

**Naval Historical Center
Oral Interview Summary Form**

Interviewers:

Capt Gary Hall
CDR Carol O'Hagan
YNCS(AW) Kathleen Wright

Interviewer's Organization:

Naval Historical Center
Naval Historical Center
Naval Historical Center

Interviewee:

Capt Bruce Kahn

Current Address:

██████████
████████████████████

Date of Interview:

12 MAR 02

Place of Interview:

Navy Annex

Number of Cassettes:

One

Security Classification:

Unclassified

Name of Project: Pentagon Terrorist Attack Incident

Subject Terms/Key Words: Pentagon; Terrorist Attack; 11 September 2001; Pentagon Memorial Ceremony; Chaplain; CACO; CNO IP; Reserves

Abstract of Interview:

Interviewee Information: Capt Kahn was born ██████████ in ██████████, PA. This was the day his father was discharged from the U.S. Navy as a Gunnery Officer. Most of the males in his family have served in the armed forces, but no one as long as he. He was commissioned in 1970; he will retire 20 June 2002 off the *USS Constellation*. He was ordained from Ebrina College Jewish Institute of Religion and served two years on active duty at NAS Memphis. In the Reserves he has served at the Chief of Chaplains office, at Naval Hospital Bethesda, Fleet Religious Support Activity Norfolk, on many staffs, a force chaplain twice, a unit commanding officer three times, fleet chaplain for Atlantic Fleet, and many experiences at sea from submarines to aircraft carriers. He performed the funeral for ADM Hyman Rickover in 1986. In his civilian capacity he has had two congregations, one at Orami in Richmond, VA from 1976-1980 and at Temple Shalom in Chevy Chase, MD ever since. On 15 August 2001 he became Rabbi Emeritus at Temple Shalom. After serving there 21 years he decided to take early retirement so he could concentrate on other things. One of those things is taking retired military chaplains and putting them in the civilian workplace to do for the corporate world what they did on ships and bases in the military world. He also plans to do some writing. He has been married to Toby Andrea Levin Kahn for 34 years. They have two grown children, Elena and Dina. He spent two weeks in prison in 1985 for peacefully protesting the treatment of Soviet Jews in front of the Soviet Embassy, which was against the law then. The Supreme Court later threw that out as an unconstitutional law. Right after he was arrested he was selected for Commander, and right after he came out of prison he was promoted.

Topics Discussed:

On 11 Sep Chaplain Kahn was home working in his study. One of his congregants who works for Channel Eight News told him what was happening and to turn on the television. The World Trade Center and the Pentagon had both been hit by then. He turned on the news and started to cry. He had a sensation of disbelief. He put on his uniform and went to Naval Hospital Bethesda. He reported to the senior Chaplain, Roy Beebe. He got involved in the plans to receive the wounded, but they never came. He left Bethesda that evening and got home around 1900. He was having dinner when he received a call from the Chief of Chaplains office telling him to report. Chaplain Kahn reported to the Chief of Chaplains office at the Navy Annex after a difficult time getting through security.

They began to divide all the chaplains into CACO teams. The chaplains were taken to the Washington Navy Yard CACO center. Each chaplain was hooked up with a CACO and a command representative to make a CACO team. Around 2330 Chaplain Kahn's team went to the LCDR Robert Elseth family home in Burke, VA. They arrived at the Elseth home around midnight. The team included Chaplain Kahn, the CACO – LCDR Mike Fulkerson, and the command representative Capt Eileen Roemer.

The Elseths had already communicated that they didn't want anyone to come over. Prior to the CACO team leaving the Navy Yard the Elseths relented and said maybe one person could come over. The team had orders to go as a team so all three arrived at the Elseth home. The family had other things going on and they were "sorely tried". The CACO team started to click with the Elseth family. Bob Elseth's brother was there, a Marine Major, and he was angry and not thrilled about them being there. The CACO team ended up staying there until about 0330. One or more of the team was there with the family almost constantly for at least the next week.

Chaplain Kahn was given another family to help out in Gaithersburg, MD, the Pontell family. He also had work to do at the Joint Family Assistance Center and some things to do at the CACO center.

Chaplain Kahn was put on orders for the next two weeks. The first week was dedicated to the Elseth and Pontell family. Bonds started to form with the Elseth family. The family wanted to believe that Bob was alive. There were two problems. The first problem was Bob's mom was in Germany. Using his cell phone Mike Fulkerson was able to get a C-130 flight from Lithuania to pick up Bob's mother and bring her back to Virginia. The second problem was that the family had another catastrophic event that had happened in the family. There were six calamities with which they were dealing. Their love of God and faith enabled them to draw great strength, understanding and wisdom. Given everything that was going on they were in extraordinarily good shape. Every day the hopes grew a little weaker. Eventually one member of the family or another started to think Bob had not survived. They were grateful for the Joint Family Assistance Center opportunity. At times they were bothered that they couldn't see more going on at the Pentagon to recover the bodies. They were concerned that the fires weren't being put out quicker. The reality was that Bob probably died instantaneously. The fact that the Elseths were devout Methodists and Chaplain Kahn was Jewish was not an issue.

During the second week Chaplain Kahn was asked to focus his attention on the Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station Washington, which is headquartered at the Navy Yard, but they have three offices at the Pentagon where they handle the message traffic for CNO among other things. In one of those three offices they had 14 personnel, 7 lived and 7 died. The head of the office was a military retiree, Mr. Woods. He was just above where the plane hit and at the end of the first month his remains were the only of the 7 that had not been found. Most of the people from the command who died were young and their closest friends were in the command. They were a very tight group.

His orders ended after the second week, but the needs didn't end after the second week. He just stayed with the people he had been tending to. That went on for another couple weeks. Then the services started. Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station had a memorial on 4 October at the Women's Memorial at Arlington. There were 400-500 people there. He participated in a service run by the General from the Ballistic Missile Command. He was asked to participate in the Pentagon Memorial Service on 11 October with 30,000 people in attendance including the President, SECDEF, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and the LTGEN who ran the Joint Family Assistance Center (LTGEN Van Alstyne). The Chief of Chaplains from the Army, Air Force and Navy were there, a Muslim Chaplain from the Army and Chaplain Kahn. He was the only reservist and the only rabbi. He initially had three readings he wanted to do, one for the family, one for the nation and one for the attackers. The one for the attackers was taking them to task, but he was told not to do that. This was a verse from Proverbs about what God doesn't tolerate. For the nation he read from Numbers Chapter 6 – May the Lord bless you and keep you and give you peace. He also went to the memorial service for Bob Elseth and was in the official party for his funeral at Arlington.

Bob Elseth's body was identified on Rosh Hashanah, a Jewish high holy day. Chaplain Kahn was in services and his cell phone was on vibrate. He went and met Capt Roemer and Mike Fulkerson and they went to the Elseth home to tell them his body had been identified. Initially the families were told they had to decide when they wanted to do the burial with the fact in mind that if more body parts were found after the funeral Arlington would not reopen the grave. They were told then there would be a common grave at Arlington for all the remaining parts, identified or not. Many of the families said that was unacceptable because they didn't want their loved ones to be entombed with the people who had killed them. Mrs. Elseth decided to go ahead and have the funeral and not wait to see if more parts were found. Chaplain Kahn presented the flag to Mrs. Elseth; a flag officer presented the flag to Bob's parents. Chaplain Kahn was very honored that Mrs. Elseth wanted him to present the flag to her. Chaplain Kahn ended up working with four families and participated in three notifications.

In December he was supposed to be sent to Afghanistan but the rabbi at Camp Pendleton went instead, so Chaplain went to Camp Pendleton to take care of MAG 39 during Hanukah. MAG 39 is nine squadrons of 4500 Marines. They were supposed to have four chaplains, but were down to one. Two of the chaplains were deployed and the third was packing.

Lessons Learned:

The CACO instructions are helpful but they should be considered guidelines, not in concrete. The Navy decision to send CACOs to everyone, military and civilian was a good one. The Navy made this decision right away.

They had a debrief of all the CACO's run by ADM Weaver (Naval District Washington). It was done orally and in writing and the VCNO participated at one point. This debrief occurred in October after the Pentagon Memorial Service.

There were so many survivor stories about why people survived. One guy was UA – he was late and he survived. One girl in the Navy Computer and Telecommunications Station Washington had her closest friends killed. They were trying to get her to stop smoking. She lived because she had gone outside to take a cigarette break. Another man who worked at the Telecommunications Station would meet with Mr. Woods every morning at 0900. He would use the head next to Mr. Woods office every morning prior to the meeting. There was another head all the way down the passageway that he had never used because it was out of the way. On 11 Sep he used the out of the way head for the first time ever. As he came out of the head the plane hit. Mr. Woods was killed, as would have this man had he not used this other head. For the next weeks he would not use any other head in the Pentagon.

There is no way, if he hadn't retired, he would have been able to meet all the commitments he has had since 11 Sep. August through October is the busiest time for a Jewish rabbi.

He is working on using Reserve chaplains to recruit within their communities to bring up the numbers of recruited chaplains. This will hopefully prevent so many ships from going out without chaplains. In some recent years they have only met 65% of the chaplain goal. He is also working on a program called Chaplains at Work to put chaplains in the workplace. He will take retired military chaplains and put them in the corporate world.

Abstracted by:
CDR Carol O'Hagan
18 Mar 02

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unconstitutional law. Right after he was arrested he was selected for Commander, and right after he came out of prison he was promoted.

Topics Discussed:

Q. (07:29) Let's move to September 11th and if you could just walk us through that day. Start in the morning.

A. In the morning I was working at my, in my study, at home. One of my congregates who works for Channel Eight News called me and said, "Have you heard?"

I said, "Heard what?" and he told me what was happening and told me to go turn on the television set, which I did. The Towers had been hit at that time and the Pentagon had been hit, the Towers had not fallen. I turned on the news saw what was going on. I remember I started to cry. And then I, (voice quavering) a sensation of disbelief struck. That is that I knew what my eyes were seeing, but the brain was not permitting me to believe that it was true. There was a disconnect, which was very strange for me. I don't know that I ever experienced that before. And I thought well get on your uniform and get over to Bethesda. When there is GQ the Chaplain goes to sickbay or wherever triage is or so I got my uniform and I headed over to Bethesda and had a heck of a time getting aboard Bethesda. I reported in. I know the Senior Chaplain over there, ROY BEEBE and he was happy to see me. I got right involved in the plans to receive the wounded who never came, but we didn't know that at the time.

Left Bethesda got home probably around 19:00 and had some dinner and as I was finishing got a call from the Chief Chaplain's Office down here at the Annex. Saying get down here, we need you. So I just got back in my car and came down here. Had a much more difficult time getting aboard here then I did getting aboard Bethesda, but I know how to beg and I pleaded with these authorities, the police and so on and they cleared a couple of barricades and let me through. I got here.

And this place was hopping with Chaplains and they—I remember as I was driving up when I saw the Pentagon and I started to cry again. That was too much. So I got here and they started talking about dividing us into CACO teams. We were waiting here for a while I don't know what all that was about. I guess it had to do with figuring out how to utilize the numerous assets that were suddenly materializing. So, eventually we were transported over to, taken over to the Navy Yard and to the CACO Center and we hooked up, each Chaplain hooked up with a CACO team a Command Representative and a CACO Officer. So we had a Command Representative, CACO Officer and Chaplain on each team. And around 11:30, 2330 something like that we departed and went to, my team went to the ELSETH'S in Northern Virginia around in the Burke area and got to their home around, LIEUTENANT COMMANDER BOB ELSETH got to his home at around midnight.

Q. (11:42) For the record who was on the team with you at that time?

A. The CACO was LIEUTENANT COMMANDER MIKE FULKERSON and the Command Representative was then COMMANDER now CAPTAIN EILEEN ROEMER. We were a CACO team that was put together with Divine intervention, because if there were three people who would just work perfectly smoothly together and all be on the same page, same attitudes and ideas and sensitivity and sensibilities and all that, it was the three of us. So, it was, I mean I hold them in the highest esteem, I have reverence for them individually and for us, the three of us all together. It was just a special privilege. I don't know how else to say it, it was a sacred privilege. The ELSETHS had already communicated that they really didn't want anybody coming over. So people could question you know the, how appropriate it was for us to kind of barge in. I mean we didn't barge in, we knocked on the door and they—once they did relent and say well one person,

before we left they said, "Well maybe one person could go." But we had orders to go as a team so we followed our orders; we went as a team. When we got there they did allow us into the house. They were having all kinds of emotions that were, and there were a whole lot of other things going on with the family at the moment. They were sorely tried. Beyond what anybody listening to this tape can imagine. We started to click with them. BOB ELSETH'S brother was there he is a very strong individual. a wonderful soul. But he was of course very angry over what had happened that day and he's also a Marine. He's a Marine Major. He was really not thrilled that we were coming in. The whole family was up. It wasn't that we were interrupting anybody's sleep, no one was sleeping, except their daughter [REDACTED], who lit the National Christmas Tree or helped the President light the National Christmas Tree. You know that story.

So you know about why her name is [REDACTED]? It was because the ELSETH'S had such a difficult time having children, and so they consider her their miracle child. The answer to their prayer so they called her [REDACTED].

We were there for quite a while the thought initially might only be there a couple of minutes, but the ice started to thaw. The relationship started to take hold, the awkwardness dissipated and we were there until about 3:30 in the morning, and we left. And one or more of us was there at the house with them not twenty-four-seven, but awfully close to that, for the next at least for the next week. And many, many days thereafter, especially MIKE FULKERSON.

I was given another family to help out in Gaithersburg, Maryland. I also had some work to do at the Joint Family Assistance Center, JFAC and some things to do at the CACO Center.

Anyhow, this was really, responding to September—I was immediately put on orders for the next two weeks. The first week was especially dedicated to these two families, the ELSETHS and the PONTELLS. I spent the majority of my time and efforts with the ELSETH family and the bonds

started to form. I think MIKE FULKERSON had an awful lot to do with that. So we started in with the ELSETHS and that was the first day.

Q. (17:29) Okay, go on and continue, what happened throughout that week?

A. Well, the family wanted to believe that BOB was alive. The family gathered. The big problem right away, well there were two. One was that BOB'S mom was in Germany and you know that whole story from talking with MIKE FULKERSON. How using his cell phone in the living room and driveway of the ELSETH home he managed to get a Naval Reserve flight, C130 I think, to get her. Did he tell you about his selecting what train she should take to get from Berlin to—did he tell you all that?

Q. (18:20) Yes.

A. I mean he thought of every single detail. Arranging for her to ride in the cockpit of the plane so she'd be comfortable. And he was talking with the pilots on that cell phone. (chuckles) I didn't know you could do that, anyway he knew.

So, that was one crisis that she was with her, the mother was with her mother in Berlin because her mother, the grandmother had had a stroke. So the mother's brother, BOB'S uncle lived in

Berlin and he looked after his, their mother, the grandmother while BOB'S mom came back.

That was one problem, another was that there was another catastrophic event that had taken place in the family that was drawing, that could have drawn members of the family away for a few days, but they made the decision to all stay put and the pretty much did.

This was a family, a large family, extended family of extraordinary love and faith. And despite, and there were six calamities with which they were dealing. And despite that which is really

tough to comprehend that this would be all happening at once, their love for each was without and is without measure. And their devotion, their love of God and their faith enabled them to draw great strength and understanding and insight and wisdom. And so they were, given everything that was going on, they were in absolutely extraordinarily good shape, because of the power of love and faith. It was something to behold.

Everyday their hopes grew a little bit weaker and eventually they, one member of the family or another started to think that he not survived. But they were so terribly desirous of knowing, of what it was that happened to him. They were grateful for the JFACs opportunity and that was run magnificently. They at times were really bothered by not seeing more action at the Pentagon to recover the bodies, because you couldn't see a lot of what was happening from the outside. A lot that was going place on inside and they were worried about getting those fires out and why couldn't they do more to get the fires out and so on, because that would be reducing the chances of survival for anyone left inside.

The realty was that BOB was probably, probably died instantaneously as the plane hit because he was right where it hit, so. And we ministered to the family. It was just a constant presence and trying to, without being intrusive trying always not to be intrusive, just to ascertain needs and respond to them. And each of us had an important role to play, and the fact that they were Methodist and devote Methodist—BOB taught Sunday school, he taught kindergarten and first grade in a religious school—and I was a Rabbi, I was Jewish was not an issue at least as far as I knew. And they had, you know their Pastor was over often and other clergy were there from time to time. It all just worked about as well as it could given the horror of the circumstances. So that was the focus on the first week.

The second week I stayed in close contact with them. I visited them less because I was now asked to focus my attention on the Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station, Washington. They're headquarters at the Navy Yard. Very secure building, but they have three offices at the Pentagon. They handle the message traffic for CNO among other things, and in one of those three offices they had fourteen personnel, seven lived and seven died.

Q. (24:14) Do you know where the office was located?

A. I was, I went over and—no I can't tell you from memory where it is, but if you call the Naval— and I can give you the number. I don't have it with me right now, but I can call it in to you, the Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station Washington Headquarters at the Navy Yard they can tell you what offices they were.

The head of that office that had the seven deaths was a military retiree and his name was a MR. WOODS. I think he had been, I could be wrong, but I think he had been a Warrant Officer when he retired. I'm not sure about that. He had been there a long time and he was kind of a fatherly figure, kind of a curmudgeon in some ways. Sort of a tough guy that has the sparkle in his eyes, that tells you he loves you to pieces even as he's chewing on you a little bit. Everybody loved him. Certainly in the first month his body had not, he was the only one who's body had not found, identified from the seven. He was right, he was just above, he was just right above where the plane hit.

There were amazing stories that came out of that. I think of, there were about a hundred and twenty or so people in the command. I'm still connected with them. I just got asked, they're having a change of command in May and the CO asked me if I would pray at her change of command. I mean I was only with them for a relatively short time out of her, I guess I don't

know how long her tour was, maybe three years, but those were the defining moments of her tour. So when she thinks now of her Chaplain she thinks of this reservist who came in and at that time as opposed to anybody else that worked with them over the years. And that makes sense because of the crisis.

So there were about one hundred twenty, one hundred thirty in the command and I worked with as many as I could and concentrated on those most affected by the attack. There were, most of them were young who died, in their twenties, except for MR. WOODS. And many of their closest friends were in that command. That is, that they worked together, they lived together, they socialized together, they were very tight group.

This one girl who came from a small town in Louisiana, I don't remember what her rating was, I have to look at my notes. She was twenty, twenty, maybe twenty-one never been to a big city before, came to Washington she, it really was kind of overwhelming to her. And so the women with whom she worked, these young women with whom she worked and she lived with them they became her family here and they made everything okay. And most of them were killed. I learned an awful lot about each one of those who died as I did about BOB ELSETH.

BOB ELSETH was a man that everybody said as soon as you met him you had a friend for life, and you just had that feeling that he would be your friend for life and that you would want to be his. And you know he was just he was doing one week of AT at the Pentagon.

With PONTELL this other family, you may also know the story. Do you know the story?

Q. We've spoken to her.

A. [REDACTED], so you know about his brother?

Q. Yes.

A. Okay, so and then his mom said, “Well at least he’s in the Pentagon so he’s safe.”

So I was working very, very hard with these, with this command and I learned an awful lot about each one of these folks. I just, I don’t know, if I get started it’s going to go forever. So, just let me say this, as a clergyman it was very interesting and very important, and by the way I had the feeling every day all day at night you know, because it wasn’t like a regular workday or anything like that, it was constant. That this was very sacred work, about the most sacred work I’ve ever done.

And the survivors wanted to know what God wanted of them. What God wants of them now.

They felt that they have a debt to pay. Now each one has a slightly different way of expressing this and talking about it, so I’m summarizing and homogenizing, but I think it’s being relatively faithful. They wanted to know, and they wanted to talk with me about what God wants of them.

They were desperate to, everyone of them, to ascertain the answer to that and fulfill it. And I was reminded, did you all see the movie “Saving Private Ryan?” Did you see that movie?

Q. Yes

A. At the end of the movie, you know Private Ryan is always concerned with meriting the sacrifice that was made for him. Just to get and find him and get him safely returned. In the movie Tom Hanks who play Captain Miller, the leader of the squad and as he terribly wound, mortally wounded and with his last breath, Private Ryan is leaning over him in France wanting some final advice from Captain Miller and not being sure how he’s going to be able to handle what he knows about the sacrifices that have been made for him. Miller looks at him with his last breath and says, "Earn it" (whispered), says earn it and I think a lot of people in the theaters

didn't hear it because it was like a whisper. Then he dies. Then you see years later there's a time shift and an old Private Ryan is at the grave of Captain Miller in France and asks his wife if he's a good, if he Private Ryan, he Private Ryan is a good man. So he wanted confirmation from his wife that he had earned it. Earned what it—you know this privilege, this right of life to continue to live when so many others died. And I think that was something that they all agreed. I discussed this with, this movie, this scene. And it was very important to each of them to earn it and to figure out exactly what that would mean and to pursue it. We spent a lot of time talking about those kinds of things.

That command was devast—was really devastated by the attack and there were just, there were every emotion you can think of from people who could not stop crying. There was even over at the there was a corpsman chief over at the, at the Readiness Command Mid-Atlantic, Regional Readiness Command, Naval Reserve Regional Command Mid Atlantic which at the Navy Yard in building two hundred. She was heavily involved in all in everything that was going on. And I one day was up in those offices and the Deputy Commander for the region who I know very well BETSY, CAPTAIN BETSY FITZGERALD do you know her?

Q. (34:23) Yes, sir.

A. Well I'm a big fan of BETSY FITZGERALD and I have been for quite a while. And she asked me to go check in on this Chief. And I went to see her, CHIEF BASS (phonetic). Shouldn't mention her name strike that. And she just couldn't stop crying. She just, you know, and so I spent a couple of hours with her just right then and tried to help in a variety of ways after that. I think she's doing a whole lot better, but there were many people like that. There were people who were furious. There were people who couldn't stop crying. There were people who

were numb. There people who turned inward and went disconnect from everybody and everything. There were people who couldn't stop talking about it. There were every—you know people are different, so depending on who that individual was the ministry takes a different turn. You know you go a different way. Find out where they are coming from and you go from there. So I had—I was privileged to pursue this sacred work for weeks. My orders ended after the second week, but the needs didn't end after the second week. It's not like okay, I'm done now according to the Navy so you all have to be okay and I'm going on my way and going back to whatever I was doing before. So I just kind of stayed with it. Stayed with them. I couldn't leave them. If I didn't have orders, I didn't have orders. So, I just did it, and that went on for another couple of weeks.

So now we're a month out and then came the services started. You know, Naval Computer Telecommunications Station had a memorial service. I think it was October 4th at the Women's Memorial at Arlington. The families of the seven who died were there. There were like, we were in the auditorium and there were like four hundred, five hundred people there. There was a service here, an outdoor service here that was run by the General from the Ballistic Missile Command, and I was asked to participate in that. And I was pleased to do so. Participated in the service at the Women's Memorial, and then I was asked to participate in the Pentagon Memorial Service on October the 11th. They wanted me and they had like thirty thousand people there. There was the President, SECDEF, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and the Lieutenant General who ran the JFAC.

Q. (37:45) VAN ALSTYNE?

A. Yes, he was an amazing man. What about, talk about the perfect guy for a really tough assignment. I watched him; he was magic, just absolutely perfect. He knew exactly how to brief people. How to deal with all these folks, who were so, in such deep grief. He was remarkable. And I'm sure you've talked to him. You've talked to him haven't you?

Q. (38:21) No.

Q. (38:22) The Army has. The Deep (phonetic) Services Team. (another)

A. Oh I see they're all doing their own, okay. So much for purple soup. (everyone laughs) So anyway, that was, and you talked to EILEEN ROEMER too? So she told you about what she was doing in her civilian job. There was no way out of this for her. It was twenty-four hours a day. It was either the civilian job at the Pentagon finding body parts or it was working with the family. Because she was an FBI agent that was really helpful to everybody. She knew a lot of stuff that people wanted to know.

Anyway, so and I got to the—there was the, you had the Chiefs and Chaplains for the Army, Airforce and Navy. The Deputy Chief of the Navy was also the Chaplain for the Marine Corps, Commandant's Chaplain. There was a Muslim Chaplain from the Army and there was and there was me. So I was the only reservist and only Rabbi and the only, yeah and the only reservist and the only Rabbi. And I don't think I was selected because I was a reservist I think I was selected because I was a Rabbi and they wanted a Rabbatic presence in this service. But that was a privilege beyond, almost beyond my comprehension.

Initially I had three readings that I wanted to do. One, I was allowed to choose what I wanted to read. One was for the families, one was for the Nation, and then I had selected another reading

from Proverbs for the attackers, which was taking them to task, but that was nixed. I was told not to do that, I had opportunities to do that in other places, but I was told that would be—yes?

Q. (40:47) Which ones? What was that one?

A. It was what God doesn't tolerate from Proverbs, I think it's Proverbs 3, if you have a Bible I'll turn to it quickly and I'll—.

Q. (41:00) I'm sure we do. (drawers opening and closing)

A. It was about the seven things that God won't abide, and they applied very well to our foes. It was a message that I wanted to get out. Their violence and arrogance and hate and sewing hate and all that, and I wanted to—boy, I wanted to tell them that. (chuckles)

Q. (41:42) Who told you no?

A. I—several people, it was just said it wasn't in keeping with the tenor of the, what clergy were doing at the service. I accepted that. I accepted the judgement and relented. I get mad from time to time, so. (chuckles) We don't turn the other cheek, so. That's not a Jewish thing to turn the other cheek. (everyone laughs)

Q. (42:15) Were the, any of the other Chaplains at that Memorial service had they been involved real deeply with the families like in say the same role you were?

A. No. They were.

Q. So it was just you.

A. Yes, I was the only—because they were the Chiefs of Chaplains. They were all Flag Officers.

Q. (42: 37) So tell us about the reading that you did choose. You said there was one for the families and one for the nation, which one did you pick?

A. I picked, and I gave it my own translation or interpretation translation for the nation. Which was the Priestly Blessing from Numbers, chapter 6, _____ (43:20) (speaks in Hebrew) may the Lord—I didn't do it in Hebrew, I did it in English. "May the Lord bless you and keep you and give you peace." But Shalom means, the Hebrew means more than peace, it means wholeness. So I took, in the translation and I can get you the translation that I used if you want, I focused more on the aspect of wholeness being restored, restoration of the pieces. Taking the broken fragments and restoring them to wholeness. That was for the Nation.

For some reason for the one for families which I think came also from Proverbs, either Proverbs or Psalms, I can't recall what that is off the top of my head. I went through so many in the selection process and I've used a bunch in other services. But I have that at home, I meant to bring it with me, so I can call and tell you what it was.

Q. (44:35) Okay.

A. And then I went to the memorial service at the church for BOB ELSETH. I also went to his, was in the official party for his funeral at Arlington. There was a real—there was one of the questions that families were asking, you probably know this already, was because Arlington, once the decision went to bury, once the identification, when the identification for BOB had been made it was Rosh Hashanah. You know what Rosh Hashanah is? It's one of the holiest days of the Jewish Year.

Q. (45:21) I went to Saraquse University we always had it off.

A. So you know. Off on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Q. (45:26) That's correct.

A. The High Holy Days?

Q. (45:27) Yes.

A. So it was Rosh Hashanah and I was at services, but I knew that they were starting to make the identifications. So I'll, you know, be ready. So I went to services in uniform, and my wife and I took separate cars and I had my cell phone on vibrate. (chuckles) And I got, right in the middle of the service I got the call—BOB'S body had been identified and we had to go make notification. So EILEEN and MIKE and I gathered at the school, Lake Braddock (phonetic) right near the ELESETH home, and we went over together to make the notification and be with them. So I got called out from the middle of Rosh Hashanah services for that. There was a point to that, but I don't remember what it was, but anyway—and I was at the funeral at Arlington and it was—Oh I know I was talking about the notifications.

Initially families were told you've got to decide when you want to do the burial with this in mind, that if more parts are found Arlington's not going to open up the grave. Did you know that part of the story?

Q. (47:06) Not specifically that way, we knew that there were—.

Q. (47:11) (another) That they had to make a choice.

Q. (47:12) Right, that there was notification that they were—. (first)

A. But they weren't going to reopen it. So

Q. (47:18) But they could a second—.

A. Then what they were told was initially that there would be a common grave at Arlington for all the remaining parts, identified or not. Many of the families said, that was unacceptable, because they didn't want their loved ones to be entombed with the people who had killed them. So, on that idea was scratched as far as I know. Are they still doing that?

Q. (47:53) Well I think the, I believe they have been able to separate.

A. Oh they were?

Q. (47:59) Yes.

A. Well at the time we were told they weren't going to proceed because of that, so that's something I didn't know.

Q. (48:05) It's still a part of the plan.

A. Alright, so that's something I didn't know.

She decided to go ahead and to have the funeral and she asked me to present the flag to her. We had two flags, one was presented to BOB'S parents and one was presented to her. And I don't

remember, a Flag Officer presented it to BOB'S parents. MIMI DREW (phonetic) was there. Do you know her?

Q. (48:48) Yes.

A. Okay, well she's one of my favorite people in the world and has been for a long time. We are very close. But she didn't do the—.

Q. (48:58) Was it DANIEL WEAVER (phonetic)? He did a number of them. The old district Washington.

A. Yes, I know who he is. I don't think so, but I'm not certain. And for some reason I think it was, I think it was at least a two star then, and I don't think ADMIRAL WEAVER had gotten a second star yet.

So, but that was a great honor that she wanted me to present the flag to her. She was, that was a sign that this whole thing had worked. It was a symbol that we had—because I did it on behalf of the team and it was, you know we became really, really close. I talked to her yesterday and you know, it's like a, it's a bond that I think is going to be there for a long, long time to come.

My, my I think the most important moment for me was when I was sure that [REDACTED], was felt connected. Had accepted me. That was a really a major moment. And at the funeral, the day of the funeral, as we were walking out of our own—away from the grave she came rushing, she came running by me with two or three her cousins and she said, she looked up at me excitedly and said, "Are you coming to the house?" (laughter) I mean that was, that was special.

And I went over, not then, but I went over, not that day, but a couple of weeks later and I showed her what would be a very challenging card trick for a six-year-old. And she was very excited to

learn it; it's really complicated. Difficult physically as well as mentally for a six year old to do. And she learned it. I went, we went over a number of times and she picked it up very quickly. And she loves card tricks. And it was something she could do with ten of her friends simultaneously. (chuckles) And when we got done [REDACTED] turned to me and said, "You know, I just—BOB would been so delighted to see her face, to see this going on." So there are all kinds of things involved in ministry you know. There are prayers. There's silence, and holding and hugging and card tricks. (everyone laughs) I had to make couple of, participate in couple of other notifications, four altogether. Well actually, I was working, I worked with four families and I participated in three notifications. The command to bury services, and that was it. Still in touch with folks. And MIKE and EILEEN will be...my dear friends forever. I owe them both a dinner.

Q. (53:01) When you did the notification with the other families did other Chaplains then step into the role?

A. Yes. One of them was, do you remember when they had, they were given these, they were giv—I forget what they were called, but they were taking family member to, up to the Pentagon?

Q. (53:22) Yes.

A. Right, right. I forget what it was called.

Q. (53:27) We did hear the term, yes.

A. So there was this family coming up from Carolina, I think it was from Carolina. And they were in route when the husband noti—when the husband's body was noti—was identified. So

they had a CACO team ministering to them in Carolina. This was like, I don't know how far after September 11th. It was still September. I was working at the, at that day, I was working—I think it was a weekend. I spent my weekends pretty much, working pretty much at the Command Center, at the CACO Command Center.

They needed, there was this notification had to be made. The CACO team was in Carolina the family was coming up here to the Sheraton. So a reserve aviator O6 was pressed to be the CACO, had no specific training. A little, just a tiny a little bit, and the two of us, and I was asked to go as the Chaplain. The two of us went over to make the notification. We were told the family had members in it who were extremely emotional and that the family still believed—this was like two weeks later, that this man was alive. That their loved one was alive, still. So the CACO nominally, asked me to give him instructions as to, you know how you do this. So we drove over to the hotel together and I was pleased to do that. And you know sometimes the Chaplain does a little more, sometimes the CACO does a little more depending on experience and so this time it was for the Chaplain to do a little bit more. (soft chuckle). Anyway, one of the things we arranged was for a medical team to be up—I asked for a private room. And the Command Representative showed up who knew one of people in the family, and brought them said, you know, that they had just come from North Carolina and she wanted him to have a comfortable room to be in. Mislead them a little bit to get them to a private space, and brought them up to this room that we, was available, regular room in the hotel. I had medical people who were in uniform and just had them standing by, kind of like walking around as though they had other concerns, but just being right there waiting, because we didn't know if something was going to happen. We were told that somebody could faint or get sick or something really bad could occur. So when the family came in about ten or eleven of them, and we made the notification and there

was a whole range of responses. Luckily the medical team wasn't needed. But there was everything from stone silence to completely coming unglued.

We stayed with—and they went on that tour of the Pentagon. They felt they wanted to do it more then, then even before. So we escorted them and got them to the—you know, stay with as much as possible and got them to the bus. That was one.

There was another one where the Chaplain was not available and I was working at the, again I was working at the CACO Center as so I was asked to go out with the CACO Officer who had been working with the family, and did. That was just a few hours. That was it. It's still, still going on, it's going to go on.

And then I was sent to, in December I was suppose to, I was going to be sent to Afghanistan that's also September 11th connected, but the Rabbi at Camp Pendleton, MAG 39 said, "Don't send him. He's reserve, send me. They're my guys who are out there. Those are my people who are in there. I want to go where my people are, send me."

That was a compelling argument. So they sent him and they sent me to Camp Pendleton during Hanukah to take care of Jewish needs there, but also to take care of MAG 39. MAG 39 is nine squadrons of forty-five hundred Marines. They're suppose to have four Chaplains. They were down one to start with so they had three, only three. Two were already deployed and the third was packing. When I came in the aid said, "Hi!" (chuckles) and he said, "Wow Chaplain am I glad you're here. You got the con. See ya!" (laughter) And I got a flight suit before I went down and I had cammies, and just went to work. And spent a lot—just one crisis after another. Of course, there were all kinds of stuff going on in Pendleton. I came back from Pendleton and the Navy stuff continued, one thing or another. So basically for the last six months it's been Navy and Marines.

Not right now, now it just seems like it's tailed off. Not what I'd planned for the last six months.
(chuckles)

Q. (01:00) Can you share with us your thoughts, observations, experiences on the regional CACO process. You were involved in a number of them you have—.

A. Yes they are all different. Everyone is different there is no such thing as a uniform CACO experience. I have, they were all different. A lot of it has to do with circumstances. Like with the family that was coming up from North Carolina. You know it just wasn't going to go the way it's planned to go because circumstances didn't fit. Sometimes the CACO Officer welcomes a Chaplain's partnership and sometimes not. Sometimes the Chaplain may welcome the CACO's partnership and sometimes not. There can be problems there, you know in just terms of attitude and personality. They can change the way it goes. There are those who have more training and are more comfortable with the assignment and those who have less. Like that wonderful, he was a commercial airline pilot in civilian life, he was a wonderful guy and he was bold to step forward when asked, but he had no CACO experience. So the two of us were out and so my role was broadened because of that, so that's a different experience. And then every once in a while you get a dream team. In a sense, I mean I'm not trying complement me. Just in terms of the way we work together as was the case with EILEEN and MIKE, and I think they would have done great with any Chaplain, but I was just a lucky guy that was part of that team.

The CACO instructions are helpful but they ought to be seen as what you try to do, not something that's in concrete, because it varies. I think the Navy's commitment to send CACO team to military and civilian families was extremely important and extremely well received. I don't know that, that was the case with—I don't, as a matter fact, I'm fairly sure you can

check—I don't think that was the Army's approach. I think they sent, they were out first and foremost to cover the families of the military personnel killed or missing at the time in the Pentagon, and only sometime later, fairly much later did they then turn to covering some CACO coverage for the families of the civilian personnel working for the Army. The Navy it covered all their personnel civilian and military right from the get-go. I think that was a tremendously important decision and much to the credit of the Navy.

One reason I know about that is that someone asked me if I would be willing to talk to someone who was a member, who's civilian family member worked for the Army, and was lost in the Pentagon and needed a Chaplain, a military Chaplain. And the Army at that point wasn't sending—. That shouldn't be printed any.

Wasn't sending, that you asked me about the CACO experience.

Q. (01:04:08) Yes, did you get an opportunity to give some feedback in to the system about that, I mean did anyone ask about lessons learned or—?

A. Yes we had a debrief that was, that was run by Admiral from the Naval District Washington.

Q. (01:04:32) WEAVER?

A. WEAVER. ADMIRAL WEAVER, a really good man. Was run by ADMIRAL WEAVER, the VCNO participated in that debrief for a while, and it was a thorough debrief and both orally done and in writing.

Q. (01:05:06) And who, who all was involved?

A. All the CACO's

Q. (01:05:08) CACO's, it was a CACO debriefing?

A. Yes, Navy. At the Navy Yard, Building 200, ground floor.

Q. (01:05:18) When did that, when did that occur?

A. It was sometime in November, I mean in October, and my guess is that it was, my recollection is that it was somewhere into the vicinity, I think it was, it was definitely after the memorial service. So I think it was probably in, it was in the later part of October. I don't remember the day. I think it was a Tuesday, but I don't remember what date it was, and there was a thorough debrief.

I was constantly impressed with dedication. With everyone's dedication. It was - favorably impressed. There was a strength and a determination to do this and do it as well as we possibly could. Accept as much help from God as we could get through this whole thing. I mean people were, their motives were pure for the most part. Really pure and dedicated and just a boundless energy no matter how tired—folks were getting a little tired as you know. It was just “you gotta,” I mean “lets go.” There wasn't, there was no hesitation it was, it was “let's have at and let's help and lets dig in and do what ever needs to be done.” And do it as well as we possibly do it. And that was, there was that desire that was enormous. It was palpable you could just feel it wherever you went.

It was it was the worst—I always remember the opening line from “A Tale of Two Cities?” “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.” I'd say it was the worst of times and in some respect the best of times, in terms of how people responded. You know what I saw going on all around me.

Q. (01:07:46) That's similar to what Mr. Gonzales said when he said it was his luckiest day.

A. There were so many stories about good fortune. I mean, there was this one, one—it means a little, I understand what you meant by that, but you just triggered something. People, survivor stories as to why people survived. Or how, what they were doing like one guy was a UA. You know he was late, (chuckles). He was late. And there was a girl in Computer Telecommunications Station in Washington. A young woman who her closest friends were killed and they were all trying to get her to stop smoking. And she went out take a cigarette break, when the plane hit.

There was a man with prior service, retired, now civilian working for telecommunications station. Who every morning for three years he would come out of his office he would go down one deck to MR. WOODS office at zero nine and meet with him to discuss the strategy for the day. There was a head right next to MR WOODS office so, he'd had his morning coffee and he needed to stop in at the head before going into the meeting he would do so. There was another head all the way down the passageway from his office. He had never been to that head, he knew it was there. He'd never been there. It was just made no sense it was completely out of the way. He was going this way, why would he go that way. That morning he started to go down toward MR. WOODS office decided he needed to use the head, and for the first and only time in his years of working for the Pentagon he went to that head down the passageway. As he came out the plane hit and MR. WOODS, his body was, I don't know if it's been identified yet, but into November it had not been. He was right there.

It was interesting that—he had many reactions to that, this man. What one of them was that for the next weeks he would not use any other head in the Pentagon, but that one down there. So if

he was on the other side of the building (laughter), he's going to that head. I mean that was not, that was not a voluntary thing that was an involuntary response. That was one. But he had all these very powerful responses and desires and this need to understand what God wants him doing now and so on, and to do it. That was also part of his response was that he would not use any other head in the whole building. It was just an involuntary necessity. The way his brain, part of the shock response of the whole thing. What else do you want to know?

Q. (01:11:21) Have you, have you thought about why at this point in your career, at this point in your life the fact that you retired in August—.

A. It was really, you know there is an expression in Judaism in Yiddish that's Basherat (phonetic) it means fated to be. There is no, I mean I can't imagine trying to be a fulltime congregational Rabbi, the six hundred family congregation. The most intense time of year is from August 15th through October 15th, when all the programs get, you know started for the year. You have the High Holy days, you have your main membership drive, you have everybody needing a piece of you, it's impossible. I mean it's just the most intense, it's, it's eighty to a hundred hour workweeks. There's just no way around it. There are also a lot of calamity's that occur every year during that time. There are people who get sick, people who die families that have trouble. A few years ago I had five funerals in the ten days before Rosh Hashanah. I mean, it's a—things happen at holiday time. So, there is no way in the world.

And I'll tell you, in addition to that my successor, at my congregation came down from Buffalo, he was from Maryland in Silver Spring, and his parents could not have been happier. Here it was their son, his wife and their three children, including a newborn, just coming back to town. Right in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kipper this man's mother, my successor's mother, my

relief, his mother had a stroke, a catastrophic stroke. And he has one sibling who lives in Brussels, Belgium, and so here he was with his wife and kids down from Buffalo here, the mother got to, before she had the stroke got for a month to see him functioning in his new congregation and just was so excited about all that. Saw the grandchildren constantly. And then she had the stroke and he was here to be able—not in Buffalo to be able to help her, help his dad and all that. So talk about things fitting together in ways that are a little bit humbling to contemplate.

This will come as no surprise, but I'm a big believer in God. (chuckles) And I believe that God knows a lot more than I do, and that I'm a servant. And that's the greatest privilege you can have, and so use me.

Q. (01:14:51) Well said.

Q. (another) Has this changed you in any way?

A. Yes. I mean in a lot of ways, yes. I think it's definitely deepened, however spiritually oriented I was before, and it's the most important part of my being more self deepened. However committed I was to, what I understand to be right and good and the affirmation of life. I think I remember I think that's what the part I read. Was from Deuteronomy were it says chose life.

Q. (01:15:44) Yes I remember that.

Q. (another) (01:15:46) We were at the services.

A. Yes.

Q. (01:15:48) I do remember that now that you say it.

A. Whatever I felt about those things, whatever my commitment was to them and however well I understood their meaning, and God's meaning and orienting us in that direction, I understand it much better. However much before I understood the opposite of that, you know what's, what evil, I understand better. And I'm—thirty-three of my relatives, who I never met, were burned alive during the Holocaust by Nazi's in Odessa. My mother's, father's family. So, I mean I'm Jewish. So I've and I'm a Rabbi so I'm acquainted with horrors, but this was up close and personal. So, however much I understood those things before and was committed to defeating them, all the more so.

And I think for a lot of people it was, again I know it's been said thousands and thousand of times by lots and lots people, but in a way this whole horror has ennobled us and strengthened us, and drawn greater distinctions between us and those who perpetrate this kind of horror. Between our orientation to life and theirs. And to me it's pretty clear and I said this in my prayer at the, here at the Annex in that service. You know, what God calls us to do, to affirm life, not destroy it. All the things that are constructive and positive that we're called to do, they felt called to violate. So that it sharpens your perceptions, your understanding of the world in which you live and what your mission in it is. And what a struggle it is to get it done, it's not a walk in the park. So I think it did all those things.

Q. (01:18:48) Thank you so much for your—.

A. You're welcome.

Q. (01:18:451) Is there anything else you want to say for the historical record?

A. Where I said something I shouldn't please clean it up. (laughter) I'll only have to be in good favor until June 20th. (more laughter)

Q. (01:19:07) Where do you go from here in you civilian life and—?

A. I'm going to try, I started intention was to do this in September, but—. Oh I'm also working on a final stages of, let me back up.

For several years the Navy Chaplain Corp was not getting an adequate number of people on active duty, Chaplains. So my good friend BARRY BLACK (phonetic) with whom I served in Fleet Religious Activity in Norfolk in 1977, and when he was Atlantic Fleet Chaplain down in Norfolk a few years ago. Served with him and the blue ice fell off.

He said, "Figure out a solution to this recruiting problem." It's a, it's a, my view of recruiting Chaplains is this, if you don't recruit enough Chaplains, you can't recruit outstanding Chaplains in every, for every possible billet and there ought to be in my view twice the billets that we have. You get what we call orphan ships. Did you ever hear that term?

Q. (01:20:16) No.

A. Chaplains—ships that go out without a Chaplain on board. That's not acceptable to me. And you get orphan commands, you get folks who have covered very little or not at all. And if they don't want to, if somebody doesn't want a Chaplain, you know fine. But if somebody wants one, well that person ought to have one. I mean that's, if you're in this military and you want a Chaplain you ought to have a Chaplain, so not having one is unacceptable to me. So, so when CHAPLAIN BLACK (phonetic), ADMIRAL BLACK (phonetic) asked me to figure out a

solution to this recruiting problem I was pleased to take on. Anyway I came up with one and it was approved in August and that was, I was suppose to implement it in September. So, I spent from late December until last week on orders and off orders, trying to get this thing going. It's called ROGER, Reserve Officer Goals to Enhance Recruitment. Basically, it's in a structured organized way, at almost no cost simply using the Reserve Chaplain Corp to ferret out among civilian clergy and seminarians outstanding candidates for the Chaplain Corp. And to help pave the way for our active duty Chaplain recruiters to connect with them and get them aboard. We ought to have the pick of the litter in terms of Chaplains and clergy for the Chaplain Corp and that's the goals. Not only have enough, but have great ones. So—.

Q. (01:22:04) Bring them on as reservists?

A. No. Bring them on active duty, but use the reserves who are out there in the civilian community everyday seeing these folks. You can either have, we got five recruiters, five recruiters trying to find folks from coast to coast or you can have five recruiters assisted by five hundred-fifty reserve Chaplains trying to find folks, the right folks coast to coast. Which way do you want to do it?

Q. (01:22:24: How many openings active duty billets open?

A. Well we've had, we had, we've had, we've come up ten, fifteen short each year for the last— of course for Chaplain Corp it's not a huge community, significant. And we're going to be, we hopefully, I don't know, but hopefully there will be some more Chaplain billets coming on line and in which case we're going to need more folks. But we were like doing sixty-fi—we were ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five short in the last few years. You know I think one year we only

recruited sixty-five percent our goal. Just not acceptable, there are people out there not covered, thousands of them not covered, that's not acceptable to me. So I was really passionate about having this work.

I didn't care about meeting goals all I cared about was covering folks. When I use to go to BETSY FITZGERALD (phonetic) when she was the reserve liaison CINCPAC Fleet Deputy Reserve Liaison, and I'd say, I'd go to her to and I'd say, "I need you to get me money from other designators. Give me days, because if not these folks are going out to sea uncovered, there's going to be no Chaplain with them." Well that's all Betsy had to hear. I mean she's shoo, shoo, shoo (chuckles). She was amazing, so she wanted coverage more that I did. So she just pulled the money and gave it me, gave me the days. Tons of them. So that's got to be finish—I've got to finish implementing that and turn it over.

And then I'm working on this Chaplain, what I call Chaplain's at Work. I want to put Chaplains in the work place. I kept throughout my civilian career I kept saying to my congregates who would tell me the horror stories of what was going on in the workplace, you know. So I keep saying, "You all need a Chaplain." (Chuckles) "You need a Chaplain and then finally it hit." They should have Chaplains. So I want to take these guys men and women who for twenty-twenty-five years excelled as Chaplains in the military and put them into the corporate world to do there the same kind of outstanding work and make it a much healthier place. I also have about ten books to write, which I started in my computer and will take the next fifteen years to do. I didn't want to be in the would of, could of, should of situation when I start to do this stuff. I'm fifty seven, instead of seventy five and I still have a little get up and go so I wanted to, so I need to do that. No one may ever read any of it, but I need to get it written.

Q. (01:25:14) We will.

A. Wow. (laughter) I hear you, you're a morale officer aren't you, (laughter) so—. There is a lot more to tell you but it would be violating confidences to do so. I just can't.

Q. (01:25:5) All right, thank you very much.

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