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Deed of Gift and Release: Individual Interview

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I have read the release, understand it, and intend it to be a binding instrument.

Richard E. Repstein 12/7/12
Signature of the Interviewee/Photo Subject Date

Elyse M. Mearns 10 Dec 2012
Signature of Authorized Agent Date

Summary of Restrictions:

_____ [See Deed of Gift: Restrictions

SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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 Address 617 N. Grand, Pierre, South Dakota
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 Name of Researcher Earl Hausle
 Others Present none
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Civil Defense action during and after flood.

Demographic Information on Informant

Age 38 Sex Male County Pennington

Socio-economic status _____

Occupation Field officer, South Dakota Civil Defense

Education 15 1/2 years

Religion Protestant

Date of Arrival of Family in South Dakota _____

Where? _____

From Where? _____

Number of Moves in South Dakota _____ Reasons for moves: _____

EH Monday, June 26th, 1972, Earl Hausle interviewing Richard Repstein ^{of} Rapid City, South Dakota, Dick, you're a field officer with the South Dakota state Civil Defense; when were you first notified of the tragedy here in Rapid City, and what events occurred subsequent to that?

RR I was notified at 5:30 Saturday morning in Pierre, notified to proceed to the state Civil Defense EOC which is in the basement of the state capitol building to help down there because that we had this disaster in Rapid. And I worked in the state EOC coordinating efforts down there for the state all day Saturday and Saturday night. And then Saturday evening John Powell called me from Rapid and told I and Raymond Henderson to come to Rapid Sunday morning, which we did. On Sunday morning we left Pierre at approximately 8 o'clock in the morning to drive to Rapid City, and when we arrived in Rapid, we could see, of course, the destruction; I had no idea what I was going to do when I arrived here. And we proceeded immediately to the support area EOC which is out at Camp Rapid and talked to John, Dick Trankle, and John advised us to go down to the local Emergency Operating Center ~~in~~ in Pennington County which Raymond and I did, to help them in anything that they needed, and I spent the next 8 days helping out in the county OC just doing things that needed to be done down there.

EH Whos is this John..Powell is it?

RR John Powell.

EH What position is he?

RR He is the deputy Civil Defense director ~~of~~ for the state of South Dakota.

EH Well, what was the situation that you found when you got down to the county courthouse that Sunday?

RR Well, the EOC was in operation, set up and functioning, but the right people weren't there. The EOC should be comprised of your governmental officials and I did not see but one or two of the governmental officials there, and there were too many people in the EOC that shouldn't have been there. We were told to just survey the situation, which we did, and helped as best we could, and this is all that we did.

EH You would say then that the situation was somewhat confused at this point?

RR Well, I don't know what, I wouldn't call it confused, no, I would maybe use another term

RR a little more appropos. Confused, the people that were there did not know what they should be doing, they were taking calls and manning the EOC, but an EOC operation is for governmental officials, and this is why confused really isn't the word. People were being asked questions that they had no knowledge of. And so maybe confused from that standpoint, yes.

EH Do you think that the EOC at this standpoint was operating with very much success, then?

RR No, no. EOC can't operate with any great success without the right people in it.

EH Now, can you be specific as to who should have been there?

RR Well, let's, yeah, I can. Let's go back and define what Civil Defense actually is. So that we understand what we're talking about. Civil Defense, by definition, is nothing more than local government operating in an emergency. So that when you go into an EOC type of situation like was present down there, you should have representatives from your different departments in that EOC. Your water department, you need a representative from county government, in fact, you should have the , the advisory board should be in EOC. These are the people that should make the decisions. You need representatives from your, all of your county and your city functions, your public utilities, you need welfare, you need a legal counsel, you need , these are the type of people that should be in the EOC to operate it. This is where they get the information, so that people that need the information can come down and say , "We need it, and you've got the people there that can make the decision." My own idea of a, of a emergency operating center, I thought maybe would last longer, but after ~~doing this~~ viewing this, I can see where it's a short interim period for time maybe like here it operated 3 to 5 days or maybe 6 days, 7 days. But it doesn't need to stay there very long when everything starts to recede back to normal and these people can go back to their individual offices and function from there. But under the emergency, they need to come to a central point to operate.

EH How important do you think it is that these local officials be adequately prepared to man this kind of an operation?

RR Well, very important, but it doesn't take any special training other than the fact that they should be there. Because they're performing their normal duties. They're not doing anything that they wouldn't do from day to day, they're just doing it under a

RR Different situation, working under different conditions.

EH Well, when, at what point would you say that this situation go ~~xx~~ into its proper function? When did we get the, the proper people into the EOC?

RR Well, after they requested that Dick Trankle take the operation over, then we began getting the, the department heads or the representatives of these departments down into the EOC. And from that time on, this was on Monday morning, and from that time on, Monday afternoon, the EOC began to function very smoothly, they routed everything in, we got an operations officer down there to handle the operations and they funneled everything through Civil Defense or through the EOC as it should have been, and took the load off the rest of the people. And this is actually what has to happen. Because you can't go to the (bearing) agencies outside of this, because they should all be there and that way they can get it all coordinated, and this is all that an Emergency Operating Center is, is a coordinating center.

EH Well, if, if then, the, the manual of the regular procedures had been followed, this would have been established immediately ~~axxx~~ and functioned as it should have from the beginning. It was a matter then, would you say, not that proeedures weren't laid out in that (manuel), that somehow they weren't followed in the beginning.

RR Very correctly spoken, yes. The , all of the procedures were there, everything was there, and not necessarily followed, but I'll asked the question, how are you going to get the people to follow these prãcedures?

EH Well, I think this, this is a matter of having to trian them and informa them of what they're supposed to do in the case of an emergency, I suppose.

RR They have been trained, and we're, in Civil Defense, state Civil Defense helps to prepare these people by holding what they calla EOS which is an Emergency Operation Simulation on and EOC type of a situation. And there have been some conducted out here in Rapid City. Now, what frequencyes they should be conducted and how important these become to the individuals that are receiving the training is pretty hard to determine.

EH Weãl, I don't know exactly what happened or why this operation was off the track, but I
t know that as a memeber of the Rapid City Council, I have never been apprised of Civil Defense procedures. And although it isn't that councilmen are supposed to be involved

REH in the operation that you're talking about, of course, I think that some of the things that that the officials, the council or commission or whoever it is, may make decisions that revert to people that are supposed to be in this operation out of it, in others words, put them out on other assignments when they really should be in the Emergency Operating Center. I don't know whether this happened or not, but it appears to me that it would be a possibility. That is if the, if the decision making bodies are not properly apprised of how this is to function. Do you think that might have happened here?

RR I can't answer that question, really. I would just be a good guess of some sort if I did. I don't, I don't really have the answer to that one.

EH Well, now, in these, in these procedures, you're very familiar with how the state conducts these simulations and so on, is it established in those procedures that the policy making bodies will be apprised of what ^{is} ~~was~~ supposed to happen, how this thing is supposed to operate so they know?

RR Yes, and the , the governing bodies are actually brought into the, into the situation. They're, it is explained that they're supposed to be there. But again, like I say, how do you effect this and how do these people react, is something under a simulation exercise as compared to the actual exercise.

EH Well, let me ask you about the simulations, have they been simulations on , say, nuclear attack, or have they also been on natural disasters, do you know?

RR Well, we have some now on natural disasters, before, they were on nuclear attack, but the basic concept, the basic EOC is, remains exactly the same. I'm sure the situation is different, but the decisions are gonna have to be made, and this is really what we're ~~is~~ concerned about, ~~is~~ that they can be made, it doesn't make any difference what kind of a situation we've got.

EH Do you think that the disaster like the one we've had will make the people of South Dakota more cognizant of the possibility of natural disaster and that maybe this will help to improve our procedures, make us more aware of the situation?

RR I hope so, I hope that it begins to show the people the fact that there are things available for them. Like Civil Defense, that can provide them with this training in

RR the things that they do need. It always has been there, and we try to do the job that we, the best job that we can do, but when you're , when you're dealing with people, this isn't always, it ~~isn't~~ always adequate, I guess. They don't understand, maybe the urgency of it until you actually have a disaster. Now, in areas where they have had others types of disasters, snowstorms and we're going to put on an EOs, we get excellent response from them . These people are interested, they know, because they know from year to year they may have one. Where you have a situation ~~where~~ like you have here, it may not happen in a nother hundred years, I can't say what's going to happen, they maynot .

EH Do you have any particular observations about this flood or its aftermath that you would like to anything you observed or experienced or...?

RR Yeah, there is, by way of explanation, I think, that really ~~you can get down~~ if you get down and study it, very few changes have to be made in the way the things~~x~~ was operating. Basically, everything was set up and ready to use, and was there to use, and I think the total overall picture and ~~you know~~ the total overall operation went very smoothly, excepting that just for a few exceptiosn, which I think can be corrected very easily, I don't see any real great problem. Maybe a meeting of the minds between the city council and the county government on this advisory board ~~into maybe~~ and to maybe be sure to pick between the governing bodies who can represent to make the decisions down here and how they're going to handle this. But I don't see any real problems. Do you?

EH No, I don't think there are problems between the city and county government, I think it's just a matter of ^{getting} that the new people coming onto the ~~com~~mission and the council are properly introduced to these procedures so that everyone knows what steps have to be followed. I think the people who were aware and who had been trained, I think they responded in the proper way as they had been trained to do. But many of us didn't know how to respond, really.

RR Right. Well, this is something that I guess, it's a continueing education process that maybe we don't realize quite as readily , maybe it isn't quite as apparent as it should be, that these things must be constantly reviewed and looked at every, pretty near every year, cause you have a change in your commissions, and your, and your governing bodies

RR and even in your staffing. And these things should be discussed all of the time.

EH Well, I've heard it said that ~~several~~ Civil Defense, I'm thinking of it now on the local level, had, in polit~~ic~~language, gotten low priority, many times from local governments because the urgency didn't seem to be there. And some of our people are now saying that well, it's, it's going to get a better position now because we've had ~~some~~ this disaster and . Do you think this is, this is rypical? That Civil Defense ranks low on local government priorities in normal times?

RR It ranks low on the federal priorities, I don't know why it shouldn't rank low on the local. We don't really get the monetary support ~~xx~~ that we feel we would like to have, and I suppose this ~~was~~ common no matter what government you go or how far up or down the ladder you go; I think the situation like this makes people, will help people to reasses their situation and maybe dec~~ide~~ that they can utilize it, I hope they don't forget it to o quickly.

EH Well, you've lived in Rapid City before, I know, and how do you view the situation in the city now after the flood has ravaged a great part of it?

RR Well, the cleanupoperation seems to be going real smooth, the people that are working here are doing a good job, there are not too many problems presenting themselves, everything is running pretty smoothly. There's just a lot of damage to clean up. A lot of people lost their lives, and these are just things that happen, I don't know, all you can do is prepare for them and then, and then utilize what you have to work with after it's over and this is exactly what you do do.

EH I notice in ~~yx~~ a story in yesterday's paper that Ron stevenson, the count y commissioner is going to appear in Washington, D.C. because wondering how we got such rapid response, which would indicate what you have said, that we did have a pretty good operation right from the beginning, and that it got smoothed out more lateron with the help from State Civil Defense officials. Do you think that we can greatly improve upon what we had at that time?

RR Well, I think-a person should always try to, and I think individuals hsould try to improve on the situation, and this is what we at the Civil Defense at the state level would hope, that the counties and that the cities try to prepare themselves better for

RR these so that they can have a smooth operation without , without even the EOC concept you'd have been bawled up and pretty well muddled up, I don't see how you'd have functioned at all.

EH Well, this is true, I'm sure very important.

RR And this is part of our job this is part of our planning, we're a planning and coordinating agency, and this is what we do, is try to help people plan and coordinate things for' this type. We provide matching funds for communications systems, equipment, and things that people think they need, for Civil Defense for this operation, this type of a situation.

EH Do you have any particular observations about the damage or loss of life or anything that struck you as you came into Rapid City that morning?

RR Well, nothing that , nothing that I hadn't already been told , that the damage was great, and I still haven't been out Jackson Boulevard to Canyon Lake. I've been out in the Canyon Lake area, but not on Jackson Boulevard. All I'm really acquainted with is Baken Park down Omaha and, and around in that area, and then there are parts of the creek down there that you can't even see, so, but you can see how far the flood reached and what amount of damage it did , and you can imagine what it did up above. So I, as a first-hand information about the damage that is done, I don't really have a whole lot.