely out.

M: Oh, my word.

U: And so I put it in reverse and got back up on the roadway, and got on the P A and yelled in the P A for the people on the other side of the river to get out, get to high ground. "You can't get out, the bridge is wiped out, just get to high ground." "Don't take anything, just get to high ground."

M: Did they hear you?

U: I don't know whether they heard me or not. I really don't. And . . . .

M: Was there a lot of noise in the river?

U: Oh, yes, it was like a big roar in the river. Then I got on the radio, and only . . . nothing shakes me up much, and I started telling all my officers down here, Sergeant [Jerry] Becker was down and Officer [Jim] Slough was out over there, and Officer [Morgan] Porter, and they were all down that Glade Road area.

And I told Jerry, that's Sergeant Becker, "Evacuate the whole Glade Road area." I says, "This is a 10-39 run," which is lights and siren. I
says, "Pull in the driveways, get on your PA's, tell people the river's flooding, to get out. And this is no joke, it is really flooding, Jerry, got to get everybody out, and clear all of Glade Road and all those campgrounds. It's 10-4."

We knew it had hit the fan, because, you know, I wouldn't do it otherwise. So they started screaming around there with their sirens on and then they pulled into a residence, get on their PA, you know, shut their siren off, get on the PA and say, "Get out, get out, the river's flooding, don't take anything, just get yourself out."

One of them warned my wife, and all she ran out with, she was in her nightgown, she just grabbed the two kids, threw them in the pickup truck, and made it, which is a good deal.

M: Yes.
U: But after I did that, then I . . . .

M: How successful is that kind of warning? Well, there's some disbelief, from what I've read.

U: Yes, well, it still wasn't raining down there. And you know, water, a wall of water, a great deal of water, you know, you really couldn't call it a wall, because, when you think of a wall, it's straight up and down, and it wasn't, it just raised so quickly. Matter of couple of minutes, you know, water went from, you know, raised six feet and kept going up and going or something.

M: Yes.

U: It was disbelief. I know that one man there, [Irving] Liss, they lived out on Highway 34 just west of . . . oh, what's the name of that little motel? Riverfront Campground or something, there by Big Thompson School. We had to tell them three times to get out.

And at first he was going to send his wife out, and then she argued
with him, and so finally when he came back again, she had talked the old man into going.

Well, then they took the pickup truck, and they were halfway into Loveland, and he says, "Well, this is crazy. Here we've got the old pick-up truck, and we've got a brand new Cadillac sitting in the garage."

So they went back and got their Cadillac. And that's the third time Sergeant Becker got them. And he was, he was by this time highly irate. And they made it out. Their home was completely wiped out.

M: Oh, my.

U: They, we made believers after that. Mr. Liss was kind of upset with him for, you know, ordering him around and whatnot, but I guess he wasn't too upset after he saw what happened to his home several days later.

M: Okay, so those guys were warning down the mouth of the Canyon, and you're still up there, though.

U: Yes, I was trapped. Cause after that happened I went down to that little bridge there where you, just where you go onto the Narrows, and by that time there was water going over it, and shortly thereafter an A-frame home came along and hit the bridge, and it sat on top of there. And there was propane bottles, those large propane bottles, I don't know what they are, 300-gallon, 500-gallon propane bottles, propane bottles of all sizes were going down. These big ones are whistling and gurgling into the water as they rolled over and whatnot.

M: Were they exploding?

U: No, none of them explode. I found out later, some days later, day afterwards, it was Monday, I think it was, that we finally got some people from these different propane dealers in Fort Collins and Loveland, and they said, no, that you probably couldn't have even penetrated a bottle with a... [revolver] you know, service. We probably would have had to have something like...
armor-piercing rounds to penetrate them, and then they still wouldn't explode.

So if we would have walked up and lit a match to them, because most of them were broken off where they'd connected to the trailer, or the home or whatever, and they said instead of having all that gas smell, the only danger was because it sinks down to the ground and sits in the low spots, and if you light a match, well, all that stuff would ignite, and it would burn you on the legs and whatnot.

But if you could have got there right away, you could have lit a match, and all you would have had was a flame coming out of where the leak was, and it wouldn't have exploded on you.

M: But those types really don't explode.

U: No.

M: Yes.

U: Didn't know that too well that night (laughing), kinda wasn't that assured that night.

M: Well, you're marooned then on the highway?

U: Yes, we were marooned up there. And then they called me and told me that Officer Garcia, Jim Garcia, was also marooned, he's stuck up there, yes. Someplace, And I don't know where he was, and I said, "Where'd you get the last transmission from him?" and they said, "Well, he was up by Park Terrace someplace.

So I ran back up Park Terrace Motel, and I got him, I found him just as he was coming back up to the road.

And he had ... well, he was in there warning people, and the flood was starting, and evidently I had driven right by him, and he drove down by the old firehouse and gotten down there near the river, and a old woman,
I think she was, I don't know what her name was, but she's sixty-eight, and she got out of her house once, but evidently she wanted something else that she went back into her house, and by the time she came back out, she was knee-deep in water and knocked her off her feet, and she was rolling down the river.

And Jim saw her rolling down the river, ran down and jumped in and drug her out. And the . . . he and some other fellow drug her right up the side of a steep hill there, and they got her up on the road, and then they took her over to Park Terrace Motel.

And then he went back down and some other woman was screaming at her son, her retarded son was in the automobile out there, and the automobile was fastly rising in the river, so Jim got in the truck and got the 100 foot of rope we got in the trunk of these patrol cars, and he tied off to a tree, right at the water's edge, and then he went out to the car.

Well, when he got out to the car there was nobody in it. There was nobody or anything in the car. So he started hand-over-hand back to the shore, and when he got to the shore he untied his rope and of course by this time the tree was in knee-deep water, and then after he got the rope untied, and he started up the bank, the tree fell over and went down the river.

So he felt real fortunate too, and that's about when I found him. He was just getting back up the edge of the road, and he wanted to go check another car, and I told him, "You're not going anywhere. You're crazy as hell if you're going back in that river."

So we went up and gave the older woman some first aid. In a while we figured she had a dislocated shoulder, but she's spry, and she said, "Oh, no, I'm not hurt. Give me a couple of aspirins, and I'll be okay," and we
got her bound up a little bit and got her halfway comfortable, and she was stable. Her pulse was stable and whatnot, and we said, "Well, we'll try to get a helicopter in here to try to airlift you out," and she said, "well, don't make no special efforts for me or anything," you know, just a super old lady, she . . . you know.

And then we went out, and we got in the patrol car, and we used our spotlight, and we got one of these aircraft landing beams, and my spotlight that's real bright. We were trying to find where people were at, and of course the river was really coming up at this point, and we were spotting people, several people that were on top of roofs, and several that were in a debris pile.

There were some trees that jammed up in this one area and there were some people in it, in that debris pile. And we'd get on our PA, tell them, "Yeah, we see you, don't leave that debris, don't get away from there," you know, "until daylight. When the water goes down, don't come out of here, wherever you're at, you know, because you never know. Just stay put."

And at daylight we never did find those people in the debris pile. We lost them after the crest; we couldn't see them in there any longer. I don't know if they got washed out of there, or if they, when the water went down, the first thing they did was boogie out of there, or what. I don't know. Because we weren't close enough, really, to recognize them. I don't know whether they made it the next day or not. I know when it got . . . after the crest had went down, I no longer saw them in the debris pile, so . . .

M: Through that night, what did you do? Continue to patrol the river?
U: Yes, we just located people that were across over there, and some of the
tourists we had were concerned about the woman, and they came down and wanted us to do something for her, and we'd told them we'd done all we can, really; there wasn't anything else we can do for her.

"What are you going to do for the people on the other side?" "We can't do a thing for them. There's no way to get over across the river."

"Well, there's a guy down here from Nebraska, he's an EMT, so we went down and got the guys from Nebraska, and they weren't EMT's. They'd had some first-aid training a million years ago, and we had a couple of those; they were just driving up and down the road, really, they had CB's, and . . . .

M: An EMT is an Emergency . . . ?

U: Yes, an Emergency Medical Technician.

M: Right.

U: Finally, yes, I told them, "Hey, you're wasting gas. There's about two, two and a half miles worth of road here, you just keep driving up and down it, and it isn't going to do any good."

They says, "Well, we're looking for a road to drive out of here." I says, "There is no road to drive out of here." And I was semi-familiar with that area, and there was no way to get out of Cedar Cove, drive out.

And then we set up a helipad right in front of Park Terrace, which isn't a big thing, you know, you just get an area a chopper can set down in, and we got vehicles at three different angles of it and turn their lights on so the pilot would know to land in the center of them lights.

M: Was it raining by this time?

U: Yes, we got a little rain, and then it went back off, and then a little more rain would come in, and then it would quit for a while. It was kind of intermittent type thing. Nothing of any great consequence. It would come in and rain real hard for a minute or two and then it would let up,
M: You had radio contact all that time.
U: Yes. And by this time John Englebert, and the sheriff went up, they had their command post.

Well, the Sheriff was stuck there at the Dam Store, I guess, because I can remember radioing to him after it took the bridge out and the bridge up above us, there was a house sitting on top of it, and whatnot, and I heard he was at the Dam Store.

I told him, "Well, if you're close to the mouth of this canyon, you better back up on the high ground up on that road. Because it is coming down, and you better get your ass out of there." And so, he said, "Okay, 10-4."

About that time that big old flume right there at the Narrows, that great big metal flume had went out, and him and Captain Thomas looked at each other and said, "I think we better get the heck out of here," and they jumped in their car and whipped up the hill a little bit. If they hadn't of braced that down into the roadbed and off to the edge, they... you know, the flume probably would have... if they'd braced it back up to the mountain. Cause that's what tore the flume out.

M: Yes, it took the support out.
U: Yes, it took the supports out.

M: Well, about what time was that?
U: Oh, geez, time just completely ran together at that point. I imagine it was around 11:30 or something like that. I really don't know. But then about all we did was spend a restless night just driving up and down the road looking for people that were out there and trying to get a location, and then we tried, I think four times, John tried to get the chopper in to us.

One time he was way up over us. We could see his... the lights.
And I think it was St. Anthony's. I'm not too sure, it might have been Adams County, too, I don't know what chopper it was, and we could see his lights, and we told him, "Just set down, you're right over us."

M: And you had the spotlight on.

U: Yes, and they came back, "Well, we could see them, but it's too turbulent. We can't get down in there."

So then at the first light we ran up and down the road a little bit and started to get some light, and John said, "I'm getting a chopper into you now." I said, "Okay, I'll send J.J. up to get the woman ready," and then I ran down to the back, and there was a fellow I saw walking over in the debris.

By this time the river had went down, it was semi in where its bed is. All those homes in Cedar Cove that used to be over there were all wiped out and sitting on top of each other and ... you know.

I yelled over across to him, and he came over to the bank, and then I ran down the bank, and asked him if anybody else was over there, and he says, "Yeah, there's about ten, twelve people over here," and I says, "Do you have any injuries?" and he said, "Yeah, we've got two old people," I said, "Okay, there's a meadow up behind where D.R. Pulliam used to live, a couple of horses in it even, and I said, "Get everybody there, cause the chopper can set down in there," I says, "and we'll airlift you all out, or medivac you."

I said, "Get all you able-bodied men and go through all them cabins and see if you can find any injured," I said, "carry them all up to that helipad." He says, "Okay, have you seen my wife and my mother and my daughters," and I can't remember the man. I think his name is Graham, I think, and I said, "No, I haven't," and he said, "Well, they're missing."
Later on I found out when I talked to him that he put them all in the car, and he had started the car and then his wife says, "Well, did you lock the house, the cabin?" and he says, "No." She says, "Well, you better lock it." So he walked up the step and locked the front door. When he turned around, his car was rolling down the river. His wife, his two daughters, and his mother in there.

And I don't know if we ever recovered their bodies or not. I never kept up with that but I think we did; I think he lost his whole family. I think he was the one that we had spotted on the roof.

But then he got some ... everybody then that were over on the other side, and they started gathering up the people, and I saw them searching the cabins and whatnot over there, and they were taking people up to that helipad, we were going to make that meadow, and then we got the chopper in there, and we got the woman out.

And then I was going to go across the river and then J.J. said, "No, you better stay with the radio, I'll go across the river," so I took Jim Garcia down to the bridge, and by this time the bridge was sticking out of the water, the water was going under it yet.

Lot of debris and several big propane bottles sitting there belching gas and whatnot, and of course some of the residents right away contacted us and wanted to know when we were going to get a road in, and then the tourists wanted to know when it would be that they could drive their vehicles out.

I told them, "It's gonna be months before you can drive your vehicle out," and they says ... well, I can remember one fellow from Louisiana, he says, "Well, why is that?" and I says, "Well," I says, "This thing is bad, and I don't anticipate we're gonna get a road in here for a long while"
that you're gonna be able to drive your vehicle out of here."

He says, "Well, I'll have you know I'm gonna call the Governor of Louisiana, and he'll get a road in here." And I says, "Hey, great. You call the Governor of Louisiana and you tell him to get a road in here, that's fine," you know (laughing). I don't know if he was trying to impress me or what, you know.

So we went down, and Jim went down to the bridge, and the bridge was out, and we didn't know how steady it was, but people were walking back across it. So then I . . . when I dropped him off, he said he was going to work up the other side so I turned around and went up, and I started working on the south side of the river bed, along in there.

And Jim had met a lady that owns a motel there, what's her name--Mrs. [Mary] Chappell. And she had a lariat, you know, a rope, a lariat, a western-type lariat, and she had pulled it out of the river along the river bed there.

He said, "Ma'am, I could use that lariat. I'm going up the other side of the river, and I might need that rope." And she says, "No, I found it. It's mine, and I'm gonna put it in my store and sell it."

And he says, "Well, I'm officially commandeering that rope to use on the other side." She says, "No, you aren't." So he grabbed it, and she tried to pull it away from him, and he shoved her down on the ground and took the rope. Which added for a lot of P.R. (laughing).

M: Just what you needed (laughing).

U: But he went over the bridge, and they climbed up that little cliff affair there and scaled along there until he got over to that first group of cabins.

Actually, Cedar Cove sits two groups, or whatever, two flat areas.
He had to hike up over a mountain to get to between the two, cause everything else being between was wiped out.

So he worked up that side, and he no sooner got over there and he called me, and he said, "Well, I've got half a body here." "Okay, you got half a body?" He says, "Yeah, I got just a lower half of a woman." He says, "I'll mark it and I'll leave it." I says, "Okay, make it obvious and leave it."

And he found two other bodies up there on the other side. Quite obvious, they were right out in the open, and he marked them readily, and so we could find them again real quick, and he was making sure all the people were there, were getting out, and the men that I contacted first, they pretty much had everybody pretty much out.

And Jim was checking all the cabins again coming through once he could get in there, and he stuck his head into one, and it was about four-foot-deep in silt, and he thought he saw another body, that's what he thought, and then there was a dog next to it, a old black dog.

This old fellow kind of half sat up and looked at him and said, "Well, it's about time," he says, "I think, I'm sure glad somebody came for me," and Jim just about had a heart attack, he said, you know, "Here I thought I was looking at a body and the old guy sits up and says, "Well, hi, how ya doing," and he about croaked.

And the guy was buried up to his waist in silt, dirt, just right to there, and the high water mark had hit him right under the chin. He just stretched out all he was worth, and the high water mark made it to his chin. Well, I guess Jim jumped in there then and dug him out with his hands, and then carried him up to the heliport. And got him lifted out.

The dog was still there, because this Tuesday . . . that was on Sunday . . . and I got lifted out of there Sunday night, so I wasn't in there
all day Monday, I was at the CP, and then on Tuesday I went back in, Mike Elijah and I went back in that same cabin, and that little dog was still there, and he almost got me (laughing). He didn't like me trespassing. I'll tell you that. He got worried a little bit . . . .

M: So what you guys did then was to organize . . . .

U: We got the helicopters coming in, we had Hueys and a little Hiller coming in there, 2-C Hiller, and somebody came up and said they had a man with a heart condition, down there across the ridge, and we went down there and there was a house up above, and then we got him out of there, and it was his A-frame house that was sitting on the bridge, come to find out.

And he did have a heart condition, and they had gotten out just in time, and they'd spent the night up on the mountain up above where their cabin is. They just went up the side of the mountain, and then at daylight they kind of worked their way around the edge of that mountain over to where that cabin sat way up high, and it was high and dry, and he contacted the gal there, and she got him some clothes and whatnot.

We brought him down and got him on a copter, I think he was the second, he was on the second chopper that went out. We got that initial woman and then there was a break for about a half hour, forty-five minutes before they started getting choppers in there, and we lifted the other people out of the other side of the river first. Got all those people out, and . . . .

M: Did any of them want to stay?

U: Not on the other side of the river. Nobody wanted to stay over there. There wasn't nothing to stay for. All their homes were full of silt and debris, and there was no way to get to the south side of the river, no way to get out; their cars were all gone, and so they all went out, which was
the smart thing to do, and then we had two officers over there, well, we had three, we had Jim and then Jim Slough and John Rabun, had flown in on one of the choppers to help the evacuation.

I told them to go down and get the two bodies that were up on that end and bring them over, and they carried them over and wrapped them up in blankets. We got them out a day later, I think, and we went down and got the half of one, that we brought it out right on the road, wrapped it up in a blanket and sat it on the edge of the road.

And then we started bringing in the choppers and in front of Park Terrace. A lot of tourists wanted to wait. They were going to stick around and wait, they wanted to know when we were going to get power back and whatnot, they were just going to stay there and wait for the road to come through and then drive out, and they kept asking me.

And I kept saying, "You're looking at three weeks to a month before we're gonna get a road, and even then it's gonna be a jeep road or a Cat road, and you're not gonna be able to drive your cars and whatnot out of here."

They wanted to know, "Well, could you get one of those big Army helicopters and drive our cars, fly them out?" and I said, "No, I don't think that's gonna happen, either." So most of them finally, towards afternoon, decided they'd leave, and I really never kept track of how many people we lifted out of there, but I'd venture to guess maybe around 250 people we lifted out of that area.

M: My word.

U: Seemed like every time we'd get a bunch of them . . . at first we had choppers coming in, and we had very few people, you know, were there to lift out, and we were getting them out readily. But towards afternoon
every time I turned around there was more people there.

M: They were just coming in out of the woods?

U: Right, they finally decided that there was no way in and out, and there was no power, there was no foreseeable way they were going to get electrical power or gas, or anything else.

So long about afternoon we had a lot of people there, and then the Chinooks came in, and we lifted out about twenty-five on one load and about thirty some on another load, which helped out a great deal, we got a lot of people out in two shots. And things pretty much stabilized there, and people that were there wanted to stay there. They didn't want to leave, and . . . .

M: They were the ones that live there?

U: Yes, they lived there. Or owned the motels up on the side of the hill. And they were concerned about getting power and whatnot, and then some supplies were dropped in and for Old Man Stille, Stille, there, and he got himself a little generator, and some other stuff, and he went down and started cleaning his home, and he was bugging us about getting that road in there, because he wanted to get his equipment out.

Stille's a sanitation, I mean, he has that, they pump septic systems and whatnot, and I've got to admit, all his equipment was trapped in Cedar Cove, and a lot of people that wanted their wells pumped out, and their crawl spaces, and septic systems and everything else, so he's losing a lot of money besides having about two foot of mud in his house. And he was a little hard to get along with there for awhile.

M: Some of the literature on disasters says that old people, as a generalization, old people resist evacuating. Do you find that to be true or not?

U: There's an old fellow that lost his life for sure there towards the Narrows, he lived in a little cabin right down on the river, and some people went
down there and told him he'd better get out, it was flooding, and he says, "I've lived here all my life. It ain't gonna flood and I'm gonna stay here anyways." He stayed in his cabin, and heaven knows where he is.

I think, I think a lot of people couldn't believe it. It wasn't raining where we were at, and then after it happened, I believed myself, even, that the Dam at Estes Park had broke, and I asked about it over my radio, and they says, "No, any phone communications and everything else was cut between here and Estes Park." The only communications we were getting was spotty communications with the State Patrol, the State Patrol and the Estes Park Police Department have the same frequency. And they were about as confused about what was going on down here as up there, but they did tell us that the dams were intact.

And I couldn't believe where all the water came from, I thought, "Well, maybe they had a big gully washer there, and everything had funneled down, and in order to save the dams, they probably threw the gates wide open." Well, that didn't happen, I found out. They closed the gates. No water went through. And later on we found out, you know, where the rain patterns were, and how they flooded out the Canyon.

M: Were there bodies on your side of the river?

U: Just that half a one. Just a half a one. No, we found none on the south side of the river, all of them were on the north side, where there was a lot of debris piled.

M: Where Garcia was?

U: Yes. A lot of the debris piles. They found an additional, several days later on, I think they found additional five or six, and I think; the Corps hasn't got in there yet, to tear big piles open, and so I think we're going to find a great deal more, because up around the bend from there was the
Covered Wagon, and SS Rapids Motel.

And they had a lot of people in them, and a lot of people missing out of those two motels, and they all went right in the river. I think they may have run that one bend until they hit all that trees and whatever there in the Cedar Cove area.

We got a lot of big debris piles and silt that, you can't believe how deep it is, because our guys were over, have been in there just about every day to ford the river, and you know, picking in around through there, and one day they were walking along and Jim was walking along, Jim Slough, on one part of a sand bar or a silt bar, whatever you want to call it, felt kind of funny, so he started kicking the sand away, and after about three inches of sand, he hit a car roof. A car completely buried under it.

So they got to digging, and they couldn't even hardly penetrate it. The car was all full of silt and so they've got to wait for a Cat to come in there.

And then they, you got a Cat in there, we punched a road in up over Coleman Clymer's, and they got a Cat in there, and they tore apart one cabin that somebody was supposed to be in, and they found Richard Huffsmith in there, a young kid, he was about eighteen, and the couple that was supposed to be in there wasn't in there, so I don't know what happened to them.

M: Yes. In the night that you were, there, when the river was on its rampage, did you see cars and all kinds of stuff going down? Didn't it kind of amaze you to see a car floating?

U: Oh, yes. To roll down the river it was just incomprehendable to me to see it go. I was watching it go, you know, we saw a flashlight went down
at one time, and somebody was on the end of it, shining it. You know, it wasn't bobbing down the river by itself. Somebody was with it, and I don't know if they were hanging onto a log or whatever it was, but what can you do? You know, you couldn't do a thing, and you feel so helpless when you see a car roll down the river and they had their lights on, we knew there was people in it, or a home go by, a mobile home or something, you know, small camper homes just go zipping down the river like it was a toy, bobbing along the water.

M: Okay, then you were there for the evacuation. You went out Sunday night.

U: Yes, about, oh, I think it was about 5:00. I finally, Sergeant [Ron] Richardson, Sergeant [Mark] Krug, came up and J.J. and I were going to get on this, they only had two people to put on a helicopter, where they were standing and looked around and so I said, "OK, J.J., you and I are going to get out of here." And he said, "Okay," and then they heard about four other people up someplace, and he decided to drive up there with Sergeant Richardson, and Krug says, "Well, you get on this chopper. I'll send J.J. out on the next one."

He finally came in about two hours later, but I got out on that Huey, and then caught a ride from there, got a bunch of volunteers, and they just had a piece of that orange flagging on them, and they were supposed to be transport people. So they told me when I got to helipad.

And so I walked up to one and said, "Are you a transport person?" and he says, "yes, you bet," and I said, "you've gotta take me into CP," he says, "Where's that?" and I says, "I don't have the slightest idea." It was at the Water Conservancy . . . I got over there and got ahold of John and after he lifted me up off the ground and said he was glad to see me, Captain Englebert's six-five, you know, and I asked him how things were going, and
he says, "Well, considering the confusion and the mess," he says, "they're going pretty good."

He says, "What's your situation up there?" and I ran down things, you know, everything was pretty cool. The people had food and water and ones that want to stay there were in there. We had, if we could get them a generator in there, they can, these motels up on the hillside have wells, and they can pump water, the wells weren't damaged. And get good water in there. And he said, "Okay, fine." And I said, "What's the plans for roads and whatever?" and then I saw the sheriff, and we ... I don't know, it was just a continuing thing of what they had going on. And . . .

M: So then did you work at the headquarters?

U: Yes, I worked there at the CP for a while, and then about, I don't know when it was, 11:00 or so, I went with Rich Hovey, because I finally found out where my wife was at, and she was at Ralph Morgan's house up here at Collins, and we took all the helicopter pilots and brought them up to the Ramada Inn and, for the night, and put them up here at the Ramada Inn, and I finally got over to the Morgan residence and found my wife and family there after, about midnight.

We got about, oh, three, four hours of sleep, and then I got back up and had a patrolman pick me up, and he picked up some equipment, raincoats and whatnot, and we went back down to CP and that day I spent in John's truck, in the front seat of his truck, most of it, with Joyce, who was handling his dispatch.

And John was in between his truck, which was more or less his command center, it was more like his communications center, and the command post, the inside.

And he was running back and forth across the parking lot, and Joyce was sitting there, and you know, people would ask me, "What about this and
what about that," and she was coming to ask John, and then when I was sitting there, she was asking me, you know . . . It was very easy for me to say "no" to a lot of things.

And I had a lot of volunteers coming up that, well, "I saw a picture of the Rocky Mountains and National Geographic, and I'm a mountain man and I want to go up the Canyon and help," "No, sorry."

M: So you turned away a lot of those helpers.

U: Yes, you try to turn them away. When you get an organized group, those are the ones that are helping you. You know a guy walks up and he says, opens up his wallet, and he shows you a little shield and an identification card, he's lieutenant of the Longmont Fire Department. He says, "I have twenty people here," he says, "We're all trained, we're all together, we're in one group." He says, "Where do you want us, and what do you want us to do?"

I said, "What areas have been covered, John, along the river?" He says, "Well, most of the upper areas," I says, "What about from Merri-Ax to Wilson Avenue, here?" He says, "No, I don't think it's been covered. We rode it on horseback, but I don't think it's been covered."

So I says, "Okay, Lieutenant, you've got from the Merri-Ax to Wilson Avenue," he says, "Draw me a map because I'm not familiar with the areas," and I draw him . . . tell him how to get there and whatnot and I says, "Take a couple of your people and drive you all up there, and we'll get a couple of our people, and we'll drive you all up there, and you can bring some vehicles down here."

He says, "Well, our vehicles are parked here at the CP and Wilson is right below where the CP was." He says, "If you get us transportation up there, we'll walk the whole river." And they were tagging bodies and we found that's what worked out the best.
And we organized, gee, I don't remember how many jeeps, thirty some jeeps or twenty some jeeps, that went up over Pole Hill, well they dropped down into Waltonia and dropped a group off that way.

M: Was that necessary? That was on Monday, wasn't it.

U: No, they never encountered anybody in there, it was funny, they dropped in to Waltonia, well, Waltonia Motel was gone.

M: Right.

U: Where it was, there's road that came up the back from Waltonia there and went, back up, well, it goes over to Pole Hill Road and went up, right back up in that area is private ground, and I don't know how many cabins are back in there. Ten, fifteen, twenty of them, something like that.

But when our rescue group got down to rescue, everybody was out, anyways, and there was a Mountain Bell truck sitting there with his little orange cone sitting off on the lefthand bumper, you know, like you have to put it out there to warn for traffic, and he's up a pole repairing the pole lines (laughing).

Our people were sitting there, going, "Gee we're supposed to rescue people, and Mountain Bell is already here," so there were some comical things about it, and they worked from there down to Drake, and then I don't know where they went from Drake.

Of course, the Rocky Mountain Rescue Group out of Boulder now had went the whole route. They came down from Estes and went all the way around to Drake and working from Drake back up to Glen Haven.

Now, it was kind of a wasted trip, cause they really didn't encounter anybody, or tell us anything we didn't already know, but we didn't have any chopper traffic in the air.

M: That was on the Monday that the weather was bad.
U: Yes. It was so bad, and then finally after, it was late afternoon, finally John and one of the Ag copters, I think Gene Greenwalt himself, was one heck of a chopper pilot, took a little Hughes 500, and they penetrated.

The problem we were having was a low ceiling; you had to fly practically in the river all the way up in order to be able to see, and then they stopped along all the way up only to find out that the people who wanted to be evacuated were evacuated the first day.

We'd gotten them out, and the people that were in there wanted to stay in there. So we only had a couple little minor problems with a few people that wanted some medication, some people wanted some flashlight batteries, you know, we had no problems whatsoever up the Canyon, and so that hinged a ... they brought us up quite a bit up to date.

M: It must have made you feel better, though.

U: Oh, yes.

M: Because from what I've read in the newspapers there was some pressure on Monday, people saying, you know, on the outside, saying "Why aren't you doing something?" you know, all this kind of crap, and you couldn't fly.

U: It's funny, you know, you kind of hate to risk a lot of people into an area not knowing what you're going into, too.

M: Right.

U: So we felt better after that, we at rescue operation, and you know ... and of course, during the day there, on that Monday, we were having a lot of bodies down along the river. A lot of the obvious ones, you know, there was some obvious.

M: *Newsweek* reported that a body went all the way to Greeley. Is that true?

U: No, The farthest east we found a body was at the Big Thompson Ponds, which
is right at I-25 and the Big Thompson River.

M: Right.

U: We found one there. That's the farthest east any, we have found anything.

M: Yes, right. Okay, and body recovery. You are going to have a problem as time goes by.

U: Oh, yes.

M: And you can't... well, I don't know, you'll have to tell me. Can you use volunteers for that kind of work? Or do you have to use trained people?

U: Well, how do you get a trained person? Who's trained to do that, to recover bodies?

We tried to get the coroner in on it, and they were swamped. They wanted to handle the, of course, you know, all the deputy coroners are morticians. So they want to handle their funeral parlors, you know. Really, and the handling of bodies from that end.

And we were talking, you know, at that time we were guesstimating, we were talking a lot of bodies. And we started, you know, that's a..., and they started, and we started thinking, "God, this is gonna go a hundred bodies." Then we started having problems, so we got our, regular sort of police officers.

They took... well we figured we'd better be doing, we should use our own people. And so we brought in what we call our body crews, and we would haul them wherever we would pick them up to funeral homes, and then they would take care of them there and embalm them or whatever, and then they were taking them to... they established a morgue at that point at the old hopsital, designated it as a morgue. The Sheriff had gotten some refrigeration. Cars in there, refrigeration trailer trucks in to be for temporary... .

M: So you'd rather use your regular officers for that.
U: Yes. Finally, by Tuesday, and that's when the weather broke; we had sunshine again, we start flying again.

Instead of bringing the bodies ... well, all the ones down below we were taking them right in the funeral homes, or we were, if we flew them in, we were just taking them in to a helipad and then take them from there.

M: We're going on in time now, and Wednesday, things must start changing for you in the nature of your problems.

U: Yes. Tuesday, when we got sunshine again, oh, everybody was geared up and we had groups ... well, "You're gonna go here, you're gonna go there," we'd have things pretty well organized. That's when they established Heliport Number Four. One initially was at the Merri-Ax. And we did away with that one. Two was in that little pasture there, on private property.

M: Must upset the owner.

U: Well, the only thing that upset her, from what I understand ... it's a woman who owns it ... she didn't mind us using it, that was great. But it got a little muddy from the vehicles on that south side of it, so somebody ordered in a bunch of gravel.

And she didn't want the gravel in there, because that is a pasture, it's a horse pasture. And she didn't want the gravel in there, and so we told them, "No, we can live with mud for a day."

And then the State Patrol said, "Lay it out," so we laid it out, so we've got I don't know how many tons of gravel are sitting there, you know, and this woman's sitting there saying, "Grass ain't every gonna grow up through that gravel. So that eventually, the County's got to go in there and scoop all that gravel out and make it right to the woman, I'm sure, and ... .
M: Sure.

U: And the other one was up, well, right there on Highway 34, where it goes from four lanes into two lanes right there by Fort Namaqua Hills.

And then we established Heliport Four, which is way out by the Dam Store, and it sits all by itself, and we plant that one off, and we were going to bring all bodies into there.

And the Forest Service brought down one of their big water trucks, and we set up a tent, an old Army tent. And our body crews were working right out of there, and any bodies that came in, we brought them into there, and we'd wash them all off, and put them in this body bag, and then we'd put them into a pickup truck and truck them on into Hunter's Funeral Home.

And long about, it was already on Wednesday, the whole operation had only been in a day. Thursday, for sure, because all the days ran together for me. I can't pick one from the other.

Maybe it was Thursday, and by then, you know, the bodies were really decomposing at a fabulous rate. They were just falling apart. The guys would grab an arm, and the skin and muscle would just slough back away from the bone, they'd pull on it.

And I told them at that point, I says, "Now, we're done cleaning bodies. You pick up a body, it goes in the body bag and we'll take it right to the funeral parlor."

If the funeral parlor was upset about it, you know, Hunter's, if the coroner's upset about it, then they may be better pick the bodies up themselves, I says, "We're no longer gonna do it."

Hell, at that point they're working with, you know, rubber gloves that are coming up to their shoulders and they put on rubber suits in order to, and putrefication masks, to even be able to get near them.
M: So the odor's pretty bad.

U: Yes, they were decomposing, and that's ... you know, that makes it rough for identification. Well, all the bodies were, from what I understand. They, coming down that river, they look like somebody had taken a fencepost and worked them over. They were just broken all to pieces.

M: No clothing . . . .

U: No clothing on any of them, no, they were ... all clothing was ripped off.

M: Oh, my.

U: The force of the river and then they were . . . .

M: In that sense it's amazing that you have identified as many as you have.

U: Yes. Well, the FBI team finally got there, I think, on about Tuesday, they got there, and . . . .

M: That helped?

U: Oh, yes. Those are super-dudes. Yes, we got to rolling prints and what-not, and they took the missing lists, and we went through our files and pulled forty-six fingerprints we had that were, they'd evidently come through our jail at one time or another, that were on the missing list and sent them down, and they made several people off of those. And one other piece of identification, I don't know, rings or whatever. And they were doing, they were really doing a good job.

M: So you worked at the command post, then?

U: Yes, I was on Monday when it rained, and then on Tuesday we went back into Cedar Cove, Mike Elijah and Jeff Kawrey and I, we flew back into there.

M: That's when the dog almost got you.

U: Yes, he dropped us over on the other side of the river and I, we basically, we covered the same area that Jim Garcia had. And we covered that area again. We didn't find any bodies, and we didn't find anything additional.
really to speak of. Contacted the residents along that side, and told them what we had planned for a road cutting in, and when the other roads were going to be back in. We had no idea about power; we were going to try to get generators.

That's the same day that Stille got his generator, and then later on that day we got another generator for Park Terrace Motel. And we got them hooked up with some power again. And later on in the afternoon we flew out of there again back in, and that's the last time I've been in there.

M: Yes. But at that point in time, though, your function kind of changes. It's no longer a police function, it's a, you know, a supply.

U: Yes. Well, then I think it was, it was along about Thursday or Friday that we had all our patrolmen geared up and I threw most of it on Sergeant [Robert] Seaman. He's investigations sergeant, and I think it was on ... we started Monday . . . but definitely on Tuesday, we saw we couldn't keep people on their feet any longer.

We had people that had been awake all the while, and everything, so that's when we decided we were going to kick in shifts, and that's the only thing we could do, and we broke people down into shifts and we just lumped them all together, investigators and patrolmen and whatnot.

And John was handling more or less the rescue end of it, and supply end of it, so now we needed a patrol for looters and everything, and Sergeant Seaman did one heck of a job. Trying to keep track of everybody, and we broke them into shifts and put two sergeants on the shift.

Sergeant Richardson handled the office area up here, and he didn't have anybody to handle calls for him, in essence, but he handled this area up in here and then Seaman handled the area down there. [Indicates.] And we got some signs up and roadblocks up and started maintaining the roadblocks and patrolling the devil out for looters.
M: So you were kind of in that end of the operation.

U: Right. After about Tuesday, that's when we kind of switched over, and we were in the law enforcement business again.

M: Okay.

U: That was kind of like a kick in the tail. We had a lot of people wanting to get into the area, a lot of sightseers wanting to get into the area. We had a lot of good cooperation from ... Fort Collins PD came down, and they offered us a bunch of manpower for roadblocks, and boy, that helped out tremendously. And CSU and Weld County Sheriff's Department, if it wouldn't have been for all of these organizations we would, I don't know how we would have handled it.

M: You don't have that many ... .

U: No, we were just ... it didn't bring it really till light, but we were operating marginally on the manpower we had. Just marginally. And we had thrown in an emergency. It just ... bringing people out, all of them for so long, and then somebody's got to drop, or you got to give them some relief. Those people relieved us, and then we got to get on schedules.

M: But you didn't have lots of sightseers.

U: Yes, we had a little bit of looting coming on, but our guys really, took the bit in their teeth and we had people crawling all over down there.

M: Okay. Is looting a legitimate, Is it a real problem in something like this?

U: It can be; it can be. Yes, it really is. It's something you wouldn't believe, and even if you contact the people ... they say, "Well," you know, they don't think of it as looting.

They want to go down to see, and they walk along the river and here's you know, valuables, belongings, you know, but they pick them up and they think, "Well, nobody wants them, they washed down from God only knows where." They, you know, they don't think nothing of picking them up, they don't think
it's wrong. You know. In essence, it really is theft.

And we arrested a couple of people; found one who took a motorcycle, pulled it up in his front yard, and the officer stopped and said, "Is that yours?" "No. I just found it." "What you gonna do with it?" "Well, I figured I'd keep it." "Wait a minute. That belongs to somebody." You know, that type of thing.

My neighbor, his gas tank, he has one of these that sits on a stand, that had been washed right through my place, took out a couple of my fences, was way back out in back of my place. Back out in the boonies. And, geez, you know, there it sat, and it had a nozzle on it and everything, it was half full of gas, and he found it back there, no problem, but by the time he went back to go pick it up with the tractor with a loader on the front so he could pick it up some way, somebody had stolen the hose and the nozzle off of it. You know.

But I don't know. He had a gate back there, and I think he finally got his gate and whatever. I had two water troughs for my stock, and I never did find them. I don't know where they ended up. So I just went out and bought a new one. I just didn't have the time to . . . .

M: But looting can be a problem, then.

U: It can be. Definitely, definitely.

M: So you've got to do something.

U: So that's when we started with the pass thing. Residents get passes, because we want to get the residents back in there. You got to get them back in there because they know what their property is, and they're going to get all their stuff together. Or try to look for it and find it, and take it in, so if you can get your residents back in there, just your residents, then you're in good shape, and if you can exclude everybody else, and you can hold
the lid on, and patrol the devil out of it, and that's basically what we did.

And they caught three kids right in front of my house, and they'd been turned away at three different roadblocks. And finally they parked up the road and walked in. Walked around the roadblocks and came in. And one of our roving patrols stopped them. And, you know, three young juvenile kids from Fort Collins. You know, in the middle of the night? What were they in there for? I figure they're in there for no good. They aren't going to see anything in the middle of the night, I don't think.

M: Right.

U: And so, we caught them before they could do anything, and so we run them out. We had three police officers, now, from a different jurisdiction, two from ... the small town police officers, little towns over in Weld County. I don't know what towns ... they were from LaSalle and Pierce. And two of them were police officers, and one, I understand, had been fired. Or something of that nature.

But they came over in uniform, and they stole some gas in Loveland, they went to one of these U-Fill-Em or Fill-Em-Fast self-service gas stations, put in about ten dollars' worth of gasoline in their vehicle, and then left without paying for it, thinking, you know, maybe, you know, it's an emergency type thing, they'll just bill it to somebody else or something.

And then they badged their way through all our roadblocks. Well, it's the kind of a thing, you know, police officers recognize each other, especially if they're in full uniform. You know, and say, "Yeah, we're here to help out with patrolling and whatnot," and they went through our first roadblock and somebody said, "Hey, you know, I just checked through a
couple of Pierce and LaSalle police officers. Anybody know anything about them? Nobody knew nothing about them.

So a couple of our guys went out to check on them, see if they could find them in there, and they found them at the Dam Store, and they made it as far as the Dam Store, and they're out of their vehicle, and they went around the back of the Dam Store. Well, you know, again our guys jumped out and threw down on them, and they said, "Hey, we're police officers, we're cool," you know. I says, "Yeah, you're police officers. Reach for your gun, and you're a dead man."

And they put them back down in the street and disarmed them, well, "Who authorized you come in here? Who are you working . . . ?" "Oh, we're here to help you out with security." "Who authorized you?" "Captain Smith." "You come in here, you know all about this?" "Oh, yeah, yeah. Is that the guy who's chief of patrol? Oh, yeah, yeah." "Got news for you. The chief of patrol's name isn't Smith." You know, and so they booked them and took them to the Loveland Police Department, and I don't think, well, Loveland ended up letting them go.

What can you charge them with? Only entering an area that was secure. And they shouldn't have been in there, but they didn't do anything. It's kind of hard to charge them with an intent to do something wrong if you can't unscrew their head and prove that that's what they intended to do. That's what we think they intended to do.

M: But there is that kind of stuff going on?

U: Oh, yes.

M: Okay, but if you're going to control looting and all of the Big Thompson, you've got a personnel problem. That's a big area. You can roadblock, but there can be backpackers.

U: Yes.
M: There's ways of getting in there. There can be backpackers. So you got to deploy . . . you got substations.

U: Yes.

M: Cedar Cove and Drake . . .

U: Two at Cedar Cove, two at Drake, and two at the Glen Haven area.

M: But even then, you know, you're too thin.

U: You're deterring the honest man from wanting to do it. You've got the hardened criminal that really wants to do it, and he's going to do it on you anyways.

But our roadblocks helped out quite a bit because we established, you know, got our pass situation, and the guys roped in on the patrol were stopping and talking to people.

And the big help was getting our residents back in there. Because like along in the Glade Road area, you know, all my neighbors got together and not too many of the homes up above, the Cottonwood Estates and whatnot, were damaged.

Well, a lot of the citizens around my residence there, well, they all got together and they decided that all our deputy sheriffs down there, because basically we had these other agencies sitting on roadblocks, and we were patrolling in there . . . because we knew the residents a little more, but there residents felt that it would be a good idea, my neighbors, to have a resident there that could, you know, at a glance say, "Well, that person belongs and that one don't.

M: That's right.

U: And that helped out appreciably. It was unreal. Our guys were real thankful for that, and they went down there and stayed right with our guys, through a whole shift through the whole night they were in there, and all day long.

And somebody would pull up, because we had roadblocks within the se-
cured area too, in case cars slipped through someplace, and anybody that had a pass, because we had to let passes, for the main roadblock was on 34, and people that lived by the helipad up on Butte Road and whatnot had to have a pass to get in there, but they had no business being down in the disaster area. And we'd take those passes and tear them up as . . . .

M: Is the pass system just sort of come in due course? I mean, is it usual procedure or something like that?

U: I don't know whether it was usual or not. I think it is. If it isn't, it should be.

M: Whose idea was it?

U: Well, the Sheriff's.

M: The Sheriff's then?

U: Yes, the Sheriff says, "We got to have some type of control when we start letting people back in there. We've got to have something, say, that people that are in there should be in there. And we can readily differentiate people that should be there from the ones that shouldn't."

M: Right.

U: You know, because we had a lot of different people manning the roadblocks at that point. And we had people from, like Weld County and what not, and at that point we were letting residents in if they could show you their driver's license that said they lived in there.

Well, if I went over to Greeley right today, you know, and somebody handed me a driver's license that said Glade Road on it, I wouldn't know where Glade Road really is. The man in the moon.

So we had to have a pass system, and we had our officers, somebody, look at a driver's license, say, "Yeah, you do live in the area," and give them a pass. Or they'd look at the driver's license, say, "You don't live in the area. What do you want to go down there for?" "Well, I was gonna go
down to take a look."

M: Yes, okay. The reason for that is to protect property, control traffic, prevent looting . . . .

U: Right.

M: And I suppose keep from interfering with repair people and people that are working in there.

U: Yes. After about a week we tried to pull that roadblock on 34 there. We thought we had enough residents in there up to the Dam Store. The residents were back in, and that they'd have enough time that we'd pull the cork and pull those roadblocks and just patrol it. And, well, it didn't work out too well.

M: So you had to put it back in there.

U: Yes, we stuck it back in. We had about a two-hour lag there, and it seemed like somebody put the word out the minute we pulled our people off the roadblocks and everybody and their brother-in-law was out there driving up and down the road, getting out of their cars, walking in the ditch, picking stuff up and whatever.

And the residents came alive, and we stuck the roadblocks back in, and we had a mad half-hour in there where we kicked people out.

So we kept it over that weekend. It was a . . . we kept it then, Friday and Saturday and Sunday, and then Monday night, we just quietly pulled off and left the signs that said "Residents only. Pass required," and we just patrolled it. And things went pretty well then.

M: So . . . .

U: Once we got over the weekend. We got a lot of people out there driving up and down the roads to look. We're always going to have that, and they have been kind of a pain in the neck, but I think it'll . . . now that we've let
them in there; they had last weekend and we had . . . if I could have collected a dime for everybody that turned around in my driveway I'd be rich today, but there's been a lot of people in there, but I think all the curious ones got their look, and we won't see them again.

M: So you moved your roadblock up to the Dam Store, someplace?

U: Yes. Today, we're moving it to the Dam Store; we're pulling the roadblock off the Storm Mountain access road and Soderberg's, which are one and the same, just off of Buckhorn, and we were going up and over Storm Mountain and dropping into Drake.

Well, now they've got the road down from Estes Park into Drake, and we had . . . we punched a road in Coleman Clymer's property, which is on Carter Lake Road, and punched it up and over into Cedar Cove.

There's Cats, and they built a pioneer road back through the Narrows again, so, the minute we can open that up, then we'll close Coleman Clymer's, off the private property, and then we'll just have the one roadblock at the mouth of the Narrows.

M: How long do you estimate the roadblock system to continue?

U: This one's going to be kind of different, because these Corps of Engineers and these private contractors that are cleaning up above the Narrows are pretty well using that pioneer road through the Narrows, and we probably . . . I don't know, I'm thinking of at least two or three weeks.

And then they will have the residents back in there and give the Corps a chance to get back in there and clean up the debris and everything, and once the Corps has pretty well got all that debris, and the residents have got their property secured, whatever, and they've cleared the debris out of there, I think then we'll have to open it up. I'm looking in the vicinity of three weeks.

M: But you'll probably continue your substation?
U: Oh, yes, yes. With a little luck, maybe today we'll find out from Lee [McBrien]. They came down and promised us the moon, and then they told us, "But don't buy anything until you get a letter of approval." And that was a week ago, so that makes it kind of rough, you know, when they say, "Yeah, you can hire six people, and you can get four-wheel drives to put them in," and they'll be, cause that's the only way you can ever get around in that area, and . . . .

M: Sort of the lasting effects of this may be till next spring. If you have to continue the substation.

U: Yes, we're looking at least a year. We gauged it in at least, the plan I wrote out, the first six months here are going to be critical. I think basically now, the way they're progressing, the first four months are going to be critical.

We're going to have to be on top of it all the time and really watch it hard, and it's going to be a lot of work, but I think after that, I think things are going to calm down, and the road building's going to improve, and utilities are going to be back in, and now the phone service is in the Canyon. And so things are going to improve markedly after about four months and start to return to normal.

M: But you're getting back to normal police function, then?

U: Yes, other than missing four men off the regular patrol, which really cuts us low up here. Yes, we're back onto shifts again, we're giving people days off after fourteen days in a row now, and we've finally got some people two days off.

It was really kind of funny, because at least their first day off, you know, they couldn't sleep. They had to get up and felt they should have been coming back to work, and just about every one of them we have at least come to the office at least once during their first two days off that they
got after this incident, you know.

They'd been on for two weeks or however many days without a day off or a break, and suddenly, you give them a break, and they just sat down and didn't know what to do with themselves. And found them wandering around here in the office saying, "Gee, what's going on today?"

M: One last question. Did this experience leave any thoughts, any ideas? Did it change your life in any way? Change the way you operate?

U: Oh, (laughs).

M: That may be a difficult question to answer.

U: Yes, it's... it is a difficult question. I imagine that it's changed things a little bit.

M: You certainly have experience in disaster.

U: Yes, I've got a good experience in disasters, I guess, but it didn't shake me up that bad, you know, or change my life to any appreciable amount.

I lived through four years in the Marine Corps in Vietnam, and you know, a lot of things don't shock me, I mean after seeing that, I don't shock too easily, and after being a cop for six years, I... things that happen to people, that people do to people don't shock me too much anymore.

You're kind of thickskinned, and you got to get an attitude, I think, the Marine Corps gives you a kind of an attitude that, about life, is a little easier to cope with, maybe.

But yes, I notice, I can notice the spirit de corps [sic] and the department pull together, when the thing broke out, you know, the organization really kind of matured, and we started working as a team.

And it always has been kind of a family; it's kind of Sheriff Watson's philosophy, you know, and the organization has progressed quite a bit, you know, as far as our relations with each other and everything, but, oh, it was a heck of an experience.
I can imagine sitting back and telling my two sons about it and one's two and a half and the other is a year. And I can see, you know, ten years from now, telling them about it, and they can think their old man's an old fuddy-duddy when I tell them all about, "Well, this was all underwater, and our lawn was buried in about a foot of silt," and they just can hardly believe it.

M: Well, we'll close on that point. Thank you very much.
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