

**Naval Historical Center
Oral Interview Summary Form**

Interviewers:

CAPT Gary Hall
CAPT Michael McDaniel
CAPT(sel) Carol O'Hagan
CDR Karen Loftus
YNCS(AW) Kathleen Wright
LNC Jeff Luthi

Interviewee:

CMDMC(SS) Gale Bond

Interviewer's Organization:

Navy Historical Center
Navy Historical Center

Current Address:

██████████
████████████████████
Work – PERS 65

Date of Interview:

14 NOV 01

Place of Interview:

Port Mortuary
Dover AFB
Dover, Delaware

Number of Cassettes:

2

Security Classification:

UNCLAS

Name of Project: Pentagon Terrorist Attack Incident

Subject Terms/Key Words: Pentagon; Terrorist Attack; 11 September 2001; triage; evacuation; lessons learned; Defense Protective Service; FBI; carnage; Navy Command Center; renovation

Abstract of Interview:

Interviewee Information:

CMDMC Bond was born in ████████, CT, the only one of his family who was not born in Texas. His father was a submarine sailor stationed in Groton, CT when he was born and was discharged from the Navy three days after he was born. They moved from place to place following his father's jobs. They ended up in California where he spent most of his teenage years. He dropped out of high school at age 16. He took his GED on his seventeenth birthday and joined the Navy. Was stationed on the USS Skate in Pearl Harbor as well as other submarines and fleet commands. Reported to Navy Personnel Center, PERS 65 as the Senior Enlisted Advisor to Navy MWR this past June.

Topics Discussed:

On September 11 he was at a conference in Leesburg, VA. He received a call from CAPT Seapock, ADM Brown's (PERS 6) Chief of Staff. He told him that he was PERS 6's only representative on the east coast at that time and they had a job for him. He was told to go to Dover AFB and set up the Navy Liaison Office to handle mortuary affairs. He was told to establish a Navy office to help communication flow going out and coming in.

He was told to pick up PN1 Prince Brown at the Navy Annex to take him to Dover for admin support. They picked up what medical and dental records were available at the Annex for the Pentagon victims and took those to Dover with them. They also took a briefcase full of office supplies and the Master Chief's laptop. Neither of them had any background in mortuary affairs.

When they arrived they met CAPT O'Brien, who they did not know would be there. They went through the mortuary without any advanced warning of what they would see. They saw the assembly line process involved in dealing with the remains.

As a submarine sailor he was used to there being a procedure for everything. He initially asked for the instruction to cover what they were doing and was told there was none. He called PERS 6 to get some guidance. They initially wanted voice reports 5 times a day and written reports 4 times a day for the status of what was happening.

They had very little office equipment and no ADP support. Master Chief carries a \$25,000 NAF (Non Appropriated Funds) purchase card and was given authorization to buy whatever he needed with the card. Master Chief did not have uniforms with him (since he had been attending a conference when he was sent) and had to go buy new uniforms. He bought a printer, second laptop computer, and a copier. They received all their faxes through the Port Mortuary Director's office.

There were several commands involved, OPNAV N1, Naval District Washington, PERS 62, Mortuary Affairs in Great Lakes that works for BUMED, (with their own flag officer), and each wanted information.

When they began they were prevented to knowing identification of remains until PERS 62 notified them. The mortuary would identify a body, and call PERS 62. PERS 62 would call Navy District Washington and OPNAV N1 and tell them about the identification. The CACO would notify the family. After the family was notified PERS 62 would call them and give them the identification. At that point they would have to get the remains ready with the uniform, awards and transportation set up. Their primary focus was to try not to delay the remains being transported to the family's desired location.

There was never a Navy Liaison Office set up at Dover before. During the USS Cole aftermath they sent a couple of Navy morticians (E-5 and E-6) from Great Lakes at Dover. The Navy wasn't happy with how this worked so PERS 6 decided to send a more senior PERS 6 representative during this event.

They found after a few days all they were doing were writing reports and talking on the phone. After a few days they called Navy Comm. Cell and told them they would only be sending one daily report at the end of each day to update. This went out via email to OPNAV N1, Navy Comm. Cell, Mortuary Affairs Great Lakes, PERS 6, PERS 65, and CAPT O'Brien's boss at Navy Headquarters.

They established a process to deal with personal effects. If the body had already been shipped they FEDEXED the effects to the CACO who would present the personal effects to the family in person. If the body had not been shipped they would give the personal effects to the escort who would present them to the family.

They tried to keep a distance between themselves and the victims because it made it too hard to carry out their jobs knowing very much about the victims. They weren't very successful at this, and ended up coming to know the victims. This made it harder to keep composure.

They mainly dealt with the CACO's over the telephone or via email. The escorts had to go to Dover for their briefings and to escort the bodies.

A few weeks after the last Navy remains have left Dover Master Chief Bond and CAPT O'Brien will get together in Millington to debrief the Admiral and higher ups as well as to try to look at the difficulties they encountered, look for root causes and come up with solutions.

Lessons Learned:

Anyone associated with this type of duty assignment needs to keep in focus that what they are doing is for the families left behind.

You have to believe in what you're doing and understand it. You can't play politics in dealing with the deceased and their families.

You need to be able to make decisions and set precedent. Master Chief made the decision to put medals on the uniforms of the deceased. Their end of tour and posthumous awards were pinned to their uniforms. The parent command took care of the citation writing and presentation of the awards and medals to the families. Two sets of awards were then presented, one with the body and one to the family.

It took about five weeks for them to sort out their chain of command. Whoever writes the instruction, owns the instruction and should be the person in charge for Navy mass casualties. They need to write a cookbook for how you set up for mass casualties. Who is responsible for CACO's. Who do you get information from, who do you liase with, who coordinates the CACOs. Roles and responsibilities need to be delineated.

Abstracted by:
CDR Carol O'Hagan
19 NOV 01

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Topics Discussed:

A. (44;18) I don't know if it's fortune or misfortune to have been on a conference with the Army in Leesburg, VA on September 11th, when terrorists attacked the Pentagon. I got a call that night from CAPT CEPAK who was ADM BROWN—ADM BROWN's PERS 6—he's ADM BROWN's Chief of Staff. He called me up, said, "Master Chief, you're our only representative on the East Coast of the United States right now. You're within driving distance. You've got a rental car and you're ours, so I've got a job for you."

I said, "All right, Sir, have green ID card, will travel. What do you need?"

He said, "I need you to go to Dover Air Force Base."

I said, "That's in Delaware, right?"

He said, "Yes, that's Delaware."

I said, "OK, and do what?"

He says, "You need to set up the Navy Liaison office to handle Mortuary Affairs."

So I went on to explain to him, after saying, "Yes, Sir, I'll do that," said, "I don't know if you've got the right guy for it because I barely know how to spell mortuary, but you know, I'll give it a shot. What do I do there?"

He says, "Whatever we need you to do, just get there. Establish yourself, tell them the Navy is on the scene and figure it out from there, because there's nobody up there. There's chaos, there's no coordination. We have nothing going on and we have no information coming out or going in, so we need a point man and you're it."

"OK, will do."

So the following day he called me early in the morning and said, "First go down to Navy Annex and pick up PN1 PRINCE BROWN, who works at our Congressional Liaison office in Navy Annex, and take him with you for Admin support."

“OK, we can do that.” So I drove to the Navy Annex. I met PN1 BROWN. I’d never met him before. Absolutely fantastic sailor. I can’t say enough about him. Another one of those guys, you know, when—he wouldn’t tell the story, but BRUCE SHERMAN—he’s a retired Navy Captain; He’s our Representative Congressional Liaison at the Navy Annex—PETTY OFFICER BROWN wouldn’t tell the story, but BRUCE SHERMAN did, that when the plane hit the Pentagon, BROWN came back in (tape is turned over and Bond says, “That was thirty minutes, already.” Questioner responds, “It was running out of tape and that was 45 minutes.”) BRUCE SHERMAN was telling the story to me, that PRINCE BROWN had come in, told him what happened and he was out the door.

BRUCE walks outside and you can see from the front steps of the Navy Annex, you can look right down on the Pentagon to the side of the building that was hit, and here's PRINCE BROWN, First Class, wearing his whites, running toward the Pentagon, a bunch of Marine’s with him, and there’s this one sailor in a crowd of Marines running in the direction of the attack and a bunch of other people—I’ll reserve my opinions, only they know what was going through their mind—they’re running away. And BROWN stayed there the rest of the day at the crash site trying to render first-aid, doing recovery, running around doing whatever he could. Covered head to toe, soot, blood, you name it, the guy was just filthy. And he won’t tell you about it. BRUCE SHERMAN will tell you. PRINCE BROWN will tell you it never happened. That’s what kind of people we are. In my mind, that’s the ideal that we like to think that we would all rise to that, and I think for the most part, we all will.

I got to wondering, maybe those folks that were running away, a couple of them got in their cars and drove off. I wonder where their hearts and minds were at, because that’s not what we are all about. That’s not who we are. That’s the patriotic zealot in me coming out, but I believe that all

people, all Americans genuinely look at ourselves that way and we would like to think that we are all, we would all be heroic and self-sacrificing and all that. PRINCE BROWN embodied that for me.

Here's a guy who just saw an airplane crash into the side of the building. Doesn't even think about it. Just goes directly toward the scene, and that's what we try to teach everybody. That's what warfare qualifications are all about. Now when the ship gets hit, when the airplane crashes, whatever, you're the one to be relied upon, you and your shipmates to go for assistance and help out shipmates who can't help themselves. That man embodied that, so I know his warfare pins aren't a bunch of crap. They're for real. He deserves them. Some folks I've got to question.

That's just my own personal editorial on that one.

The following day with nothing going on in our office, PRINCE BROWN volunteers his time and goes down to the SHERATON and he works at the SHERATON for the next two days. He had to be recalled from the SHERATON, to come back to the Navy Annex so I could pick him up and we could go to DOVER.

We went over to the Pentagon and picked up what dental records they had available, a couple of medical records there at the Navy Annex and then drove up here to DOVER. You know we had a briefcase full of a couple pads of paper, some pens, some yellow stickies, a stapler, some tape and stuff like that and my laptop computer, which I brought with me to the conference. And we walked in the door, "OK, we're the Navy. We're here to go. We're here to support. What do we need to do?"

Of course PETTY OFFICER BROWN had no history in this and neither have I. The first corpse I'd ever seen was right here in Dover, and that was a Second Class Petty Officer who died in the Pentagon. So that was rather traumatic to say the least. We come in and we're setting up and we

had been talking all the way up. You know it's like a three hour drive getting up here and we were talking about what our game plan was, what we were going to do, and we were pretty much both lost saying, "Well, I guess we'll just figure it out when we get there."

First thing we've got to find a place to set up, establish phone con, call PERS-6 and ask them what they want us to do. So we get up here and CAPT O'BRIEN had arrived, I guess first thing in the morning, he got up here.

Q. (50:58) Did you know he was going to be here, or was that a surprise?

A. I had no idea he was going to be here. I thought it was just going to be PN1 BROWN and myself, and when I saw him there was a big sigh of relief on one hand and then pardon me I know you're all Reserves, but I find out this guys a P-3 pilot in the Reserves and I'm thinking of the horror stories my brother, a Chief AW P-3 guy has told me for the past twenty years about, you know, P-3 pilots and Reservists and this and that. So I had that stigma going into it, saying OK, well he can either be a really good guy, or he can be totally useless. Let's see how it goes. I had no reservations the first couple of days, I'll tell you, and he knows that. There are no secrets between us, but I'll tell you what. When it first started out, you know, trying to—one high charged emotional state. We don't know what's going on. The news is going round the clock. CNN's filling your head with the, the you know, voyeuristic approach to news that they have today. Just sometimes it's generally distasteful. I hope CNN hears this. And everybody's charged up and thinking the thoughts that they're thinking, and we've got this job to do and we go through the mortuary on our first day. They drug CAPT O'BRIEN and I through, without any type of advance notice, warning or whatever, and we're walking around in this assembly line process of nothing but partial remains, charred bodies with pieces of building and aircraft

sticking out of them and autopsy in progress. The smell is overwhelming and it's just, it's horrific. Words cannot, cannot describe any, anywhere close to the emotions you feel, to the thoughts that are going through your head, to the overwhelming, and overwhelming is the right word—amount of sensory input you're getting that is so repulsive. I'll have nightmares about this for life. I know it.

I made a comment earlier today that this is one of the proudest things I've ever done, and I've done some pretty significant things in my career. A lot of things I can't talk about because of where we were and how we did them. Nothing illegal, but certainly in the classified area. And I've been very proud of my role in being in a submarine crew. I've been on six boats and all of them fast attacks, and some of the things that we have done, I've been extremely proud of our missions and accomplishments of the crew and some of the milestones we have met.

One of my personal milestones of getting my Bachelor's Degree. I finally got my degree, but it was after my father passed, unfortunately.

I know that he knows that I got it finally. I did get my Associates while he was still alive, so I showed him that, and said, "Well, I made it through two years of college anyway." But I am a college graduate like he always wanted me to be.

But the job here was actually the hardest assignment I've ever had. The most difficult to deal with. It's easy to do, the work is easy. The attention to detail is demanding, but the emotional strain and just the trauma that your psyche goes through in dealing with the dead and their families and knowing that these are your shipmates. You know these are people that you could have served with. I didn't know any of them personally. CAPT O'BRIEN knew several of the casualties personally, and that's got to be hard. That's got to be so hard, because he has had to be, he has been the man who when families ask really, really tough questions like what exact

body parts are remaining and what condition are they in, we don't always know that, but he has been the one to go in the back and physically lay eyes on exactly what's left and what condition it's in and painstakingly try to explain that in the most, (sigh) sensitive and caring, compassionate way to a loved one.

How do you tell a wife that the only thing they have left of her husband is his left thigh? You know and do that with compassion and without totally losing it yourself, and he's done that. He was absolutely the right guy to come here. Absolutely, I don't think we, the group dynamic we have had, once again, I must have lived a charmed life somewhere else and done great things, because I do not deserve the blessings I've had in this life. I've just fallen into it, literally.

PRINCE BROWN coming up here, CAPT O'BRIEN coming up here, now it could have just as well have been some stuffed shirt, ramrod stiff, knucklehead, who wanted to do everything by the book, and my way or the highway, and I don't deal well with people like that, because I'm one of those people myself. So we would clash, and thank God he wasn't that way. Very easy to work with. A team dynamic was established in the first three days. We gelled and we were a solid, efficient, well-oiled, going to town getting the job done. As distasteful as the job is, it was important enough for us to get together and make sure that we worked out any issues we had. Come to terms with it. Get professional, get on with it and get resolution. Tough job.

Q. (57:39) What sort of guidance or direction did you have? You said you, you know, coming up here you talked about what you're going to do with PN1 BROWN. Did you find that there's some written direction or did you develop it all?

A. (laugh) What a very good question. I got—every time I turn you know being a submarine sailor I thought it was just me after a while, because it's been beat into my head since day one,

everything has a procedure. I mean, I'm part of the nuclear Navy, nothing is done without a procedure and you'd better have two people reading it to make sure it's done right. We come up here and the first thing I asked being a good submarine sailor was, "OK, where's the written procedure? Where's our rules. Where's the instruction to cover this?"

"What are you talking about? There's no instruction for this?"

"What do you mean? This isn't the first time people have died. You know we have a history of killing people in the military."

Being good guys or bad guys doing it, we have a history of sailors dying. So what'd they do at the *COLE* last year? What'd they do with the *STARK*? What'd they do, you know, *IOWA*, come on let's go back some years.

All I got was, you know, a shrug of the shoulders, and "Well, I don't know what to tell you, everybody pretty much does whatever they're going to do."

That's not good enough. So I got on the phone and called Navy Com Cell, PERS-6 and said, "I need some guidance up here. What the hell are we supposed to do?"

"Well, send us a report every four, like five times a day we need an update from you, starting at five o'clock in the morning, because we need to get it ready for the Captain by six, for the Admiral by seven and there's a one hour time difference." That's the kind of answers we were getting.

Q. (59:24) Send a report five times in a day? (laugh)

A. Exactly. They wanted voice reports five times a day and a written report about four times a day and just all this convoluted garbage and I don't even know what the hell I'm supposed to report. "Well, what do you want to know?"

“Well, the status of what’s going on.”

“Well, I can tell you we’re sitting in a room. I have my laptop computer. I have no internet connectivity. I have no print capability. I’ve got a telephone that sometimes works, sometimes doesn’t and I’m trying to get us into living quarters where there’s not three of us in a room.

That’s where we’re at right now. So what do you want first?”

You know, and that’s how it kind of got started. We screamed loud enough, we jump-started some folks to get us ADP support. I work for some really great people at PERS 65, CAPT ALBRY (phonetic) and Mr. TOM MCFADDEN, the Deputy Director for Navy MWR. I carry in my wallet a \$25,000 NAF purchase card, (Non Appropriated Funds) NWR dollars and you know, they could probably go to legal battles over this, but they said, “Whatever you need, buy it.”

We had no uniform. I didn’t have any uniforms. I was at a conference that was all civilian clothes. I had no way of getting any uniforms, so I bought me uniforms out of my pocket at the Navy Annex.

TOM MCFADDEN said, “If you’re here in Tennessee, would you buy new uniforms?”

I said, “No, I’ve got five hanging up in my closet. I need more uniforms like I need a hole in the head.”

He said, “It’s on the government. Don’t worry about it. Submit it, claim it.”

So that seems kind of you know down in the weeds, but that’s the attitude and type of support we were getting. What you need, make happen. We’ve tasked you to do a job. We don’t know what the job is. You got to figure out the job on the way, and whatever you need, you make the call.

You get paid for your judgement. You do what’s right. We trust you. So I had carte blanche to pretty much do whatever I wanted to do.

Went out, I bought another laptop computer, a printer. We cajoled a copier out of some folks. They wouldn't give us a fax machine. Did not want us getting any kind of faxes directly to us, because the dynamic of the way the Dover Port Mortuary works, the Director sees everything that comes on the fax machine, even if it's personal, it goes to him first, before it goes to the recipient. It's quite the little outfit he runs there. I'll leave it at that. (sigh) Nobody's going to get me for liable, slander.

Q. (01:02:08) Are you going to progress from September 12th to 13th. Tell us how it went.

A. Oh, sure, I can do that, if I can remember back that far.

Q. (01:02:12) Before leaving there, there really was nothing written there- ?

A. Not to my knowledge. Like I say I don't do this for a living.

Q. (01:02:21) No, I know, but I mean it's PERS 6 responsibility and they didn't have anything?

A. Now PERS 62, I'm sure has Casualty Procedures for how to handle decedent affairs, but I could not find, by asking PERS 62, MIKE WARDLAW, the guy who runs it. He's actually retired affairs, but he was kind of slid into that job because it was vacant. How that political infrastructure works in the Civil Service where all, I don't want to get into, because I don't know. But in his defense, he was new to it. He didn't know anything about it. He was learning as he goes, too.

We've got several commands involved. We've got OPNAV N1. We've got Naval District Washington. Now all these people have Flag Officers and we all understand how the flag community works. Everybody wants information and they want it yesterday, because they all,

they're in the information business. That's what they operate on and he with the latest information can make all the proper decisions, judgements, this and that and everything and you're the hero of the hour.

Not all flag officers think that way, and I don't think 99.97% do, but I'll guarantee that their staffs do. I've worked on enough flag staffs to know that. If the Admiral says, "Hummm, I think," all of a sudden that becomes directive to the guy in the loop, and that's the way they think. The next thing you know there's a Chief or First Class waking people up at 3'oclock in the morning because the Admiral said, "I think," and that's not what the Admiral wanted at all.

So we've got OPNAV N1, we've got Navy District Washington, we've got PERS 6, PERS 62, we've got the Mortuary Affairs in Great Lakes. That's another separate command that works for BUMED, so BUMED's got their hand in the pie. It is a joint thing so the Army and the Air Force and the Marine Corps, everybody's sniffing around wanting to play.

Unfortunately, we ran into entirely too much of the "I did this. I did that" at mid-level positions. Junior officers, senior enlisted and I'm talking E-6, E-7 and 8 level, enlisted and Lieutenant, Lieutenant Commander level officers who were in the "How can I get my name in the paper?" I need the latest and greatest so that I can brief the Admiral personally and say, "Look what I got," and that infuriated me. I don't play that game. I don't work well with people who do. So we had some growing pains with that in trying to—my forte and my successes in my career have all been in team building. Be it with the Draconian approach and team beating, and getting everybody to hate me to be a team, with me as the enemy so they have something to focus on. That's a leadership tool that works. When you've got people that are down in weeds. But when they're up here and they're operating efficiently, you've got to be a coach and a team builder and a part of that team. You can't be just the ruler of that. You've got to be a team member.

In trying to work with these different entities, different commands and say, "Hey, you know you folks don't work for me. You don't answer to me. I am here to tell you that in order to get the mission done, we have got to work together. We can't stovepipe information. Can't hide things." When we first started out the information process, just as a for instance, it was absolutely ludicrous. We were prevented from knowing identifications on decedents until we were told by, excuse me PERS 62. Navy COM CELL had to notify us. Now identifications were done right here on-site because the senior medical examiner was here. They would identify a body. They would tell the mortuary director. The mortuary director would make a phone call to Tennessee, to Millington, and say so and so has been identified. Tennessee would call, you know, PERS 6 who would call Naval District Washington in OPNAV N1, and tell the regional folks and all the players down there would get the word to the casualty officer. The CACO would notify the family. Only after the family was notified did we get a call from PERS 62 saying, "By the way, the person right across the street," who you have to get prepared, you have to arrange transportation for, get a uniform ready for and arrange all mortuary affairs for has been identified and the family knows.

Q. (01:07:07) That was the first time you learned who they were?

A. Yes ma'am. That process sometimes took three days, and in that time if we'd have known first, we could have had them ready to go out the door and not delayed any of the process of getting a loved one back to their family. My caveat to everybody that has come here, has been do not be the person that causes any family member one second extra anguish, more than you need to. They're going through enough crap. The more visits they get from a CACO, the more visits they get from the FBI or DNA, the more times they're called on the phone, the more times their

told, “Jeez, well we got to wait, “ the more painful it is, the more drawn out it is. I’ve lived on the other side of that and know it, and lived it. So the caveat and I think that’s one, I’d like to think one of the reasons I was sent here was because I had that attitude. That, you know, MWR has a kind of catch phrase now, that’s our new motto, “Mission first, sailors always.” That goes without saying for all of us. That should be the words we live by in life as members of the Navy team. Cradle to grave, you know, ADMIRAL CLARK our CNO, cradle to grave. Great phrase. You got to live it, and here’s where it happens. This is the grave part.

We were picking up responsibility for retirees that were passengers on the airlines. CAPT O’BRIEN and I were doing that. We’d make the call and then tell Naval Casualty what we were doing. When you have autonomy to operate and you don’t exercise it, you’re foolish. So when you give me autonomy, know what you’re giving me, and we were making calls left and right. People calling up family members here on the CACO, you know, courtesy CACO for a family off the airliner. They just told me that, you know, their father was a retired Lieutenant Commander in the Reserves. OK, he’s ours. We’ve got him. Find out what you can on uniform stuff. Do not bother the family, go through Reserve, Retired Affairs in New Orleans and get the DD-214 sent up here. I’ll scour the records. We’ll get a uniform put together. What does the family want? Let’s get things rolling, and those were the things we were doing and then we would inform OPNAV N1, NDW and the COM CELL, that’s what we were doing. That’s what I see the job here as being. That’s what we should be doing. We are the naval liaison. We’re the Navy pointmen and women doing the job and we have to be able to make a call. Don’t put me up as a spokesperson if I can’t speak. Don’t put me on the front line if I don’t have autonomy to act in your behalf. Pull me back and put somebody else there. Thankfully I worked for some really smart people who gave us that autonomy.

Q. (01:10:10) who gave you that autonomy?

A. ADMIRAL BROWN AND CAPT CEPAK, ADMIRAL BROWN through CAPT CEPAK.
PER 6,

Q. (01:10:19) Was there ever a Navy Liaison office here at Dover?

A. No, Sir.

Q. (01:10:20) No, there was not, so it was a first.

A. Now, according to some, they had Navy Mortuary Affairs out of Great Lakes had a mortician or two during the cold, here.

Q. (01:10:37) That's what I understood.

A. And they, they're the reason why I'm here. To put it honestly, it didn't work.

Q. (01:10:44) Oh, it did not work.

A. It did not work. It's not a slam against any of the morticians, but they are corpsman with a specialized function. They bring them into the Navy as E-4, E-5s and they sent an E-5 here, or an E-6, who had two or three years of military service, all of it in an office building in Chicago. Honestly, what the hell does that person know about the Navy? Nothing. Never served at sea, you know. Don't have the years, the experience working with sailors, knowing sailors, being with sailor's families. You don't know. So that was kind of a failed experiment.

Q. (01:11:24) Or maybe a lessons learned from *Cole* –

A. Absolutely.

Q. (01:11:25) was that didn't work so,

A. CAPT CEPACK told me, he said, this is one of the *Cole* –

Q. (01:11:31) OK, and that was a PER-6 initiative.

A. We got to get a PERS-6 guy there and you're it. Of course I would probably have been the one they sent anyway, because I'm the only Master Chief that's not a Musician in PERS-6.

(laughter)

No, it's true, but you know, I don't mean to bounce around and jump from topic to topic. It's kind of the same theme but, when a thought hits me, I've got to spit it out, otherwise it just runs away, room for others.

When we finally got handle on who was who, who answered to who, how many reports we had to make, because after like the second day, I turned to Captain, he turned to me and we said, "You know we're spending all our time writing reports. We can't do anything else." The phones are ringing off the hook and all we're doing is sitting here typing away on reports and telling people stuff that they really don't need to know. We're done. So we called NAVY COM CELL and gave direction, once again. Said we will submit a daily situation report and that won't be at 17, 18, 19:00 hundred. Whenever the mortuary shuts down for the day and they have nothing else for us, we will summarize and we will submit it to you for a daily update. If you need anything more than that, more urgent, call, because we're not going to call you.

Q. (01:12:50) And that was an inner, via an email?

A. Yes, sir, that goes out via email, and we sent it to OPNAV N1, NAVY COM CELL, Mortuary Affairs in Great Lakes, PERS 6 direct, through CAPT CEPAK PERS 62, Navy Casualty. My boss in PERS 65 just so they know what I'm doing. CAPT O'BRIEN's boss at Navy Headquarters. They all see it, because they're all calling and asking, "What are you doing? How's things going?" You want to know.

One of the things when we toured the mortuary and I asked you all to take a minute, and we were in that big room where they were doing personal effects and said, "imagine this many people and all this activity and stuff like that so you can get that in your head, because I'm going to get this one out. This is a knife in somebody's back and I'm going to twist it so be forewarned. I won't mention names, but there was a certain individual at PERS 62 who was another bureaucrat, who evidently has never dealt with mass casualties. Which a lot of people haven't and that's OK, but when the guy on the scene says something, you ought to believe him, because they're putting eyes and ears on it. When you get information, you've got to act on what information you get. I had given direction on how to handle personal effects. The Army has their way. The Navy has their way. The Air Force has their way and we were told by Navy District Washington, but OPNAV N1, handled them the way that they're normally handled but, you know, we've got to do our thing and you guys do your thing. You're on the scene, free rein.

So, OK, I've got some ideas about personal effects, because I've had to do that before for decedents. I know how personal effects are covered. We get in this email war over personal effects and personal property with PERS 62.

So personal effects that are here are going to be handled in this way. When you inventory, you'll have good tracking this and that. Things that cannot be returned to the family will be sent to Cheatam Annex, who handles all that stuff. OK, they always have, always will.

Things that can be returned to the family, for those who have already been shipped out whenever their personal effects are released I will FEDEX them to the CACOs so they will be hand delivered to the next of kin, not just mailed to a family member. "Oh here. Here's your dad's watch." You know, I want a person to hand carry it, inspect it. Make sure it's ready to go and do a hand-to-hand delivery with our apologize that we couldn't get it to them sooner.

For those who hadn't been shipped yet, if I could get stuff released then they would be hand carried by the escort with the body, and that's the way I wanted to do it.

We wrote it up, sent it off. Everybody at PERS bought off on it. Said, "That's the right thing to do, run with it."

I had ADMIRAL BROWN's blessing on that. Hey, if the one-star says go, you go.

Couple days later a certain person came off of travel. They were a PERS 62 person. They thought they owned this program and got all haughty and, "you can't do that and why isn't all this stuff going with the bodies. You screwed up already," and I'd already explained in great detail to other persons who were asking questions what the personal effects were going to look like, but I kind of glossed over it a little bit, and said here's what we're dealing with.

Well, I was pretty well slammed by this email and insulted and derided and it was very abrasive and downright nasty. So I told the Captain, "I'm going to send a zinger right back, and it ain't going to be, it ain't going to be pretty," and he says, "Go ahead." All right carte blanche, here we go. So I went through detailed graphic explanation of what lengths we went to recover rings, pendants, and things that family members had specifically requested accompany their loved one

when they were shipped out and escorted back home, and the emotional impact that had, going through that. Walking back in that room seeing family pictures that are personally charred of a man standing there with his wife and kids and know that his stuff is laying on that table and he's in a backroom a charred hulk, and having to pick through that stuff and find exactly what the family wants, and getting it cleaned up and getting it, taking it off the inventory sheet and transferred over and this and that, and doing that and then have some know-nothing bureaucratic knucklehead try to dictate to you that you're doing wrong or you should be doing this, or you shouldn't be doing that.

Knowing what you know about me from my previous hour of speaking, I didn't take that well. So I fired off with both barrels and explained exactly what we were doing. I got a personal call from ADMIRAL BROWN the next day, saying, "Master Chief, you OK?"

I said, "I'm fine, Admiral, I just don't like people putting their nose in my business, especially when I've explained in great detail what we're doing and then still get it rammed down my throat just because they're unhappy with their position in life and they think they ought to be in charge. If they want to run things permission granted, jump on an airplane, if you dare, and come to Dover, Delaware. Permission granted to relieve me. I am not an expert in this, but I'm going to do what my heart, and my mind, and my experience tells me to do. That's what you pay me for you know. If people don't like that, well I can be relieved at anytime. I didn't ask for this assignment. I hate this assignment and I don't want to be here, so if you want to get me out of here, please do."

He said, "No, no, no, no. Nobody's leaving up there, especially you. You're the right guy. You're in place and you're not leaving."

“OK, roger that. At least we know where we stand. No, I’m not ready to leave. I’m here to do a job. It’s what I was assigned to do and I will do it.”

So, I wanted to explain a little bit that those are the kinds of things that make this the ugliest and hardest thing I’ve ever done. And why I never, I wish I could walk away from this and be brainwashed and have my memory wiped out from my experience here. But another side of me says this is probably the most important thing you’ll ever do in your life. And it’s important to me, because we received a phone call from one of the mothers of one of the decedents, and I talked to her. And it was the day after she buried her son. And we were both pretty emotional when we were talking, because it broke me up; I could imagine my mother doing that. Nah, I can’t see my mother doing that, having the strength and the conviction that she was moved so much that she had to call us.

I don’t know this woman. Never seen her before. Have no idea who she is. She called up to tell us, just us at Dover, that the escort for her son told her about the operation here. About the people that were working here and how much of ourselves we put into making sure that everything went right and was absolutely succinct, perfect, and pristine, and her son received the utmost in respect and dignity from the time his body was recovered ‘til the time he was interred and we assured that. And how the Air Force stood up and honor guards and how the NAVY detachment stood on the curbside and rendered honors as his hearse rolled by. And she called to thank us for that. Saying that it really meant a lot to her that the Navy cared so much about her son.

I said, “No, Ma’am, it’s not so much him, as we care so much about you,” (He’s emotional)
That’s what’s important, you know the dead are the dead and we don’t do this—my personal

feelings are, I think funerals are barbaric. I don't go to them. I respect other people's wishes to have that closure.

When my father died he was cremated. I flew back home. I took his remains back to Hawaii with me. I got on board my submarine and we went to sea and we had a very private, personal ceremony up on the bridge and I scattered his ashes at sea and hauled down the flag that we flew over the ship during his burial, put it in the container that I carried his ashes in and we wrote up a certificate, the Captain signed it and presented our flag in that case to my brother. My brother David being my father's eldest.

You can't, from what I've been saying, my mother and father married each other when my Mom already had three kids. Nobody knows that, talking to them, because we're all brothers and sisters. That's the type of family I was brought up in. There's no stepbrother, stepsister. I think that whole dysfunctional family stuff is a cop out. It's a bunch of garbage. If you're raised properly with good values and morals it doesn't matter. Love is love. Doesn't matter whether it's attached by blood, water, Kool-Aid, ice tea I don't care. Love is love.

But getting back to it, you can't do anything for the dead, other than respect their remains and treat them with dignity, but they don't know that. I mean, you know, if they're looking down from the hereafter, whatever anybody believes in whatever form of after life there is. Heaven, hell, I don't believe all that stuff, but I personally believe there's something after life and we have a higher being. Call him God, call him Allah, call him whoever you want to call him, but – (sigh) you can only do so much for the dead. What we go to such great lengths for is the living. And it epitomizes all the talking head crap about, yes, we got, everybody's on board has seen those policies, cradle to grave and this and that. I've heard so much about that from a conference

that I attended in Dallas in June where 750 Command Master Chiefs were all there, how they could fit that many egos in one hotel is beyond me.

(laughter)

But my God there was a lot of them, with the MCPON and the CNO right there on the spot and they didn't let any of us talk. Which was probably a good thing, because all those people, type A personalities trying to take charge, used to being in charge, trying to herd them around during a conferences, that's a tall order, and they did it beautifully. ADMIRAL CLARK was a very impressive man. He believes what he says. He lives what he says.

Having others live that and not just say it is our challenge. To do that, CAPT O'BRIEN does that. I believe I do that. CHIEF NICHOLSON, HM1 ALONZO, PN1 BROWN, HM1 MONTAG, those are all men who have lived that. And we do this, it's for the family The Navy is the family. No one can ever convince me it's not. Like I say, sometimes it's dysfunctional, but for the most part we're a pretty tight, tight group and to do this has been one of my proudest moments and one of my most, I won't say hated, because I hate being here, but I don't hate being here. It's- I've got, I've got mixed feelings about it and they're very strong powerful swings on that pendulum.

Emotions run from zealot, patriotic love of country and duty and mission, and you know all the way to the other end when I just think, "Man, if you'd of retired last year when you could, hum, you wouldn't be here right now." But then who would?

Maybe this is my service, and my duty to my country. This is what I'm supposed to do. You can't always pick and chose you know to be the backseater, land ordinance on target. You can't be the guy on the trigger shooting Tomahawks, which is what I'm trained to do. I can't be that guy, but I can be this guy on this end of it.

Which is kind of funny. all my career I've trained to lay ordinance on target and do exactly what I've seen the results of, right here. That kind of puts a little different twist on my chosen profession. I always wanted to, you know, shoot stuff off submarines and blow people up. Now I'm seeing what blown up people look like. Kind of a different outlook on my career. I don't look forward to it so much as I used to. When necessary you've got to do it and I wouldn't waiver from it a bit, because I believe in what we do, but to see the result of that puts a little different spin on it, and it gets real serious because it's in your face.

When I mean in your face, when you spend a couple of weeks in a mortuary with 189 bodies in various states of decomposition and charring, and they're open on the tables everyday and you're looking at them and smelling them, that smell gets in your clothes, it gets in your skin, it gets in your sinuses. You can't get rid of it. There's not a soap or a shampoo that will eliminate it. I've taken six and seven showers a day. I've washed out my nose. I've snorted soapy water to try and get rid of it, and all it does is make you sick, but you can still smell it. You can taste it. It gets in your clothes. You step outside and the rain starts coming down, then it leaches out of your clothing and that will make you about vomit. And you live in that day in and day out. I wouldn't take the elevator in this barracks, after the first week we were here, because all of the people who worked at the mortuary, I mean the morticians, the embalmers, the people I really dealt every day with them, were taking the elevator everyday and they'd bring the smell of the mortuary with them on their clothes, and it, you know, that small little box, you get four or five people in there and it'll make your head swim. Like I have got to get out of this thing. I got claustrophobic. I ride submarines for a living. I don't get claustrophobic. Well, I sleep in a coffin rack for crying out loud. There's nothing—but being in that elevator really bothered me. Having that just, that being stuck in there with all those people and that smell coming off of them. I said, "No, I'm

done.” To this day I still don’t take the elevator. I’ll walk upstairs, and they’ve been gone for over six weeks, those people have been gone. I still won’t get in that elevator. I hate it. Won’t do it.

Anybody who watches the news knows that people die. You can see our history. It’s a long history, it goes back to the, well before I came into the Navy. Terrorists were blowing up Americans. And you see it on CNN as that voyeuristic news approach. It’s like “Yes, a bunch of people got killed.” Planes crash somewhere in the world. “Yes, guys died. Man that’s a shame.” Change the channel you go to watch NYPD Blue, you don’t think another thing of it. “Man, I really feel sorry for that.” Sympathy and empathy got to cross over there somewhere. ADMIRAL KONETZNI says it a hell of a lot better than I do, and I’m going to steal one of his stories, because he’s one of my heroes. Hadn’t always been, but he is one of my heroes now, because a lot of what he predicted four and five years ago is coming true today as far as sweeping changes in how we treat sailors and how we take care of each other. ADMIRAL KONETZNI was a pioneer of that. When other flag officers didn’t think it was popular and said, “They’re going to throw you out of the Navy, we’ll distance ourselves from you.” ADMIRAL KONETZNI stood up and said, this is what I think. He was a one-star at the time. He’s now a three-star, Deputy CINCLANTFLT, and some of the guys that told him, you know, you’re not going to make it. Well one of them’s the ex-Secretary of the Navy. Who’s out of a job now? You know. AL KONETZNI’s a hell of a guy. Man of conviction. Doesn’t care who he makes mad. He’s got something to say you’re going to hear it, because he’s a very honest man with a hell of a lot of integrity.

But anyway, he tells the story about, you know, you’re walking down the street and you’re on your way to the bar. A couple of guys walking along and you see somebody get hit by a car, “Oh

man, that's pretty bad. That guy got killed over there. Whew. Oh, well we'd better get in there the games about to start." Look at your watch, and you walk into the bar and you watch your Monday night football. The sympathy you showed there, well pardon the phrase, that was bullshit. Right? You must empathize, and I didn't learn anything about empathy until my father died and how my life progressed after he died and that opened up who I was. I was sympathetic to some things, but really callous for the most part. Had that wall inside that said, "Yeah, Yeah, it's not my back yard. I don't care, Get over it. Get on with it. Let's go."

And then my father died and it happened to me and it's like, "Whoa, what an idiot I've been all these years. What a callous, self-centered and shallow SOB I have been." Life took on a whole new meaning. I think that's when I completed my maturing. Not really completed but made a major leap in maturing, because we all mature everyday. Some people call it aging I call it maturing, and I think that's why I was single all those years. Because the year, two years after my father died I got married. Met the women that I was, probably about the fifth or sixth one that I have known that I should have married. This one I finally didn't chase off and we are ecstatic. If I'd know it was this wonderful I'd have done it years ago, but I wasn't ready years ago, because I wasn't who I am today.

So since such time as we got married. I have a little boy eighteen months old. The light of my life; named him after my father. (tears) Sorry that really gets me, because I wish he would have lived long enough to see him. Really do.

Q. Think you just don't get the pleasure of seeing his joy.

A. He is his only grandchild. He's pretty special. My blood, he's his only grandchild and since he and I were so close. I mean we never had the father/son conflict that so many people go

through. We never had that. He was my daddy. I was his son and we never had big blow up fights. He called me and told me, "Your real smart son, but you don't have a lick of common sense, but you don't have a lick of common sense." I heard that more times than not, and he was right, but we never had any big flare-ups. You know, he was always one of my heroes, always will be, and I don't idolize him as the perfect person because he was a man. Yes, he was a man with all of a man's false. He was a recovering alcoholic. He didn't put his potential to full use. I probably didn't put my full potential to use, but he lived his own life the way he wanted to. He did the best he could with what he had and the circumstances he was in. He never slighted his children. How can you do nothing but love and respect a man who does that. And he understood that, finally, I had to explain it to him a lot of times.

He always felt he was a failure by his kids. You shouldn't judge yourself by that. You cannot judge yourself as a father, only your children can. And when I finally got him to understand that, and told him that, you know, I loved him and respected him for what he did and who he was then he was OK.

What else do you want to talk about? This has taken me on such a roller coaster ride and everyone going to listen to this here's going to say who's that whiney crybaby Master Chief. I can't believe sailors are such wimps back east.

Q. (01:34:21) Can you tell us a little bit about, as this is winding down, what have you and CAPTAIN O'BRIEN talked about, what you need to do to kind of capture what you've done here. Now, hopefully it isn't going to happen again, but to prepare any future activity in this regard.

A. Let's see, the last war to end all wars was 1914, 1918, I believe. We got into it in 1917, yes. It will happen again. We all know that, unfortunately. That's just the way human nature is. We're barbarians in suits and ties sometimes, with a set of socialistic rules and values we call laws. What we've learned from this to get off the sociology kick there. Did that come out, I'm a sociology major. Sorry, and I didn't even know that until I'd taken a GRE in mail 30 semesters hours I'd taken one exam, and said, "Well I guess that's my major." All right. I'm just extremely well read, that's all.

What we've learned. One thing most important is, I'll beat it into the ground. We do this for the families, and if anybody is associated with this type of duty assignment and does not keep that in focus and does not embrace that wholeheartedly, they don't belong here. They need to seek employment elsewhere. They really do, because some of the things you are required to do are extremely disgusting and distasteful. They'll give you nightmares. You'll spend sleepless nights. You'll think about going on drinking binges, which I haven't but I thought about it. I've spent many a night not sleeping and a couple nights sleeping and wishing I hadn't slept because of the nightmares, but it's all in what you've got to do. I'm sure that you know, me and my Chaplain buddy back in Tennessee are going to have some long discussions after I get back and get back into life. Because my trip back home was kind of surreal, it wasn't long enough to get re-acclimated into my family and knowing that I had to come back here was difficult. So that was kind of, it put a little strain on me. I was there for my wife and my kids, but I wasn't really there. I was still here, and I need to close out from this place, and get away from it. Put it behind me, put it in the history books and get back to my normal life and get on with that.

But you've got to believe in what you're doing otherwise you won't do it, you won't do it well. You have to understand why you're doing it. That will help you believe in it. You cannot,

cannot, cannot play politics, or look what I've done lately, Oh look at me, I'm the unsung hero here. Because I believe that takes away and dishonors the deceased and the deceased's family. Self-aggrandizing in this particular instance is vile. It really is, and we've had some people in some organizations that have done that. And I told them that. If you can, anybody listening to this knows by now, that I'm kind of full of myself. I have a lot of arrogance and that's OK, I didn't get where I am by not being extremely confident in who I am and along with that goes a certain sense of arrogance. I come by it naturally and I think deservedly so. You can ask me how great I am and I'll tell you. That's a little joke.

(laughter)

But, I'm not as bad as some, but I'm worse than others and I understand that about myself. My mother tells me that all the time. "You're not shy." No, I'm not, I'm not shy at all. But I think to set yourself up as more than you are or to have done more than you have done, or to take credit for other people's contributions is absolutely disgusting and that's the word that fits. It's disgusting. I don't want to come across as the great martyr, Joan of Arc and you know, please don't publish this because I just want to be this anonymous guy who did his part and feel sorry for me because of all the terrible things I've had to see and look at. Not true. I signed up for this. This is one of my duties. This is what I do. I understand that. I believe in it and it's important to me to do this. To do it to the best of my ability, because I am a professional and when you know my dad always said, "if you're going to be a ditch digger, be the best damn ditch digger you can be." It doesn't matter what's your lot in life. You've got to be the best at what you can do. Well, whatever it is you do you've got to be the best at it for you, other wise you're cheating yourself. So I come with that attitude and expect that from everybody else because that's the right way to

be. I'm sorry if other people have different viewpoints, that, "Well, you know, mediocrity's Ok," well not for me, and I don't believe anybody in our profession ought to be that way.

Not to say that your performance level has to be at the peak of efficiency for everybody, because average wouldn't be average unless it was average. Now think about that tongue twister.

Average is OK, because it is average. But you got to come at it with the right attitude. You can't play politics, you can't play games, You have to be expedient. You have to be able to make decisions, and make decisions on things that have no precedent. You have to set precedent.

Things like putting medals on the uniforms. I will take personal credit for that, because I caught so much crap for it. I made that call. I did it. CAPT O'BRIEN backed me on it, but I made the decision to do it, and I threw the fit about it and said this is what we're going to do. And I had no authority to do that whatsoever. It looked like the right thing to do. It felt like the right thing to do, therefore it was done. This is the first time it's ever been done. They didn't do it for the *COLE*. They didn't do it for the *STARK*. It's never been done before. No medals have ever been pinned to decedent's uniforms for interment, never, and I thought how bizarre. That's totally backwards from the way I would have done it, so hey I'm in charge now, I'm going to do it this way. We stand people up at awards ceremonies and we pin medals to them and ribbons on the uniform, so what's more appropriate that a persons end of tour award and their posthumous award should be pinned to the uniform that they're wearing or that's draped over their remains. That's right! I felt it was right. I said it was right. I fought for it being right. When I finally got back to PERS 6 CAPTAIN CEPAK says "Seems like the right thing to do to me. What's all the hubbub?"

ADMIRAL BROWN, "Sounds like the right thing to me. Good call."

People were throwing a fit here, “Oh my goodness, what are they going to present?” We had a couple of folks from NDW, “Well what are they going to present at the graveside?”

Well do you think that those medals come from us, that we’re going to you know, give you medals to accompany the body to give to the next of kin. That’s funeral arrangement stuff. We’re not in that business. I would expect the parent command to take care of that. Write the citation, you know, I don’t know who these people are. They didn’t work for me. How can I write an end of tour award or a posthumous award citation when I barely know what part of the Pentagon they worked in, let alone what they did?

Get a grip on it. Focus on the job. See who’s got to do what and do what’s right for the family. Don’t start the finger pointing game of you should have done this, you should have done that. We went to battle stations for a couple of days over that.

When it finally came down to it, I believe ADMIRAL RYAN was briefed on it and the Chief of Naval Personnel says, “That sounds like the right thing to do, to me. Present two sets, one that goes with the body and one that goes with the family. Next question.”

Q. (01:43:09) Is that being captured someplace though, is that being - ?

A. Yes, sir, because I’m not letting it die. It’s in my lessons learned. I’m talking about it on the tape. I’m going to talk about it to every officer I meet. Every flag officer I see is going to hear the same story, because I think that’s the right way to do it. The response we got from the families, the response we got from the lady that ran the uniform shop here on the base. The response we’ve gotten from every military person that’s come in and seen Army uniforms hanging and Navy uniforms hanging and how they’re prepared and dressed and go out

everybody has said that to me and said, "That is class. That's the right way to do it." I don't care if it's class or not, it's the right way to do it.

I'm very proud of that. That's one of the things that I say, I'm glad that it was me that was here, because I don't know if it had been somebody else, they may have said, "Oh, OK, we don't do that?" And let it go.

Q. (01:44:13) Well the on-going thing, for the next time, if it happens, it's got to be written down someplace so that, you don't have to rely on somebody like you being assigned here.

A. Yes, sir. It's in the lessons learned and, by word of mouth, and exactly. I am adamant that—we have six pages of lessons learned right now. Everybody that has been here has written up a summary, excuse me, and presented it to me, and my job is to take all the emotion out of it, and type it up into facts, figures –

Q. (01:44:37) Can you do that?

A. Point, counter point. Oh, yes, sir. I can be –

Q. (01:44:43) That was my little joke.

A. I can be very matter of fact in writing. I can cut it and just be monotone, and I understand but I feel such conviction sometimes when I speak that I get overwhelmed with it. You know, you've all seen this. But I am who I am. I believe in what I believe and you get the good and bad and the ugly as it is.

Q. (01:45:13) Master Chief, how much did you know about some of these individuals. Is that something that you had to keep yourself a distance from there?

A. Well, I'll tell you because I didn't want to know them on a personal level, because it just made it harder. You know, I prepared a uniform for an AW1, putting it on there and I see you know he's got his aircrew wings, he's surface warfare, you know, aviation warfare, those gold aircrew wings sitting there and I'm thinking my brother, my brother, my brother. My brother was an AW. Proudest thing he ever owned was a set of Aircrew wings. He didn't care about those mud wings, what he called aviation warfare wings, because hell storekeepers can get those. They don't fly for a living. I'm aircrew. I got five thousand plus hours in P-3s. I know what those wings meant to him. Doing that; seeing that. I called him up and I told him the guy's name. He knew him. That was tough. When you humanize it and you personalize it. There was a second class ET (Editors Note: ET2 Brian Moss), submarine sailor. Two of the officers wore Dolphins on these uniforms and it's just eating me, you know. I'm looking at this kid and his ribbon rack, here's a Second Class, eight years of service. He's got four Navy achievement medals and a Navy Commendation medal as a Second Class Petty Officer.

I call up his CACO (Editors Note: ETC Todd Spurgeon), I'm talking to him. His CACO is a chief, submarine sailor, ET, he's the Chief in Charge of Ceremonial Guard at Arlington. He calls up and says, yes, he was one of mine. He just transferred from the Ceremonial Guard. He was specifically selected. He was supposed to go back to sea, but he was picked up by a flag officer to go to the Command Center, because they were so impressed with this young man.

There's the illustrative draftsman, DM2 Noeth, who during Kosavo Campaign prepared charts and briefing materials and stuff like that for, jeez I can't think who the Admiral is he prepared them for. Anyway whatever, and this was onboard I guess the WASP or something on Amphib

ships, this kid was stationery. Prepared all this stuff. The Admiral was so impressed with him he picked him up to come to his staff. Goes to his staff and he gets killed there. He was an artist in New York. He had stuff displayed in galleries in New York. Second Class Petty Officer.

Another kid, a hot runner, had an AG2 (Editors Note: AG2 Mathew Flocco). Three years in the Navy, the guy's an E5 already with a Navy Achievement medal. He ain't even got a hash mark yet and he's already second class, and he's a hot runner, up and coming. First class with four years of service, Service Warfare Aerographer (Editors Note: AG1 Edward Earhart), you know, everyone of these people the more I learned about them the harder it hit me, because there were no slouches. You don't get a job there being a slouch, and you could tell that, when the biographies came out and the Chaplains were so kind. This one well-meaning chaplain brought in big articles and histories and of course, when there's nothing else to do, oh dopey me, I sat there and read them and then they became people that I knew. I didn't know them but I knew of them and I knew more about them than I wanted to. And then it got harder and harder and harder. So to distance yourself from it is a good thing, so you can remain professional and keep your composure in doing what you've got to do.

Some of the escorts that came up shouldn't have been escorts. They were too close. A division officer, that was very close to her troops, LDO Lieutenant, no way in hell she should have been an escort. We were propping her up through the briefing. She sent me a card. I've got it on my desk back in Tennessee, when I went back home. I got a card from her, and she said, "It went well. You would have been proud of me," you know, "and thanks for all you did, and thanks for helping me and supporting me."

It's things like that that make this the greatest thing I've ever done. You know, this ranks our with being able to do my dad's burial at sea myself and give him the send off he wanted, and read his favorite poem, you know, and be his son taking care of him.

Q. (01:50:12) Share something with, you know, this was before I was born, but you're talking about how important this was to you. We know how you were talking about, the Lieutenant (Editors Note: Ltjg Nancy McKeown). We interviewed her and as hard as it was for her, that was probably very anesthetic for her. They died in her space. She tried to save them and she couldn't. So I think she needed to be a part of it. As hard as it was, and as much as she probably fell apart. So it probably was a good thing.

A. Well, she's pretty tough I'll tell you. I don't think I could have done that. I really don't. Knowing what I know about myself, I don't think I could have done that. If it was my guys, phew, I don't think I could have done that, and gone and looked their parents in the eye and stuff like that. I'm not tough enough to do that, you know. I'm a lot of bluff and bluster on the outside. I'm pretty soft on the inside. That would have torn me up.

Q. (01:51:02) And look what you've done here.

A. Pardon?

Q. Look what you've done here.

A. Exactly, see.

Q. (01:51:05) So don't talk yourself out of it.

A. No, I mean I'm falling apart here.

Q. (01:51:15) No, no, no, that's not— What sort of interface did you all have with the CACOs?

Did the CACOs actually come here or no?

A. Some CACO's did show up. As a matter of fact we had one come in yesterday, and ask five minutes worth of useless questions that we told him on the phone last week all the answers to. CAPT O'BRIEN'S in the back giggling. (laugh) This guys been kind of a pain. He's a square peg, round hole type of thing – guy.

The CACOs we deal with mainly on the telephone and via email. A lot of phone conversations coordinating stuff, because the escorts need to come here. Be briefed as escorts. Take charge of the remains, and escort them to either a funeral home or to a cemetery for direct burial service, or in the case of cremated remains escort them to final interment resting spot, or the next of kin's address, and deliver them to the next of kind. That kind of thing. So a lot of our interaction coordination was with the CACO, but we rarely seen them. We mainly deal with them over the phone.

Several of them have come up here to act as escorts also, and we get to meet them and they're all like wow this is great, and I'm like we wouldn't want your job, so I don't want your job, so I think we're all in the right jobs, because we all feel the same way. I wouldn't want to be – I've been a casualty officer once, never again. I will decline every time that just, it's too damn hard for me. I'll do it if absolutely necessary, I'll do this again if absolutely necessary but given a choice, no way in hell I would do this voluntarily. No way. So long answer to a short simple question. We don't interface with the CACOs that much, personally, No sir.

Q. (01:53:12) And how was that, I mean, you had mentioned about the, the I guess the interface with PERS 6 and 62 I mean who, if there was a questions or like I mean, who had the lead –

A. Nobody. Whoever asked and yelled the loudest. Whoever was king for the day sometimes.

And, I'm not being facetious, I guess I was here for about five weeks before I finally said, " you know, Who the hell is in charge around here? And who do we really work for?" because I honestly didn't know. We were getting demands from this organization and that organization.

BUMED at one time called up here and wanted to give directions and like, "OK, get in line", you know, "who are you? How many stars do you wear? Not enough, try again. You've got to go three-star or higher level to even get in line around here." It was that convoluted at times.

Now everybody else might know who worked for who and how the whole dichotomy of organization orchestrated together for harmony, but, news to me. That's another one of the lessons learned. If we have instructions and somebody owns the instructions, he who owns the instructions is in charge. And that's who you go to for the answers, for change in procedure, for change in policy, for change in any guidance. Deviations, waivers, everything goes to who owns the instruction and then everybody else backs out of it, because they know, hey there's an instructions that covers this and we're following the instruction. Change the instructions or follow the instruction, but by God the instruction is what it is and he who owns it is he who is in charge.

We currently don't have that and we need that desperately, and that's one of the things that CAPT O'BRIEN and I are working on, to put the framework together for how all that has to come together, because Navy Casualty is going to write an instruction coming out of this that's going to work for mass casualty overseas, in CONUS, wherever. It's going to have brought

diversity, fluidity, vague enough that you can work within inside it, but- what's the word I'm looking for, Throw it out there. Distinct –no.

Q. (01:55:50) Specific.

A Specific, that's the word. Specific enough that it gives you a cookbook to go by and marching orders of how you need to set up a liaison. How you need to handle mass casualties. Who responds to who. The regional Commander is responsible for this. You're responsible for CACOs in your area and getting the word out and you will not direct, but you will get information from PERS 6. You will liaise with the naval liaison office wherever it may be and you'll coordinate the activities of the regional CACOs without giving direction to any other agency anywhere in the world, and share information freely. It will give directions, specifics to people for what their roles and responsibilities are. So we don't have a senior chief from NDW saying, "Well my Admiral wants this and he wants it now!" And somebody from OPNAV N1 saying, "Well my admiral wants this and they want it now." And it's all a bunch of crap because they're dropping their admiral's names so that they can get the information that they want because they don't know what's going on. Nor do they need the information, and that's what we ran into. I think if we get a clear concise directive out and all the players get it. Here it is, you know, then they'll all understand what their roles and responsibilities are and we'll have clear as clear and defined chain as we can in this multifunctional Navy we have.

That will make our job a hell of a lot easier, whoever's job it is being here. It is absolutely vital that we have that. And being the guys who've taken a punch in the nose a time or two and given a couple out, I think CAPT O'BRIEN and I are the guys to do that. Not because we're so wonderful ourselves, but because we lived through this right here in Dover, and we have to

interface with all the other agencies. And we're putting it together, and we're going to brief Admiral BROWN on it and we're going to brief ADMIRAL RYAN on it, and you know, they'll implement what they like and throw out what they don't and that's OK. We're providing input and that's what we're paid to do. Opinions are free.

Quite the experience in life, I'll tell you that. Amazing some of the things that we have done, that I have seen, been exposed to, and just the raw roller coaster ride of emotions that you go through, and yet you never have joy. There's not happiness here. You have contentment, significantly different, because you're content in because you know that what you have done is to the utmost and the decedent has received the highest honors possible and dignity and respect paid to them and that the families wishes have been met to the nth degree and you're content with that. You're never happy about it, but you're content with it. Because you can't ever be happy about a shipmate being killed you know

Q. (01:59:15) What kept you going?

A. Hum, that man for one sitting right over there. CAPT O'BRIEN. PN1 BROWN, HM 1 ALONZO, HM2 NICHOLSON. My bestest buddy in the world, has been since I was a little boy, is my mother. I used to call my wife and talk to her for ten or fifteen minutes in the evening time. I'd talk to my mother for two hours. I didn't want to put my wife through what I'm going through, because I know we would end up in these big sobbing sessions on the phone together and I'd make her life more miserable. Am I selfish for not sharing that with her, or mean to load it up on my mother? I don't know. That's for a psychologist to figure out. I know what I know. I know what my wife can handle and what I'm willing to load her up with. I know what my

mother can handle and what I'm willing to load her up with, because I provide that same emotional crutch for her when she needs it.

When I need to unload I unload on her and I tell her graphic specifics. This is what happened, this is what we did and she boo hoos with me and "Son, it's OK, you'll make it through. I'm proud of you. I'm glad you're there." You know, and when things weren't going right with her, you know, she'd load me up with things about my father's condition and what she had to go through and you know when he got to where he was incontinent and couldn't and wasn't ambulatory and what she had to go through with that, and load me up. Give it to me. I'd bawl on the phone with her and "It's OK, Mom, you're all right. You're still doing OK."

We have had that relationship since I was a teenager. One of my best friends in life. Always will be. Be a very sad day when she goes, cause I'm going to be one lonely guy, you know. My wife's going too get it, all of it. I hope she's ready for it.

(laughter)

You know my daughter [REDACTED], fifteen years old and she'd get on the phone, "OK, Daddy what's going on? What'd you do today?" And I'd try to couch terms and be selective in what I said to her, she says, "We know. We watch it on Discovery Channel and you can explain," this and that. "I've seen autopsies," and you know she's into science and stuff like that. She's like "Oh go ahead and tell me." So I'd explained a couple of things and talked about containers full of nothing but hands and a container full of nothing but feet and she's like "Ooh, that's gross." I'd say, "Yes, it's gross."

She says "Are you OK?"

"Yes, I'm OK. How about you?"

She says, "Oh, I'm fine. I'm not there."

I was like “Ooh, she’s pretty tough, too, she can handle this,” but she’s far removed from it and it’s just me and her talking. I’m telling her about my day at work, and she’s taking it in and supporting me.

So, you know, she asked specifics about the condition of some of the people and what they look like and how they got that way, and said, “OK, I’m going to tell you, but don’t ask me to tell you again if it upsets you, because I won’t,” and I went through, you know, fire dynamics and explosions, you know it’s my trade. I know it very well. I went through, you know, the actual physics of an explosion and in a confined space and fire, and the resulting heat and shrapnel and all kind of stuff and what the human body can take and what it can’t and what happens to it when it’s emulated and she took it all in.

She’s like “Wow, that’s tough. That must be hard looking at all that”

“Yes, it is.”

And it’s like, “OK.” No emotional response or anything, other than “Are you OK, now, Daddy.”

“Yes, I’m OK, thanks.”

She says, “No problem, anytime. “ you know. Things like that get me through this, because I’ve told you I am deeply entrenched in family, and I’ll share the wealth with them. I’ll spread it around. My brother gets some of it on occasions. My brother ██████, I’ll load him up when I know my mother can’t take anymore. I load him up with stuff, you know, and they take it. I like to think I’m there for them.

Captain and I have had some weepy moments together. He’s kind of a sobby kind of guy, too, but he’s a hell of a lot tougher than I am when it comes to that. But I’ve heard him have to talk on the phone with wives, brothers, fathers, and the man is extremely compassionate, can hold it

together to get his point across without getting too weakened. Not like me, I just fall apart and start crying on people and say, "Oh, I'm so sorry (makes voice like he's in tears.)"

Tell you it, I've told you, I've said it three or four times today, I consider myself an extremely blessed person in life. I don't know what I've done to deserve it, but I continue, maybe it's just, everybody in the Navy is wonderful and I know that's a bunch of crap, because not everybody's wonderful. I work by the 10-10-80 rule. Ten percent of the people do ninety percent of the work. Ten percent of the people give you ninety percent of the problems, and 80 % are along for the ride. It's kind of draconian, but that's if you look at it in hard light of day it's probably about true. It's pretty close to the truth. Maybe it's 12-8-80 or something like that or whatever. But I continue to be associated with nothing but the finest that every community has to offer. I mean it's just, it blows me away. Now I've got, I fell into it with several of the COs I've had. With my first Chief of Boat, Master Chief [REDACTED]. Hell of a guy. Great influence in my life. Guys that put it on the line for me and took chances on me when better judgement said they shouldn't have. I should have gone MAST three or four times in my career. I've never been. Because guys believed in me and risked what they had on me and I've never, never forgotten it, consequently I've done the same things for others, because that's what I'm supposed to do. You're supposed to pay back the next generation.

But, you know, CAPT O'BRIEN ranks right up there with some of the finest COs I've ever had. That we have pardon the pun, a play in my name, we have a bond that only highly charge emotional states and crisis create. The dynamics of the human interaction with human behavior. You're either going to love each other or hate each other. We got lucky with each other, because I think, we have a very, very good rapport. A great working relationships. We understand how each other works and thinks. Now, we're diverse enough that we can see things from different

viewpoints but alike enough that we can go down the same path together. And we complement each other, I believe. As I say, I am extremely blessed and very lucky.

Q. (02:07:18) Where do you go from here?

A. Where do I go from here? Wow. Hopefully we can get everybody identified and there are still some that are outstanding that it doesn't look good, but I'm hoping and praying that it happens. That we get everybody identified. We can give closure to the families. We can get their loved ones back to them so they can have whatever services they desire and get final closure on their death. Getting closure on a persons life is a hell of a lot harder than getting closure on their death, and that's another one of those philosophical things. We probably don't have enough tape to go into and I'm not in the mood for it really. That's best discussed over a tall, cold frosty friendly. That's beer, in other parlance.

Q. We got that down.

A. CAPT O'BRIEN and I wrap up our lessons learned. We pack up all the brain ready (Unintelligible 02:08:18) we just brought. I cart my happy self back to Tennessee to be with my family and go back to work. The CAPTAIN goes back down to his family in Virginia, goes back to work in DC and we can get together a couple of weeks after that in Tennessee hopefully, because I don't want to travel again for a while and we sit down with the powers that be and figure out how to do this better, brighter, the next time around. Because there will be a next time and if there isn't that's OK. I hope it never gets used. But if we can, I learned a long time ago, you know, the only reasons that you have a critique is not so you can point fingers, it's so you do it right the next time. We're not in the finger pointing game. If you point a finger at somebody,

you do it right, you've got three fingers pointing right back at you. So I've never been a finger pointer or I would fail as an inspection team guy, because I'd be terrible at it. I don't want to point a finger. I want us to candidly, honestly lay out the difficulties we've experienced. Try and identify root causes and propose solutions to those causes and to try and get something going so that if we ever have to do this again, God forbid, that'll go smooth. And what is the end game. The end game, minimize the anguish for the family and get them their loved ones returned expeditiously as possible, with as minimal pain and suffering as we can inflict. 'Cause we inflict it. When we contact them we cause it. We cause more scars emotionally. Every time we contact a family member we're picking on a wound. So the fewer times we can do that, the more professionally we can operate, the better we are. The better we are. So, and hopefully we each, you know I go back to my job at PERS 65 running MWR programs and getting good stuff for sailors.

Q. (02:10:22) How much longer do you have on that tour?

A. On that tour, I just started in June so I've got –

Q. (02:10:27) OK, so you're –

A. Plenty of time to get this behind me. For back and doing fun stuff, and just as meaningful, though. Taking care of sailors is important stuff. You know when people say taking care, I think that, actually that's kind a kind of trite term. Sailors don't want to be taken care of. They don't want to be cared for. They want to be cared about. You know, a big difference. I'm a nut for semantics. Taking care of somebody is what a babysitter does for your three-year-old while

you're out to dinner. Sailors don't want to be taken care of, they want to be cared about. They want to be mentored. That's the happy buzzword these years, the last few years. Mentor a sailor. Now that's what leadership is all about. That's what chief's are supposed to do. Chiefs and Master Chiefs are supposed to be mentoring First and Seconds. First and Seconds are supposed to be mentoring E-3s and E-4s, now. And E-1s and E-2s are supposed to be looking in rapture at the E-4s and E-5s saying, "Man, that'd be great when I get there someday."

Not, looking as I did as an E-3, saying, "Well the power base is really at the E-9 level. That's where I need to be."

(laugh)

E-1s and E-2s need to be looking at E-4s, saying "Wow!" That's a major impact there, and quite often we don't have that and we need to get that back. Our Navy had that forty-fifty years ago, and we lost it. I think we lost it personally, since this is my testimonial, we lost it during the Zumwalt era, and it's slowly been creeping back you know, over the last five or six years. But there for a long time were a bunch of technocrat knuckleheads, who didn't want to offend somebody, you know, for wearing their hat wrong.

"Oh, I might hurt their feelings." Who cares, you're not getting paid to be liked, you're getting paid to do your job and part of your job is to square people away. If you don't like that seek employment elsewhere.

We're going down a whole new path now, so we'll stop. Because I could talk another whole day on leadership.

Q. (02:12:35) Well we'll come back and interview you about that. We'll come and visit you in Tennessee.

A. I'll be ready.

Q. Master Chief we just want to thank you for taking time to talk with us today and tell us your story. Your personal insights and your candidly sharing with us.

A. I told you before I would be very candid and honest with you and I just don't –

Q. (02:12:53) We appreciate that.

A. Come across as, you know, I've been bawling more today than I have in weeks, and it's you know, a lot of, lot of high charged emotional stuff. My personal life is just as full of joys and miseries as anybody else's, but it is mine. You know, and it belongs to me, therefore it effects me as strongly as it does. But I tell you I really, I am honored by this. I am humbled by it more than anything. That you six would actually sit around for, what two, three hours now, listening to me babble on incessantly about what I'm doing. Like it really means something. It does, but I thank you for listening and for caring.

Q. (02:13:46) We're the ones that are humbled.

Q. (another) Yes, you've made a difference.

A. Thank you for that. You know, it was funny, I was on the Indianapolis as a COB (Chief of the Boat). Last story, I swear. We did a wreath laying ceremony on our last deployment and lucky enough we had Marines on board, onboard the submarine. We're doing special ops insertion type training off Okinawa. We couldn't get to the exact sight where the cruise Indianapolis was sunk in 1945, but we got close and we did a wreath laying ceremony. We had wreaths all made up and stuff like that and here were are out in open ocean. We had Marines onboard so we took three

Marines on deck, four actually, three with M16s and one to call it off as our honor guard, and had two sailors to lay the wreath in the water, two or four. No, four sailors, excuse me. One to play the boom box with the CD with marching music on it and stuff like that, you know. And here's the Captain and myself and the XO all in choker whites in the middle of the Pacific in about sea state two, green water washing over the forward deck, the aft deck. We're on the forward deck because of the higher freeboard, and we start to do it and we had the ship's photographer video taping it, because we're going to send it off to the survivors organization and also off to *Navy News* and stuff like that. We think it's an important thing. So on the anniversary of the sinking of the Indianapolis we're doing this ceremony, so we're topside, and we get about half of it done and all of a sudden the music stops and you hear the Yeoman explain in the background, saying, "Oh, God damn it, Oh." He's cussing up a storm. I look around and there's sparks flying. When we took a wave off of the aft deck, it came forward around the sail and just wiped out his CD player. Now, this is his personal stereo that he had in the ship's office, and this thing's blown up. It's done. So now we're halfway through this thing. We have no music. Say, "Oh Jeez how we going to do this?" And we figure out a way to get music and we're standing up there waiting for it to happen and while we're waiting we say, well we'd better drop below, because seas are getting kind of rough. Ok, we open the weapons shipping hatch, ship and hands drop back down in the ship, shut the hatch. OK. We've got a speaker system up on the bridge now, playing down on the main deck. Keep it away from water. OK, let's go up and do our thing. Open the hatch, get on deck. We do our thing, and we're just about down, you know, 21 gun salute's going off on the forward deck, Marines are looking sharp. It's clicking. Because the Indianapolis carried Marines, too. So it was just perfect that our namesake on our final deployment we had Marines and sailors at the same time. It was beautiful like it was ordained to

be. We do the wreath laying ceremony and we're all standing saluting and we're playing taps. Not a dry eye. Now, I'm hoping that the video guy loses the video because actually I don't want to share this with anybody other than the survivors. I didn't think it should go to Navy News at the time. It was so personal at that time. Sailors to sailors, Marines to Marines.

We kind of got together afterwards and were talking about it. It's like we don't want this to go to *Navy News*, we don't want to hype this. We want to send this to the survivors. This is us to them, no body else. We told the Captain that and he kind of got upset. This was CAPTAIN TOTI. He kind of got upset about that and we finally convinced him not to do it. So it didn't go to *Navy News* it just went to the survivors. Because that was our tribute to them without it being a commercialized PR stunt.

I got to thinking about it afterwards, you know this is kind of, it feels sleazy. It just doesn't feel right to do this and send it to different media stuff, because it looks like a media campaign to me, and I think you've understood my views toward the media, rather strongly. I don't want to be a party to that. To pay tribute to our shipmate is one thing. To get mileage out of it is another.

Let's not do that. So we didn't. We sent it straight to the survivors and they were very grateful for it. But lo and behold right as we were getting done, rogue wave, seventh wave of the seventh set of course, washes over the forward deck just as we open up the weapons shipping hatch to get everybody down below. So by this time were' up to our thighs in seawater and there was like two foot of water on the forward deck all running down this 21 inch hatch, down across the one set MC communications stack. Leaking down from there. Flooding out into the torpedo room. Electronics equipment everywhere sparking and arching and, we haven't told anybody we're on deck in open ocean and you have to have permission to do that. Its kind of one of those, it's better to beg forgiveness than gain permission. Kind of deals.

(laughter)

That was the kind of Captain TOTI was. You know, the guy, I'll tell you, pretty strong will, very determined and a very brave man. Some of the things he did with that submarine were just amazing. They'd make TOM CLANCY shutter, and he got away with it, because we succeeded. If we hadn't of succeeded it would have been a different story, but you know today's heroes tomorrows fool.

Anyway we're all soaked to the skin, and we've shorted out everything, and we get down below and lock the hatch down, and the guys that I took up, a seaman and 3rd Class, 2nd class and 1st class, all four, the E-6 and below, you know, groups represented, these guys were just, tears running down their face and everyone of them stuck his hands out and said "Thanks. Thanks for letting us be a part of that. It was really special."

Not a one of us were born when this happened, but that legacy, that camaraderie, that is what we are. In my heart and soul that's what we are as a Navy. And that's what makes me so special now.

So I want to leave you with that story because I want to share that with you and it s not just knuckleheads like me it's guys that are twenty years younger than me, you know, and people that are ten years old then me, we're all in the same mind set.

Wow, I'm done.

Transcribed by:
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