

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Danny Jan**

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Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Bob Gaffney

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Transcript

GOODSILL: It's my understanding that this building has had three separate uses. In 1954 it was a jail. In 1981 it became a juvenile detention center and in 2005 it became used for the Office of Emergency Management. Where does your life intersect with this building?

JAN: I was born in Richmond January 2, 1953. I watched this building evolve pretty much all my life. In the early seventies I became a police officer. I was a reserve deputy with Fort Bend County. I brought prisoners here when it was a jail. I can remember the radio tower that was here. Because there wasn't that much growth, when we were driving in from any direction to work Richmond we could see the radio tower from a long way off. So the tower gave us an idea we were getting close to Richmond and close to this building.

GOODSILL: What was the purpose of the radio tower?

JAN: At that time, the Sheriff's office dispatched all law enforcement out of this building. There might be one Sheriff's office patrol deputy on the east side of the County, one on the west side, and we dispatched for all of the cities. We might have one or two officers working so everyone had to work together. Everybody brought prisoners here.

I had wanted to be a fireman all my life. In 1973 or '74 after I got out of high school I went to the fire academy and became a fire fighter in Missouri City. Shortly afterward I went to Police School and I became a Reserve Deputy on the side. Twenty-seven years later I retired from Missouri City as the Fire Chief. I was the Chief Administrator for about 18 years. I have a lot of family in this county and this town. Richmond means a lot to me.

GOODSILL: From 1974 to 1992 there was lots of development in Missouri City.

JAN: When I started working there the population was eleven thousand. The fire station at that time was behind the WKM plant. It was just some lean-to buildings. A coordinated effort between Missouri City and the WKM fire brigade created a fire department back in the fifties. WKM was a valve-manufacturing company. They had an existing fire brigade. The City of Missouri City incorporated in 1956 and they needed to form a fire department. They went to the WKM fire brigade and worked together. I think WKM even helped them buy their first fire truck.

GOODSILL: Now that is good. That is public/private cooperation.

JAN: That's exactly what it was. The first fire station was built on the WKM site on Cravens Road. That's where I started working in 1974. I was the seventh paid fire fighter there. Now they have fifty or sixty. In 1982 I became the Assistant Chief under a public safety officer program where we consolidated police and fire. I started running the fire department under a Director of Public Safety.

I was interested in law enforcement and I went to the Police Academy. I took night classes from Texas A&M University downtown. There were four or five of us that carpoled for months until we got our certifications. I became a Reserve Deputy at the Precinct 1 Constable's Office and I was promoted to Sergeant. Before I left in 1982 Missouri City consolidated their police and fire departments. I transferred my police commission to the Missouri City Police Department. In 2000 I retired from the City of Missouri City and I came to work for Fort Bend County.

I went to the Precinct 4 Constable's Office. I was thinking of retirement or doing something different so I started doing warrants and civil process. I noticed that I was used to being in the middle when bad stuff was happening in this county; no one was calling me anymore and it didn't feel right. I was out of the loop. The Emergency Management Office was going through some changes. Steven Noto, who was the fire chief of Richmond, told me to apply so I did. I got an interview with Jeff Braun, who had recently been appointed as the Emergency Management Coordinator. He hired me for the job of Assistant Emergency Management Coordinator. This was in 2004.

My job was more operational. I learned that the role of emergency management is to coordinate people, agencies, resources, and information and in some cases, coordinate activities by going out in the field. "You're hired and, by the way, we're going to have a huge exercise in this building in a couple of months." So we had two or three months to get this place organized for a big exercise.

Jeff and I were still trying to get the lay of the land. The building looked nothing like it is today. This room that we're in on the second floor is the Operations Room; it used to be jail cells. They had some folding tables in here. There were some phone lines hanging out of the ceiling. They had a table at the front of the room with a TV stand on top of it and a TV on top of the stand. That was pretty much the Operations Room in the Emergency Operations Center. Texas Engineering Extension Service, or TEEX, came out and conducted the exercise. It was a learning experience for us. We had too many people in here. Everybody was on top of each other.

After 9-11 a Presidential Document came from President Bush saying that everybody's going to operate the same way. Governor's Perry office said Texas is going to do the same thing. At one point our Commissioners Court came out and declared we were going to follow the National Incident Management System [NIMS] for handling emergencies. Jeff Braun tasked me with setting up visits with people from the County and outside the County that may be able to guide us on how we should design the Emergency Operations Center. We listened to everybody and then I drew some ideas on a piece of paper and the room looks pretty much like that today.

GOODSILL: Would you walk us through it?

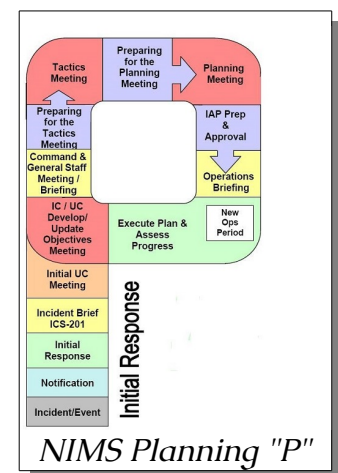
JAN: The room we're in now is the Operations Room. It's a series of consoles that are strategically placed. The purpose of this room is for different departments within the County or agencies, like the power company, to coordinate activities. It's very regulated as to how many people are allowed in this room in an emergency and we keep voice levels down. We schedule follow up meetings using a process called the Planning "P". There's a planning section that schedules briefings for each twelve-hour operational period. The product of the



Fort Bend County Emergency Operations Center (Activated) for hurricane response.

briefings is an Incident Action Plan that is used to carry on to the next shift; briefing them and guiding them regarding things they need to be doing. A situation report also states what a shift actually did. Most of the briefings include the County Judge.

If anyone needs anything (like barricades) it goes through the Logistics Section, which is staffed by the County purchasing people. They are very good at what they do, particularly during disasters. There's a software system in place to request resources. Anything that has been requested can be tracked by Logistics to determine its status.



Not only does the Sheriff's Office make requests through the Logistics Section, if the cities run out of barricades, then they come to the County. It's our job to try to fulfill their request. If we can't, then we go to the next level, which is the Region. If that doesn't work, then we go to the State and Department of Public Safety. There is a hierarchy for filling the resource needs. Logistics is a very busy and an important part of the process.

The next section is Health and Human Services. Fort Bend County Emergency Medical Services console is positioned next to Health and Human Services because they work for them. The Health Department covers environmental issues, animal control, and clinical services. If there's a pandemic event, it falls under the County Health Department. Dr. Kendrick is the health authority for Fort Bend County. Her staff supports Health and Human Services. The County Ambulance Service is under the Health Department and uses the console adjacent to the Health Department.

At the consoles, we have software where we share information within the building and outside the building, such as in the cities where we can watch things. Most of southeast Texas is using the same software, called WebEOC. We share information for situational awareness. We can tell what's going on during an event by sharing information. Resources are requested through that software. I have an incident management team at the Sheriff's office that runs just that office. They know how the software works; they send information and can see new information when it pops up on their screens. They can also order things. The system is integrated and shared by all of us.

Some of these consoles have specific software loaded that is targeted to their mission. One of their responsibilities is managing debris throughout the county. They can analyze an area to determine when the last time there was a freeze, how many limbs might have been lost, what's left, what the wind speeds are, how much debris this storm could generate, or how many trucks or people will be needed. The health department has software that can track availability of beds in hospitals in the county.

GOODSILL: Where is the Information Technology department located?

JAN: Here in Richmond, just a few blocks away. They're County IT employees. When I worked here, the County assigned one of their people here just to keep things up to date. Connectivity, backups, and redundancy are very important. During Hurricane Ike, we weren't getting good information regarding lift stations and sewer treatment facilities. Afterward we brought all the utility companies and their operators together to come up with a plan where we could have good information.

So now there are utility representatives sitting in here with us. The whole idea is that we're working together with the different agencies because it's about information and coordination. We had some areas of the town where pumps weren't working because electricity generators were failing and we had to manage the sewage. Things were backing up on the streets. They've addressed these issues and now bring them into the center during an event. You can see why we've put Utilities next to Road and Bridge. Under the County plan, Road and Bridge is responsible for Utilities.

The Fire and Law Enforcement console is staffed by a LECON [Law Enforcement Console] team. We have a LECON team at the Sheriff's office headed by a Lieutenant. He has six people that would deploy here if we go to Level 1 activation. A Level 1 activation is the highest level where we staff twelve hour shifts 24 hours per day.

The County has four levels of readiness. When nothing is happening, we're at Level 4. If there's a hurricane in the Caribbean forecast to enter the Gulf of Mexico, and it's forecast to head towards the upper Texas coast, Judge Hebert could decide to take us to Level 3. That's an increased readiness level; we start notifying people to pay attention to things. If a hurricane enters the gulf and is headed our way, about 72 hours before landfall, the County Judge may change the readiness level to Level 2. All the County departments start refueling vehicles, generators get checked and so on. When a hurricane continues coming at the Texas coast, Judge Hebert will announce when the County will go to Level 1. All the Emergency Operations Center seats will be filled at that moment.

The law enforcement console doesn't run the Sheriff's office. The Sheriff's office has its own team that links to this console. The Law Enforcement console looks at the County overall. If Missouri City needs police help it comes to this console and our job is to provide them help, whether its people, resources, equipment, or vehicles. The same goes for the fire console. It looks at the needs across the County, looking at the big picture. Typically the County Fire Marshall's office staffs the fire console twenty-four hours a day during activation.

The Transportation console is Paulette Shelton's team. They have taken on some pretty big tasks here and gotten them done. The console in front of them is the Red Cross, sheltering and taking care of people. They help families with immediate needs like finding a place to stay temporarily if they've been burned out of a house or getting them a refrigerator or other immediate needs to sustain them until they can get more help. But during an emergency activation, particularly hurricanes, the Red Cross manages all the sheltering in this County.

Having said that, Fort Bend County is a Tier II county and our job is to move people through here and not shelter them here. Our job is to get them off the coast, through the county and up north. What you don't want to happen is to shelter them and when a storm makes landfall here, you have to move them again. We're close enough to the coast that evacuees need to be moved through the county and up north.

GOODSILL: It's like three-dimensional tic-tac-toe to keep it all going!

JAN: That's what the County Emergency Operations Center is all about. Our mission is to coordinate the response requirements of the county. There's a sign behind you that reminds us that success is about information. We want to remind everyone in the room to think about what they know, who else needs to know what you know and who has resources that you might need.

In Hurricanes Rita and Ike, we had to move the population of the Richmond State School ("The Richmond State Supported Living Center" now). They came to us when the storm was getting pretty close to landfall saying the kids needed to be moved; about eight hundred people which includes the school resident population and all staff. The Transportation console coordinated the buses, and the right kind of buses and drivers. The Roads and Bridges handled fuel. Law Enforcement had to get enough escorts to get the buses to the state school in Brenham. This was all coordinated two days BEFORE landfall. The Health Department and EMS considered health and medical issues for the people on the buses. This is an example of how different disciplines came together to make something happen. There were a lot of briefings and meetings and we did it by following the Planning "P" structure. And we did it twice...we had to get them back home after the storm. We had to use a lot of buses because only a few people could fit on each bus.

GOODSILL: [Paulette Shelton](#) told me they could only put one or two wheel chairs on each bus because the chairs had to be restrained using four points to keep them safe.

JAN: Yes.

GOODSILL: The Communications Room is separate from this room. Tell us about that.

JAN: The Communications Director has a couple of roles. We can broadcast live or prerecord messages to our AM1670 radio system, which has ten transmitters throughout the County. There are sixteen blue and yellow alert signs throughout the County that tells citizens to tune their radio to AM 1670.

During Hurricane Ike Judge Hebert made a recording every day covering everything from when electrical power would be restored to when your debris would be picked up. Anything we thought would be useful to the public, including evacuation route information. Judge Hebert knows how to command the county's emergency response and he knew how to set the tone for EOC response operations. We have two fax machines, one dedicated to outbound faxes and one dedicated to inbound faxes so one doesn't bog the other one down. We have some analog phones so if the digital system goes down analog phones are used as a backup. We shared the analog phone numbers with the city EOC so we'd have a second backup way of communicating with them.

The room behind us is the Command Room. That's where Judge Hebert sits with his command staff. One of those people is the Public Information Officer. That person is responsible to get the word out and that it's the right word. We want one message going out, not only among all of us but to the cities. The Public Information Officer is the focal point for getting that information out using press releases and setting up press conferences. Since I left this building they created a Joint Information Center. The County Sheriff's Office, the Library System, and the Health Department all have Public Information Officers. They bring these PIOs in to form a team that works in the Joint Information Center with the Judge's PIO, who directs the team. They set up the press conferences. The Joint Information Center is critical to get messages out that won't confuse people.

Almost all of the computer monitors that you see have two screens. The right screen is hooked into a network along with larger monitors throughout the building. Any of the monitors can be viewed in any office. If Judge Hebert wanted to know what the shelter status was he would call the Red Cross and tell them to put the schedule on the right screen and the image could be sent to his office or downstairs. It is information sharing.

GOODSILL: What's on those large monitors at the front of the room?

JAN: They are hooked into the same network and they can be used for projectors mounted below the ceiling as well. Typically they will display on the WebEOC, which is situational awareness for what's going on one screen and weather, if the event is weather related. Whatever we feel needs to be shared with the room. In the corner we have a stack of four televisions. It's important to keep up with what's going on in the outside world.

In a hurricane we had people in here watching their own neighborhoods flood. TV stations were following Galveston. Paulette, who lived in Galveston, was sitting here working. She never wavered but could look up and see them flying over her house and she could keep an eye on what was happening there. She did a good job. That was a tough time for her. I have a lot of respect for Paulette and everybody working in here.

Another role of the Communications Room is the phone bank. The main phone number in this building is routed to them and they bring in people who handle incoming phone calls. You might have someone who handles phones in the courthouse or the annex by day. They handle calls for us in the phone bank. They answer citizen calls for information and focus on whatever the hot topics are at the time. Questions about power or status of debris are handled by the phone bank operators. They give information based on what the Communications Director provides from the EOC Operations Room.

We have another group called the Emergency Management Radio Operators Group (EMROG). It's a group of volunteers who are Ham Radio operators. I think our group is one of the strongest radio operator groups in the state. They operate out of a room adjacent to the phone bank and are recognized by the Federal Government and the State of Texas through RACES, which stands for Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service. When we're in a catastrophic situation or disaster and all of our radios fail because our towers are all damaged and we can't talk to the outside world, the Ham radio operators can still talk. Every dispatch center in the County has one of their people that deploys and sets up a backup communications network that enables them to talk with the other cities and dispatch centers in the county. They can talk to other counties. When we activate, you can hear them start testing, making sure they're connected to Harris County and Galveston County. They can also pass a disaster declaration via their radio network all the way to the State Operations Center, which is underground, in Austin. They are an important part of what we're doing here.

GOODSILL: And then there's a place where they are making maps.

JAN: Yes, they have a plotter there that's connected to GIS. There are times when Judge Hebert wants a big map printed out or a schedule or phone numbers that could be shared. We can put it on something big and run it through the plotter.

I want to go back to the phone bank. Logistics is always very busy because it is nonstop for them and so was the phone bank. People called in who were frustrated because their debris wasn't getting cleaned up and they had to deal with them. That phone bank job isn't for everybody. The people who work in there did an amazing job. The fact that they deal with phone callers every day helped them to understand when people are frustrated. When people call in, our job was to get the best information out that we can and the phone bank served that purpose.

The offices in here are designed to be breakout rooms. We had screens and monitors where people could look at stuff. But, as an example, with the State School situation, if anybody needed to take some people aside they could go into one of those rooms and work out something without disrupting what was going on in the main room.

Another room cross the hall from the Command Room is Bob Stone's office. He handles all the grants but that room becomes where our Finance and Administration folks meet. The County's purchasing people can have somebody in there working and, if necessary, they could combine Logistics and Finance together since it's kind of the same people. Finance and Administration deal with the business part of what we're doing, such as record keeping for reimbursements.

Downstairs there's a Media Room. It's designed so that during a disaster camera crews can pull up outside with their trucks, plug into a box in the wall, and bring their cameras inside and plug their cameras in on the inside.

GOODSILL: Did you have something to do with designing that?

JAN: That was all done while I worked here.

GOODSILL: That's very clever.

JAN: Otherwise they were bringing cables through the doors and you couldn't secure anything. We took that concept over to the Sheriff's Office. We do a lot of press conferences there. We installed the same box over there. The media likes it. It makes it easier for them.

They don't have to run a lot of cables and we can still maintain a sense of security around the building without having doors jammed open with cables. During Hurricane Ike, Governor Perry and his entourage actually worked out of here. They spent a day with us.

GOODSILL: Why?

JAN: It was close enough TO the storm yet not IN the storm so they could come in and look at how things were happening and get updated. They worked with us, did some communicating with us, and Governor Perry sat in the Command Room. Then they did a press conference.

GOODSILL: Who was “the boss”, the Governor or the County Judge?

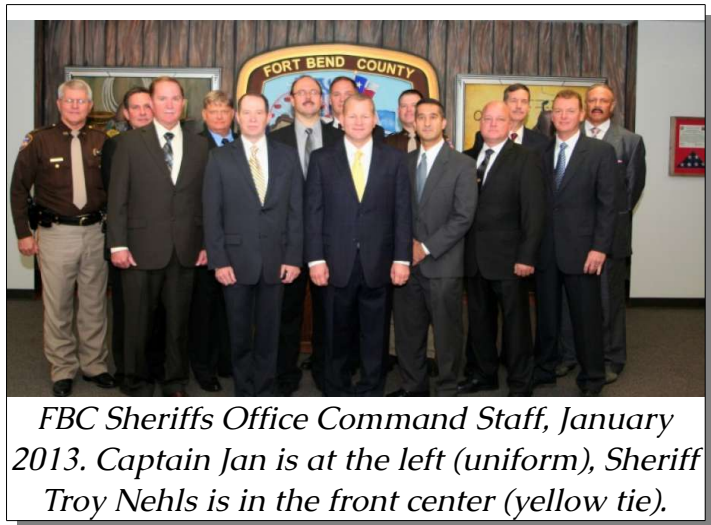
JAN: Governor Perry was there but Judge Hebert was still the boss. During a disaster Judge Hebert and Mayors become Agents of the Governor. That's really the only time they rise above all other elected officials is during a disaster. It gives them the authority to take care of business as we prepared for and responded and went through the storms. The recovery from the storm is another part of it. The roles adjust when we move into recovery mode; Road and Bridge take a larger role. Getting the county back to normal takes just as long as anything. After the storm is over we are still working. Residents are wondering where's my water and how come you haven't picked up my debris?

GOODSILL: You helped design this area to its current usage, and then you were here for several big incidents. Now you're doing something different?

JAN: I'm at the Sheriff's office doing the same thing. For the first few years my job was to get the Sheriff's Office in compliance with NIMS training requirements. The Mobile Command Post needed to be done a certain way. They're funded by the federal government and overseen by the state. Even though we're the keepers of the assets they are regional assets.

GOODSILL: What's your title?

JAN: I'm a Captain. I was a Lieutenant when I first went over there. Part of the Emergency Management plan is warning the public. Our dispatch center is the third busiest Communications Center in the region. We average a thousand 911 calls a day. Sometimes it was hard for me to get coordination done with them so the new Sheriff, Troy Nehls, put me over that as well.



FBC Sheriffs Office Command Staff, January 2013. Captain Jan is at the left (uniform), Sheriff Troy Nehls is in the front center (yellow tie).

Lieutenant Riendeau took over my role as Emergency Coordinator. It's our job to make sure the LECON Team is ready. We organized an Incident Management Team to run the Sheriff's Office. We've never had that before. If we were to go to Level 1, we have a team that will run the Sheriff's Office much like this room [Emergency Operations Center] but it's just for the Sheriff's office. They know to work through the conduits of the Logistics and the LECON Team. If they need stuff, they come here.

GOODSILL: So each city has an Emergency Management Center but this is the County's Emergency Management Center?

JAN: Even though the Health Department is in here looking at their console, they have their own center that will run their own department. This is the "nerve center", if you will. The cities are the same way. They are responsible for themselves but we're responsible to help them if they can't help themselves anymore.

The cities have a training room they can convert into an Emergency Center. Some of them have some full time EOCs, smaller versions of this one.

GOODSILL: This is quite a different job than a patrol police officer. You've come a long way in your career.

JAN: What I liked about the emergency management side is that I like working with the big picture. I like working with other agencies. I like knocking down walls and barriers between agencies and departments. I always believe we can do so much more when we work together, make it more streamlined. We've come a long way in this county. I'm very proud of where this county has come. To see this building change from what it was. In my young days, when I was a Reserve Deputy, I would bring prisoners here. This building is special to me. It was a jail and we would drive in to the Sally Port and bring prisoners in downstairs and book them. There was one dispatcher dispatching everybody and it was pretty amazing to see the transformation to what it is today, particularly if you knew how it was back then.

GOODSILL: This is an interesting building. It's a retro, old fashioned building.

JAN: It was built in 1954 so it's an old building now sporting modern technology, a blend of everything.

GOODSILL: It couldn't have been easy to upgrade since the walls are concrete.

JAN: That was the next thing I was going to say. When we went through that transformation there were times when I was in the Operations Room pointing to a portion of ceiling that had been raised. It was a concrete, wire mesh ceiling. There were times when things were crashing and we weren't sure what was happening. We actually had to move that thick concrete wall four feet back. Everything was solid cinder block and steel. It is probably the best building to be in during a hurricane!



Renovated Fort Bend County Office of Emergency Management, 307 Fort Street, Richmond, Texas 77469. Formerly the FBC Jail and later the FBC Juvenile Facility.

GOODSILL: No flood issues?

JAN: No. We are close to the river. We're on the high side of the river but we've never had any flood issues here. Judge Hebert sits in a certain seat on a console looking through these windows. We kept bringing the ceiling back until he could see everything. He also can bring imagery of everybody's console into his room. He can see what everybody's doing. It's all about information. When we took over, the previous administration had already cleared out all the jail cells and turned it into what it was when we got here. It was not an easy task to get all these cells out. They would cut out all these cells and take them down the stairway on the east side of the building. The steps on the landing were almost flat because there was so much weight going down there. We had to completely rebuild that staircase out there. My office, which was right across the hallway, was actually a padded cell in the early days. We looked at the plans. My office and Bob Stone's were actually two cells with a little corridor so you would walk in and there would be two doors. One of them was a death cell. If someone was sentenced to die, they were held in this room until it was time to move. My office was two padded cells, as I understand.

GOODSILL: The crazy room.

JAN: Everybody teased me about that but that's what it was. It was two little cells and that little corridor are now one office. It was hard for me to let go. I don't work here. I've been thankful them for not changing the locks on me and letting me still come in here.

GOODSILL: You have a sense of ownership of this?

JAN: Absolutely.

GOODSILL: During an emergency are you here or are you at the Sheriff's office?

JAN: Because I have a Lieutenant that handles it, he's going to be the one to be working closer with this deal. I'm over at the Crisis Intervention Team, the Mental Health Response Team, our dispatch center and other things. I won't be assigned here but our Team will and the Lieutenant will. I'll probably be coordinating our Incident Management Team LECON.

GOODSILL: Let me get this straight. The next emergency that comes up will be the first time that you've been at the Sheriff's office instead of here?

JAN: Yes. There hasn't been a major hurricane since I've been over there. There have been some small levels of activation where we put minimal numbers of people in here. We brought some LECON people when we had some flooding going on with localized rains. Since we formed the Incident Management Team at the Sheriff's office, we had an exercise and some training so they're ready but they haven't been tested for real yet. So I'll probably be over there in a coaching mode. Many of them are very well trained already so we feel a lot more ready than we were in the past.

GOODSILL: I think an interview like this is interesting for people who have no idea what happens during an emergency except that their road is flooded and there's this tree floating down the street.

JAN: I'm going to say over and over again. It's coordination and information sharing. Information is critical and communication. Are we communicating the right things?

GOODSILL: Not only that, it's assigning people to go out for damage assessment and pick up the debris.

JAN: You want to be thinking about that ahead of time, before it happens, not while it's happening. They're very good here at the Office of Emergency Management. I'm very proud of what Judge Hebert and Jeff Braun have done here. I'm very lucky to have been a part of it. I'm going to be retiring soon and I can leave proud. I also have to say that since I left, with Alan Spears here, they have taken this to even another level. They've done more to it and made the building better and better. They've done an excellent job.

GOODSILL: Thank you for this interview.