

**Naval Historical Center
Oral Interview Summary Form**

Interviewers:

Capt Gary Hall
YNCS (AW) Kathleen Wright

Interviewer's Organization:

Naval Historical Center
Naval Historical Center

Interviewee:

ET1 George Lee Coulson

Current Address:

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████████████████████
(w) OPNAV TCC N22A

Date of Interview:

3 APR 02

Place of Interview:

Pentagon

Number of Cassettes:

N/A

Security Classification:

UNCLAS

Name of Project: Pentagon Terrorist Attack Incident

Subject Terms/Key Words: Pentagon; Terrorist Attack; 11 September 2001; Navy Command Center; NAVTELCOM; Remains Escort

Abstract of Interview:

Interviewee Information: ET1 Coulson was born in Brunswick, GA in 1957. His father had served in the Army during World War II, but was not in the service when he was born. ET1 Coulson grew up in South Georgia. He came into the Navy at age 32. He chose the Navy because of the schooling available. Prior to joining the Navy he was a grocery store manager for a major chain in the southeastern U.S. After boot camp, "A" and "C" schools his first duty station was aboard the *USS John Rogers*, a Spruance class destroyer stationed in Charleston, SC from 1990-1995. His next duty station was on the staff of COMSUBGRU TEN in King's Bay, Georgia. In October 1998 he transferred to the NAVCOMTELSTA in Keflavik, Iceland. Next he went to NAVCOMTELSTA Washington, DC in May 2001. At this NAVCOMTELSTA they provide message service for various commands in the Washington, D.C. area and northern east coast. He is in the N2 department, which is located at the Pentagon. They provide message traffic for the Navy staff, man the Washington Navy operator phone switch, and his division is the maintenance division that handles the maintenance on the CNO's SATCOM circuits as well as providing videoconferencing for SECNAV, CNO and the Navy Staff. In the Pentagon they have about 50 people, both military and civilian. In the maintenance division with IT1 Coulson there are 5 people.

Topics Discussed:

On 11 Sep IT1 Coulson's office was in the Navy Command Center located on Corridor Four of the first floor on the D ring.

He arrived at work around 0645. He is the PRT coordinator for the department. He usually goes in to read email and plan his day and then goes to the gym around 0730 to lead a PT program. Mr. Woods, their AOIC, was usually in early too. They had sat down and discussed plans for the day. IT1 Coulson left the Pentagon a little after 0700 to go to Anacostia to run a practice PRT for the mandatory PT people. This lasted from 0730 to 0830. He was on his way to drop off mail at the Navy Yard when he heard about the World Trade Center towers on his car radio.

He went to the NCTS at the Navy Yard, arriving around 0930, and saw a television set that was on in the lounge. It was surrounded by people watching CNN. At about 0940 they flashed the news that an airplane had hit the Pentagon. He immediately went to the phone to try to call the shop at the Pentagon, but couldn't get through. He tried calling their rooms and homes, leaving messages on their machines. Three of the people who would later be missing worked for him, ET2 Brian Moss, ET3 Christopher Burford and ET3 Danny Caballero. ET2 Moss' wife called him an hour or two later asking if he had heard from ET2 Moss. He had to tell her no but tried to keep her spirits up.

After seeing an aerial view of the Pentagon from the news they knew the plane had gone through their area. The Navy Yard base was shut down, and they were not released until about 2200 that evening.

Of the 50 people they had assigned to the Pentagon there would have been only 15-20 there that day due to watch rotations. The only people who would have been in the Command Center would have been the OIC, AOIC, Admin staff (PO1 and PO3), Training Petty Officer, and the maintenance division (Division Officer, IT1 Coulson and three technicians) as well as 2 Navy phone switch operators. The rest of the command is located on the fifth floor of the Pentagon in Traffic Ops.

The other four people who were lost, besides the 3 technicians, were IT2 Yokum (Training Petty Officer), YN3 Melissa Barnes, Mr. Roger Woods (AOIC), and IT2 Chris Bishundat (phone switch operator).

LCDR Davis (the OIC) had been at the Navy Yard at the time. Lt Jackson (the Division Officer) and IT1 McCrae were on the second floor of the Fourth Corridor getting ready to go into the space when the plane hit, but managed to escape. The other phone switch operator was outside taking a break at the time.

During the day a lot of people were in shock. Some had their roommates who were missing. There was a lot of concern and many could not do their jobs. People wanted to go to the Pentagon and help the rescue efforts. It was hard on them that they couldn't assist. IT1 Coulson tried to help console those who needed it.

Later that evening the Commanding Officer told them the official status of the people was missing. It stayed that way until the bodies had been identified. There were people sent out that night to the families. The next day there was counseling for the command members. The command continued to have counselors available every day.

Every time a CACO visit was done one of the Command's officers was there. The Commanding Officer called the out of town families daily.

ET1 Coulson traveled to Dover and escorted ET2 Moss' remains back to Washington, D.C. from Port Mortuary Dover. Up until ET2 Moss' funeral ET1 Coulson would be at the funeral home whenever Mrs. Moss was there. This portion was hard for NCTS because it went on for several weeks until everyone was identified. Until all the memorial services and funerals were done they couldn't put it behind them.

The Monday following 11 Sep ET1 Coulson and another ET1 went to the Pentagon to try to set things up again. All equipment and records were destroyed. They had to start from scratch. TOPHAND communications is the Washington phone switch for the Navy, this was totally lost. Their satellite communications and video teleconferencing equipment was all lost. They were able to get into their old spaces near Corridor Six and verify that the satellites on the roof there were still workable. They then acquired satellite gear, starting from scratch, and began to clean the old space. They worked three weeks for 7 days a week rewiring equipment and installing equipment. By 7 October they had satellite communications back up and operational. In the meantime the Navy was collocating equipment with the Marines at the Navy Annex.

At first ET1 Coulson was the only maintenance person left at the Pentagon. A few weeks into October they took some ET's from the Navy Yard location and moved them to the Pentagon. By 1 November they had videoconferencing capability back.

The Commanding Officer would come down to the space and pull them aside to tell them personally when remains were identified.

ET1 Coulson volunteered to go to Dover to escort ET2 Brian Moss' remains back to Washington, D.C. He was met at Dover by an HMC who went over a packet with him about what to expect from family members and what his responsibilities were as far as the funeral home and the family. Since ET2 Moss had only been with them about 3 weeks his previous command, the Ceremonial Guard, took a lot of responsibility in his funeral and service.

Mrs. Moss wanted an open casket and had the funeral home open the casket. ET1 Coulson and some others were there. They had explained to her there would be no body. The remains were wrapped in a blanket with a brand new dress blue uniform with medals laid on top of the blanket. They stood around and talked about Brian.

ET1 Coulson went to three of the seven funerals. He flew to North Carolina with ADM Mayo to attend ET3 Burford's funeral. He attended ET2 Moss' and Mr. Woods' funerals in the Washington, D.C. area.

ET2 Moss' funeral was at Fort Meyer in the old chapel. It was full. The Ceremonial Guard lined each wall and moved on to the cemetery. ET1 Coulson was proud that the Guard did such an outstanding job.

ET1 Coulson went back to the Navy Command Center in October to verify that the cryptographic equipment had been destroyed. The walls were all black and it was like being inside a furnace. It bothered him to know people who had been in there.

Abstracted by:
CDR Carol O'Hagan
15 APR 02

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Transcript of Interview:

Interviewee Information:

ET1 Coulson was born in Brunswick, GA in 1957. His father had served in the Army during World War II, but was not in the service when he was born. ET1 Coulson grew up in South Georgia. He came into the Navy at age 32. He chose the Navy because of the schooling available. Prior to joining the Navy he was a grocery store manager for a major chain in the southeastern U.S. After boot camp, "A" and "C" schools his first duty station was aboard the *USS John Rogers*, a Spruance class destroyer stationed in Charleston, SC from 1990-1995. His next duty station was on the staff of COMSUBGRU TEN in King's Bay, Georgia. In October 1998 he transferred to the NAVCOMTELSTA in Keflavik, Iceland. Next he went to NAVCOMTELSTA Washington, DC in May 2001. At this NAVCOMTELSTA they provide message service for various commands in the Washington, D.C. area and northern east coast. He is in the N2 department, which is located at the Pentagon. They provide message traffic for the Navy staff, man the Washington Navy operator phone switch, and his division is the maintenance division that handles the maintenance on the CNO's SATCOM circuits as well as providing videoconferencing for SECNAV, CNO and the Navy Staff. In the Pentagon they have about 50 people, both military and civilian. In the maintenance division with IT1 Coulson there are 5 people.

Topics Discussed:

(Q) Could you tell us where, where was your office on September 11th?

A. September 11th our office was in the Navy Command Center located on Corridor 4 on the first floor on the D ring. Our maintenance shop was within that Command Center so we were in the same area as the Navy Command was.

Q. Has it always been that way?

A. Actually no, if you notice where we're at today, we were right down the hall from the Navy Command Center where it used to be.

Q. OK.

A. So we had moved into that new location on August 15th of 2001

Q. Take us through the day of September 11th, please, from when you got up. Tell us about that day.

Q. (other) Paint us a picture.

A. September 11th, I usually arrive at work about 6:45 in the morning. I usually come in, I'm the PRT coordinator for our department here so I usually go in early, you know 6:45 or so and read a little bit of email, plan out my day and then I normally go to the gym about 7:30 to lead a PT program.

That morning I had come in at that time, checked my mail. MR. WOODS was a civilian that was working for us. He was AOIC at the time. He was always in about that time or a little bit before me. I had checked email, sat down with him. We discussed plans for that day, you know, what I had going on and you know maybe some things that he needed to have me do that day, also.

I left the Pentagon a little bit after seven o'clock to go to Anacostia because we were running a practice PRT that morning for the command people that were you know, so I was over there. That started like 7:30 and we were probably through about 8:30. Once I'd gotten through there I stopped by the Medical Clinic on Bolling Airforce base to have a PRT screening signed, and then I was on my way to the naval yard to drop off some mail and stuff and that's when I heard about the Trade Center Towers being hit, you know.

Q. (08:22) How did you hear about that?

A. Radio, I had my –

Q. Radio in the car.

A. I had my radio on in the car and I was you know, and once I heard a second plane had hit, you know, it hit that something wasn't right. I went ahead to the yard, the NCTS there and I ran in, you know.

Q. (08:40) Were there, excuse me for interrupting, were there any additional safety precautions at the yard at the point when you tried to get in?

A. Right at that point, no. I got in, everything had just happened so I got in fairly like normal, you know. I got into NCTS and as I walked into our COM center there we have a lounge for eating lunch and stuff and in that lounge we had a TV set on. People were watching CNN and the news. So I stopped right there to catch up on what was going on. That was probably right around 9:30 you know, about that timeframe. And we were watching the news and about 9:40 timeframe they flashed that the Pentagon had been hit by an airplane.

My immediate response was I sat there and looked at it for just a second you know and from the TV camera views you couldn't tell which side of the Pentagon had been hit. So I immediately went to the phone to try to call the shop to see if my personnel was OK, or not. Couldn't get through to anybody you know, and it was, it was you know - after that point I tried calling their rooms, and home and stuff like that because if they were evacuated they would have probably gone home or whatever, and we needed to muster everybody to see if everybody's OK. I called their homes and left messages on their machines. You know, "If you come in, call the Command so we can muster everybody."

Q. (10:23) This is the five people. You have five people or -?

A. We had seven that we eventually lost. Seven personnel.

Q. (10:28) But I mean you were trying to call all those names.

A. Well, I had called my guys and there were other people calling some of the other personnel.

Q. (10:40) How many of them were yours? I guess that's my point.

A. Three of them were, directly worked for me.

Q (10:47) Who were they?

A. ET2 BRIAN MOSS, ET3 CHRISTOPHER BURFORD and ET3 DANNY CABALLERO, and I of course I never got in touch with anybody. PETTY OFFICER MOSS' wife called me probably an hour or two later, asking if I had heard from you know, Brian at that time. And of course that was kind of hard to tell her no, that I had not heard from him and to keep her spirits

up you know. And I said that doesn't mean anything at this point, you know, they could be mustered in an area over there and not allowed to a phone or anything. Of course eventually we found out that the Navy Command Center had been hit.

Q. (11:33) How did you find that out?

A. Well, just from finally seeing an overview, aerial view from the news and where they said the plane hit. We knew the plane had gone through our area you know, because it you know, it hit between the first and second floor and that was right, the Command Center being on the first floor was right where we were at.

Q. (12:04) So you stayed put at the NAVTELCOM Center.

A. We weren't released 'til about ten that night. They pretty much shut the base down at that point and I'm sure worldwide bases went into different THREATCON, and we continued trying to muster personnel and making sure even those that were off, you know, everybody that was trying to get all the people in NCTS mustered, you know and accounted for.

Q. (12:27) From an organizational standpoint did you have about fifty people in the Pentagon that day?

A. Probably no, sir. You probably had I would say on the average probably fifteen to twenty you know in the Pentagon you know for NCTS. You know, because we, our Traffic OPS has watch sessions.

Q. (13:04) You do. OK.

A. There's four of them, so you would not have them all here, so.

Q. (13:16) Were the other folks from the organization also co-located in the Command Center or were they in a difference space?

A. No.

Q. OK.

A. The people in the Command Center was normally the OIC, the AOIC, our admin staff which was at that time consisted of a 1st class and a 3rd class, our training Petty Officer and of course the maintenance division, which was the Division Officer, myself and three technicians. And then you had your, also your Navy phone switch operators which was normally two of them on watch. The rest of the Command is located here on the fifth floor in Traffic OPs.

Q. (14:20) OK, and you said that you lost three techs. Who were the other four?

A. The other four was our training Petty Officer which was IT2 YOKUM, our YN3, MELISSA BARNES, our AOIC which was MR. ROGER WOODS and one of the phone switch operators was on watch at the time, that was IT2 CHRIS BISHUNDAT. So, that was, and of course my three technicians, that was a total of seven that we lost in the attack.

Q. (15:11) The other folks who were there did they get out? I mean was the OIC there and got out or was he just not with them?

A. COMMANDER DAVIS was over in the yards with me at the time. He was the Acting XO for the Command so he happened to be over in the yard. The Division Officer, my Division Officer LT. JACKSON and IT1 MC CREA were actually on the 2nd floor, 4th corridor getting ready to go down into the space when the plane hit and they managed to escape out into the courtyard of the Pentagon to get away from there.

Q. (15:51) Was there another telephone switch operator?

A. Yes, the other phone switch operator happened to be outside taking a break, smoking a cigarette at the time.

Q. (16:06) So anybody who was in the space was lost?

A. Yes.

Q. (16:12) Tell us about the mood at your command that day, when you couldn't reach seven of your folks.

A. I think a lot of people were in shock. A lot of personnel over at NCTS were either friends with the people over here. One of them had been a roommate of one of the girls. There were a lot of crying going on in there. Just concern. A lot of people couldn't hardly do their jobs because they were so upset and that from what had happened.

There were people that wanted to come help the rescue efforts, you know as Navy personnel we're trained to go toward the damage, not away from the damage. You know, being on a ship you either put out the fire, or the flooding, or it sinks, you know. So, and I think that was hard on a lot of personnel that we couldn't assist you know.

I know myself you know, I tried to console a lot of people. I'm a little bit older. You know I was upset, too, but you know there was us in leadership positions that had to be strong for the rest you know, at that time. So it was, there was a lot of grief going on at the time.

Q. (17:52) Did you, how'd you do that? I mean had you had some training to prepare yourself for that?

A. No, I mean, I've been married almost twenty –five years. I lost a father. I've lost uncles and aunts you know, grandparents and stuff like that, so I've had experience as far as dealing with death you know. And I think just being able to be there. Sometimes they needed a hug. Sometimes they you know, just needed a pat on the back. You know just to talk to. Just being there for whatever anybody came with and asked you know.

Q. (18:35) What was the official status of the folks initially, missing?

A. Missing, yes sir.

Q. OK, and then that, I mean did that come out on that first day? Or I guess what I'd like you to do is explain to us what sort of official information was provided to your command or did your command provide to you on the status of the –

A. Our CO, later on, later that night you know evening, early evening as we had a muster completed, the official status was those seven personnel were considered missing. And that first day that's the way it stayed. Matter of fact until the bodies had been identified through whatever means, they were considered missing and not reported as killed in action or whatever.

Q. (19:32) At what point were there Casualty Assistance personnel identified to work with the families and – ?

A. The next day, I mean almost immediately. You know immediately I would almost say. I know there were people sent out that night you know to the families in the area. There was assistance to the Command personnel starting the next day with counseling. You know, I mean we had counselors in the Command everyday for weeks. You know, to you know to have groups, group sessions, one-on-one sessions.

Q. (20:17) Were these the SPRINT Team folks or, do you know who they were or where they were from?

A. The Family Service Center had provided counseling. Chaplains provided, so we had both. Then a little, you know a week or two later, reservists had come in that were experienced counselors. You know counselors, Command continued to have counselors available everyday, you know.

Q. (20:46) Did many people avail themselves of that opportunity?

A. Yes, I know the first day, or the next day, the 12th, I was in a group session the next day and we probably in that first session, probably had about ten people in there. You know and then we, they had more and like I said, they did one-on-one. And as they did the counseling within the command, of course they recognized those that were mostly affected by this and they tried to do more one-on-one counseling with this who met –

Q. (21:26) Did they work with the Command leadership to -?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. (21:27) OK.

Q. (other) Were most of those the younger most junior members of your staff, or?

A. I would say so, yeah. The personnel that were really affected I think that really openly showed it were more junior personnel. You know, 3rd classes, 2nd classes, you know.

I know you know, as far as myself you know I never had my stress relief 'til probably Wednesday night. You know the next day because I come into work the next day. And once I had gotten home that day, it - I know I had shared with my wife (becoming emotional) you know I think that's when I really started to release my stress there, and my grief.

We went to our church for our service that night and I spoke at that time, you know, and that's when I really was able to release my grief. I cried for probably an hour, you know, because being a little bit older you know, I've got kids that are the age of some of the personnel I lost and I always tend to think of myself as the "dad," or you know whatever. My people I look for -I really do care about the folks that work for me, not only at work, but personal lives, you know. Anything to help them you know, and so losing the three that worked for me and my shipmates that worked around me was like losing a family, you know.

Q. (23:22) I didn't ask you this, but how did you contact your family and let them know that you were OK?

A. After I had made some, you know tried to call the shop, my wife was at home and I immediately called home and I managed to get out. Phone lines were pretty much messed up that day in Washington and I asked my wife, I said, "Are you watching TV or anything?"

She said, "No." So my wife, the first person she heard from about this was me, and so that was a blessing because I explained what was going on.

I said, "Turn on the TV and see what's going on," and informed her I was fine, that I was not in my office at that time, that I was over in the Navy Yard. So my wife didn't have to worry. She didn't have that worry, you know that I was hurt or whatever.

My daughter on the other hand was downtown Washington in school at the time. She was attending the Ballet School, Washington Ballet at the time and she came out about eleven o'clock and somebody said that the Pentagon had been bombed. Of course she immediately started crying because her daddy works at the Pentagon, you know, and she took her cell phone. It took her a couple of tries but she actually got through to my wife and once she did then she was OK. You know my wife said, "You're dad's not there," that he's fine. So that was a blessing, because after I called my wife our phone constantly rang the whole rest of the day, because you know, family calling. You know that way, my wife was able to call her family and my family to let them all know that I was OK.

You know but then we had friends, and then cousins and aunts and everybody else calling to see, to see what was going on.

Q. (25:07) It's amazing isn't it.

Q. (Other) Went through the same experience.

Q. Did the, did your Command provide Command presentation for the family assistance, Casualty Assistant folks?

A. Yes.

Q. (25:29) And could you tell me how that worked?

A. Well, I can't probably give you exactly. I know our senior personnel in the Command, the CO, XO, Commanders and stuff, every time a CACO visit was done, one of our officers were there, you know. So they had a lot of stress you know, themselves you know dealing with visits and stuff. They tried to provide as much support to the families as possible. Now some of the families were not in town and there were calls made by the commanding officer, you know, daily to provide the families with status and so on. And CACOs were arranged to go see those families that were out of town, you know, so.

Q. (26:27) Did you participate in any of those?

A. I didn't do any of the CACO, you know the visits. A couple, I did volunteer for escort duty when bodies were identified, you know.

Q. (26:43) So you went to Dover?

A. Yes, I traveled to Dover. I escorted PETTY OFFICER MOSS back to Washington, here, and then up until his funeral, any visits his wife did, you know I met her at the funeral home and was there you know.

I think that portion was, I mean for NCTS, was tough, because bodies trying to be identified, you know not everybody was identified within a week. It went several weeks you know and we did a memorial service. We did, of course funerals, and until all those funerals were done, those memorial services were done we really couldn't put it behind us, you know, a little bit and try to go on. Because it just brought up emotions time and time again, so it was just a roller coaster ride

for several weeks for most of us you know. You know once you think you're ok, you go to a funeral and you'd be all upset again, so.

Q. (27:59) At what point did you understand or know that the folks weren't missing, but actually dead?

A. I would say probably the next day. I mean when we of course could not find them and to see the news reports and the damage of the plane going all the way from through E Ring all the way into C ring, it, you pretty much, or I did pretty much knew that they were gone. The following Monday, I immediately, one of the other ETIs and I came over, because you know we're tasked to try to get things set up again.

TOPHAND communications was totally lost. All equipment was destroyed, all records, files.

Everything was gone, you know, we had to start from scratch.

Q. (29:00) Can you explain to us what that is?

A. TOPHAND Communications of course is our Washington phone switch you know for the Navy. And our satellite communications equipment and our VTC equipment, VIDEO CON and equipment, and of course desks, files, pubs everything, everything was gone. You know we didn't have anything.

Since we had just moved out of our old space down to the new area, we came over to see if our old space was damaged by anyway since it was just off of you know corridor 6, and the fire had spread around to corridor 6. We had power into our cipher to get into the old space. We had power to the space. Everything was OK. We managed to get permission to get on the roof because we had antenna, satellite antenna systems on the roof right above that space, and verified

cabling and antennas were still OK. Once we did that we went on, went to the process of acquiring satellite gear again. Everything, tools test equipment, phones, computers, everything you know we just we had to start from scratch.

We worked with contractors, made a lot of phone calls and we came over started cleaning the space you know over here. We worked for about three weeks probably seven days a week, you know from seven in the morning 'til ten at night, you know, some days, re-wiring equipment bays, getting in equipment, installing and by October 7th, less than a month later we had satellite communications back up and operational.

Q. (31:04) In the meantime, the Navy was using, was locating space and equipment with the Marines. Was that the continuity?

A. Yeah, the rest of the Navy staff did move over to the Annex and you know to the Marine spaces over there.

Q. (31:31) Did you have any involvement with that?

A. No, sir I sure didn't. They, you know the people from TOPHAND that was in, we were re-located to the Navy Yard for that period of time, you know for about a month and then the technicians and the Yard ETs, in the Yard and I came over and we did the work and so we worked out of there and to set things up.

I know they moved a lot of Navy staff around a lot of different places trying to get them offices, phones, computers.

Q. (32:04) So when did you move back into the Pentagon?

A. I moved back into the Pentagon, I by myself was probably back over at October 7th in TOPHAND, you know into the old space since I was the only maintenance person left. And then about a week or two later we took a couple of ETs from the shop over there and moved them over here with me to provide assistance with me because we were still in the process of reacquiring video conferencing equipment and fiberoptic lines being able to be tested, you know so we could provide video conferencing for the staff, and that was by November 1st or so, we probably had video conferencing capability back.

Q. (32:56) So the five people that are in your division included you and the division officer?

A. Yes sir,

Q. (33:02) And then three techs?

A. Yes sir.

Q. And so you really lost your whole division.

A. Yes sir.

Q. (33:09) And now you have a new division? You had to take some folks from –

A. We took a couple personnel from the yard. BUPERS worked to provide bodies that were lost. They immediately started re-routing orders to get personnel back in, the ones that we lost you know, so.

Q. (33:34) Rebuilding your office for the TOPHAND?

A. Yes ma'am.

Q. Was the, did it run efficiently as far as, usually the procurement system is cumbersome to say the least. Did it go smoothly?

A. I would say yes, SPAWAR of Charleston did a lot of work getting equipment. Provided tech assist to help with installations. They even provided the phones to acquire other stuff, tools and things like that.

Probably, that first month there, I probably spent \$20,000 in office supplies, tools, test equipment and you know other stuff that we needed. NCTAMSLANT which is our boss for the NAVCOMTELSTA test equipment was provided through them. They, we called them and they immediately got together a list of things that we were going to need and put it in a van and had people drive it up here to us.

Q. (34:41) Really?

A. You know, so they were, they were a big help. They made two or three trips up here bringing things to us.

Q. (34:38) Was this kind of a new experience for you, I mean going through a complete set up like that and interfacing with the procurement system or had you done that before?

A. No I had never really done that much. I had done installs before with contractors, but I was never the one that did, did the call.

(Interviewers laugh)

You know, So I thought we did pretty good job.

Q. (35:10) Absolutely, in less than a month. Well with a new staff I guess you had to do a fair amount of training, too, or those guys come in pretty well trained?

A. Yes sir, well one of the techs I brought from back over from the yards was originally assigned to me here in the Pentagon so he had the training as far as the satellite gear. The other technician had not. I feel I have some of the best ETs, smart, young men and they're just, they're outstanding. Then a couple were orders, you know orders in you know for here and so and that took care of them.

Now the video conferencing equipment stuff like that I pretty much had to train them, you know, 'cause we don't get schools for that. That's just something that we, we pick up as ETs, just like most things. You know, we pick up a manual and read it and learn how to do it, and so we have to provide that training and we're - it's always a learning process, so.

Q. (36:25) If you could, I just want to try to step back to something earlier we were talking about. Can you take us through the, you've kind of done this, but a little bit more specifically through the days that followed, a feel for when the identifications were made and the mood in the command. I mean how you were feeling through all that. You said it was a tough time.

A. The identifications, as personnel were identified of course you know, some people cried. It was, some of it might have been a relief, OK, he has been identified, now, we can work towards a funeral, you know.

I know one of my techs, his father didn't want to, or his parents didn't want to believe he was dead, you know. "He's somewhere. He's just hurt" or whatever. So I mean that gave some closure you know there. You know they would ask questions like, "Have you checked his

room?” You know, “Did he go back to his room? Is he hurt? He’s just in his roo,,” or something you know. So that was some closure that was then be able to be done.

Q. (37:42) Who was first identified, do you remember?

A. I would tend to say PETTY OFFICER BURFORD or MOSS. I couldn’t tell you exactly.

Q. (38:02) Was it within a week, or ten days, or?

A, I believe so, yes.

Q. (38:07) How did you all find that out?

A. Through our Commanding Officer. She would come down and tell us personally. She wouldn’t send anybody down. She was real good. She would come down to the space and pull us aside, you know, or something and let us know.

Q. (38:29) You said you were the escort for PETTY OFFICER MOSS. How did that come about?

A. Like I said I volunteered for it. If I could have escorted all of my guys I would have. It’s just something I felt that I needed to do, you know. I went through a quilt thing for a while, losing all my technicians, with losing my shop and me, I’m still here. You know that kind of bothered me. It just, it, escorting his body back was the least I could do, you know.

PETTY OFFICER MOSS was the only one I had, you know that was married out of my PTs. He had two kids, a five-year-old and a seven-year-old, you know. Now they’re without a dad. So that was just, that was very, a simple thing that I could do.

Q. (39:38) The, we've talked to a lot of CACOs and family reps and escorts, did they explain that there was any particular duties to perform, and if so what are they?

A. Yes, when I drove over to Dover, the coroner came out and met me. A Chief Corpsman, Navy Chief Corpsman and he pulled me aside into a room. Went over kind of a packet with me. You know what to expect from family members. What could be expected. What I had to do to take the body to the funeral home. Have them sign over, sign for the body. What my responsibilities might be as far as being there when the viewing might be you know, whatever to support the family. To get with the CACO for the family of any of the funeral services or anything like that, If I needed to do anything you know like that.

PETTY OFFICER MOSS had only been with us for about three weeks. Ceremonial Guard, he was a trained PO for the Ceremonial Guard and so the Ceremonial Guard took a lot of responsibility in his funeral and services and things like that, 'cause that's where his friends were. And I was just there for assistance if they needed anything, you know. So I didn't have to do a lot there. Like I said, I was there at the funeral home when his wife came in for the first time, when the CACO was there and also PETTY OFFICER, one of PETTY OFFICER MOSS' good friends was there.

MRS. MOSS actually wanted an open casket.

Q. (41:28) She did?

A. She had us, had the funeral home open the casket.

Q. (41:34) Just for her?

A. We were all there. We were all there.

Q. (41:39) Was it explained to her very carefully?

A. It was very, explained to here that there was not going to be a body.

Q. (41:46) Who had to explain that to her, you think?

A. The CAOC pretty much did and the funeral home director had explained things.

Q. (41:54) Chief Spurgeon?

A. Yes, I believe so.

Q. (41:55) And you had met him before?

A. Yeah, I got to meet him a little bit before we actually went into the funeral home. He and I'd both gotten there a little earlier and so he and I had a chance to talk and really all MRS. MOSS was able to see was of course the remains were wrapped in a blanket, you know and his, a brand new dress blues uniform with medals and everything was laying on top of it.

Q. (42:23) She looked –

A. She actually, she reached in lifted and looked. You know we stood around and talked a little while about Brian you know. They shared some things and I shared some things you know. MRS. MOSS is a strong lady, you know. I admire her, the, you know we laughed about Brian a little bit with some of his unique things. Hamburgers. He loved hamburgers. He'd eat hamburger everyday you know.

(interviewers laugh)

He'd grill a hamburger everyday if she'd let him you know. But you know, I mean she cried, you know, some, but she, you know she also laughed. But she had friends there you know.

Q. (43:13) Were the Ceremonial Guard members there too?

A. Not at that time. Just one, the one good friend which was a Chief from the Ceremonial Guard was there, you know and his wife, and the –

Q. (43:26) And this was, was this late September, early October, or ?

A. I would tend to say late September yeah. He was one of the first ones to be identified. Like I say I can't remember if it was PETTY OFFICER BURFORD, or him you know that was first, or whatever, but –

Q. (43:47) Was he the only one you were an escort for?

A. Yes I, other ETs in the command, one of my other techs escorted CABALLERO from Dover to Texas. We had two of the females over in the yard escorted PETTY OFFICER BARNES. One of the CHIEFS escorted PETTY OFFICER YOKUM down to Louisiana where he was from. PETTY OFFICER BURFORD, his father had requested one of his good friends to come up and escort him back to North Carolina. And MR. WOODS was the last one. I can't remember, I think Commander Davis might have escorted MR. WOODS. He was one of the last ones to be identified. It was late, and that went on for probably about, I don't know how long. It'd just, he

was just, it was really long time. CABALLERO and MR. WOODS were probably the last two to be identified as far as I can remember. They really had a problem trying to identify them.

Q. (45:12) The other escorts, I don't know how much you know the procedure, but the bodies were shipped by via air?

A. Yes ma'am.

Q. And then did they ride on the same airplane and then get off and escort it right to the hearse.

A. Yes, so.

Q. (45:22) So PETTY OFFICER MOSS had the services at the funeral home and then where was he buried?

A. Arlington National Cemetery.

Q. Did you attend that too?

A. Yes sir. I went to I think three of the seven funerals. Flew to North Carolina with ADMIRAL NATTER to go to PETTY OFFICER BURFORD's funeral, and then PETTY OFFICER MOSS was here. MR WOODS' funeral here. There was one other person buried here I was not able to and then the two that were out of town, you know, I just couldn't fly to.

Q. (46:20) Can you tell us a little bit about the MOSS funeral?

A. It was really neat, the ceremonial Guard of course being training most every one of them. It was held on Fort Myer, the chapel service, in the old chapel. It was full. All the seats were full

The ceremonial Guard was lining each wall, and of course then moved right on to you know to the cemetery there and it was a very moving experience. I mean you know I was proud that he had such good friends. I was proud that the Guard did such an outstanding job you know with his services and stuff. It was –

Q. (47:20) Did you have an opportunity to talk to any of the kids he had trained?

A. No I haven't. You know I'm only talking to the Chief, you know, he and I got to talk a bit, but I didn't get to talk to any of the other guys that he trained. If you talk to anybody about PETTY OFFICE MOSS you know, you didn't hear anything but good. You know he was a squared away guy, a squared away sailor. Loved the Navy. Love what he did and was always seeking to do more.

Q. (48:00) After the last funeral, how'd your organization carry on? What's the mood been like? How have you coped? Are you back to normal?

A. I think so, you know, we've pretty much you know once we got all the funerals and memorial you know services out, you know out of the way. I know the last thing that kind of bothered me was I had the opportunity to go back into the space afterwards. And when I walked in there you know to see the hole inside the building and know that that plane came right through where we worked and to look around, it felt like you were standing inside a furnace, because it was just black. The fire was tremendous you know. It really bothered you to think that, you just prayed that the people went quick, because that would have been an awful death.

Q. (49:08) When did you get to go back in?

A. Probably in October about four or five weeks later.

Q. Really?

A. We, you know before they really started to demolish things and take, because we were trying to verify that cryptographic equipment had been destroyed you know and stuff like that.

Q. (49:24) Was there still like office equipment still in the spaces or was that already removed?

A. It had already been stripped. It was just, you know you could see where the walls had just been blasted out. Columns cracking from you know the explosion and just the, just the signs of just an awful fire. Like I said it was just blackened out. It was just, it was pretty bad. There was a lot of destruction. Of course I was able to walk out and stood in the hole, you know where the roof had caved in on top of part of the Command Center there. I stood in the hole at the side of the building and it was just a sad thing to see you know to know that there were forty-two people in the Command Center you know that died, and to see that fire. Like I said then to see that destruction and know that they, it was just awful, awful feeling to me.

I know PETTY OFFICER MC CREA was one of the ones that went back in there with us. And I know her remarks when we came out was "I don't want to do that again." You know, pretty sad, but following that you know, once like I said the services were done, the memorials were done, I think we were able to start to get back to normal.

I know some of the junior personnel that they've been effected. I've seen that one of them has transferred you know. She's moved on. She's advanced. One of them is still here and they're back to their normal old selves. You know for weeks though they were just really upset. Just unstable kind of, you know you really worried about them.

But as I've seen people you know, we've kind of got into our routine of things. And of course we're in the process of course, we've moved back into our old space and we set thing back up, but we're going to have to move again, you know.

Q. (51:34) Do you know when?

A. Late August, September timeframe. We're supposed to move back into the Command Center. You know as, part of - the Command Center is already up and operational, but they still have to finish part of it, so this will be the third time, I've -

Q. (51:56) Where are you going to be, do you know?

A. It's off corridor 3. So this will be the third time I've rebuilt TOPHAND, to a different -

Q. (52:02) You ought to have it down - (everyone laughs, except the interviewee)

A. I don't want to do it anymore. But you know I think everybody's done pretty well, and if you stop and ask some of them, there's times that you know we get a little teary eyed. A couple of weeks ago CAPTAIN HIGH, (phonetic) From NCTAMSLANT our boss was here and we gave her a brief of what we do and everything and she came around to my space a little bit later and talked with myself and my techs there. And you know she presented me with a command coin, you know. And of course my guys have all been given personal awards, you know for what we had done to get everything done, but I would give everyone of my personal awards back if I could have my friends back (emotional again). That's not why were here.

But I'm glad a lot of the memorials have been done and the United States is so behind what we do, because none of these people should ever be forgotten. None of the people of the *Cole* should ever be forgotten.

Q. (53:35) Did the command still have some contact with the families or how would that -?

A. I know my 3rd Class is always in contact with CAB's (Caballero) family. It's ironic because he was willing to escort the body down and they look so much alike. The same build, same dark hair, same skin tone, Hispanic descent, and he still contacts his mother and father and talks with them, because they gained a friend there, you know.

I know there's other, a couple of other people I think that contact, stayed in contact with some of the parents. You know, I know the BARNES family, that's been a tough time, because they lost their other daughter about a year before. And now they've lost both you know lost both daughters and I think they have a son left, but that's it. You know they've lost two of their kids.

Q. (54:45) How has this whole experience impacted or changed you? Lessons learned or some course corrections to your life that you can share with us.

A. I don't know if there's lessons learned as much as being thankful to God that he took care of me that day. That it wasn't my time, you know. And, just continue to work, to do my job the very best I can, you know. I know as far as procedures, you know within the Command you know, yeah there were lessons learned about some things. You know, that we can do better if something like this ever happens again. But every command you know has to respond a certain way, or they learn something anytime something like this happens. Incident with *Cole*, her procedures have been reviewed time and time again for security purposes with ships, you know

pulling into foreign ports and things. You know there's always lessons learned. I think maybe some of us that have, that were close over here, you know some might appreciate life a little bit more, you know, but other than that, and I'm just, I'm thankful I mean you know, I'm still able to see my wife and my two kids, you know. So I just make sure that I make everything count.

Q. (56:34) You had mentioned that you went to a church service I guess the night of, or the next night.

A. The next night.

Q. (56:41) Next night. What can you, you said you spoke, can you summarize what you shared with your -?

A. Well, I shared with our church family basically that I had lost seven shipmates and that I – to be praying for the families of those seven and to also pray for you know our leaders of the country, our command, myself as we deal with the situation. You know that we're doing the right thing, you know and that we're able to do the right thing. And I think that's why I probably rebounded so quickly, because of my faith and the support I got from that church family.

I'm a director of the Sunday School Department and they're older adults, medium adults as we call them. They don't like to be called that but you know it's a great group and they were there for me, you know, And –

Q. (57:52) Where is that?

A. Alexandria, First Baptist Church of Alexandria. And so you know, staff was there for you if you needed it. So that's, I think that's why I was able to handle things as well as I have. Yeah

there's times I get teary eyed about them, like today. You know but you know you miss those friends and but having that support group will also get you through things.

Q (58:24) You mentioned your children. Are they boys or girls, or – ? How old are they?

A. I have a twenty-one year old son and a twenty year old daughter. So when I said that I have kids age of some of the ones I did. CABALLERO was twenty-one years old. I've got a son that age, you know that could very well be in the armed forces. You know he's not, he's going to school and working you know and stuff, but so you know that's why I felt like, you know these guys are coming in you know I'm getting older and older and they're getting younger and younger it seems like.

Q. (59:03) I can identify with that.

A. Yeah, so.

Q. (59:08) Did your children ask you very many questions, or did you explain to them or tell them about your troops, your shipmates that you lost, or did they exhibit any curiosity?

A. They exhibited a lot of concern for dad. My son being gone, of course he wanted to call you know and make sure I was OK. My daughter was just, was thankful that I was OK. And she was around to see the emotion you know, and understand a little bit of what I was going through, and I know some things some of the counselors would put out, you know they even would go to talk to family members. That you know you've got to, that Mom and Dad are going through a tough time, you know right now. They've like lost some friends at work and things like that. You know they might not be really acting normal, you know. They you know, some of us could be effected

in different ways. Some of us could tend to shut folks out you know a little bit, because we get a little quiet. Some of us might be short tempered or something, but you know that's. I don't think I've, I did that, I tried not to do, you know put my family out of the picture. I know my wife was real good about if I was sitting there being quiet or something she would ask, "What are you thinking?" You know "What's going on with you," or whatever. So I had a lot of support at home too.

Q. (01:01:01) Good. So what's next for you. How much longer in this tour?

A. I've actually got about two years more left in this tour, so considering I had just gotten here, this first year has been a very busy year.

Q. (01:01:15) Really?

A. So like I said this morning, my plates full. Our Division Officer, I don't have one, I'm acting Division Officer so, you know I'm pretty busy and so we've still got other plans. We've got to do another whole move and we're going to have to work with that.

Q. (01:01:41) Then what, after this tour what, do you know? Crystal Ball.

A. Don't know yet. Enlisted most likely with me, I've been on shore duty here, I'll have to go back to sea. So I'm sure I'll be stationed on a ship somewhere. My goal is I need to work on advancing to Chief and to you know, so I'm still waiting for the results from this last _____.

Which wasn't probably it wasn't too pretty because September 11th really cut into your studying time. You know, just, I didn't do any studying. I was too busy to. To involved with other things, If I made Chief it was by the grace of God that I did it.

Q. (other) We'll meet you at the initiation then.

Q. (01:02:29) Well you've experienced some of that thought, the grace of God. So you know that's possible and it sounds to me like you've, maybe you didn't have enough time to study but you did some life lessons that will serve you well when you make Chief.

A. Uh huh, I think so.

Q. (01:02:47) Is there anything else that you'd like to say for the historical record, or something that we didn't ask you?

A. I don't think so, you were pretty thorough.

Q. Thank you. You were very good. I really appreciate you taking your time I know you're very busy as you said, but this is a critical piece that we didn't have really any incite into yet. So I really, really do thank you for taking and making the time to do that. Thank you.

(Disk continues with casual conversation following end of interview, because no one turned off the machine.)

Transcribed by:
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